

A Look at Leisure

Getting Outdoors

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Introduction

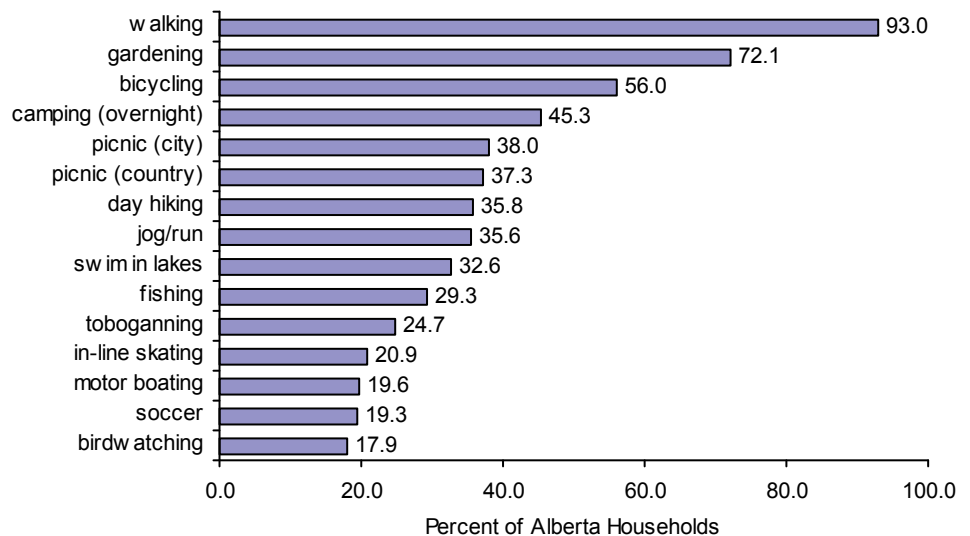
The *A Look at Leisure* series has presented summaries of the results produced from the *Alberta Recreation Survey* since 1981. The *Alberta Recreation Survey* is conducted every four years using a mail survey to a representative sample of Alberta households. The most recent survey was conducted in 2004.

The bulletins have covered a variety of topics including participation by Albertans in recreational activities, reasons for taking part, constraints, favourite activities, and trends in preferences. This is bulletin No. 54 and presents results for Albertans' participation in outdoor-based activities, a full list of which is included as an appendix to this bulletin.

Overview of Outdoor Participation

The 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* asked respondents about their participation in 37 activities that are classified as outdoor pursuits. The activities that attracted the highest rates of household participation are summarized by Chart 1.

Chart 1
Participation in the 15 Leading Outdoor Activities



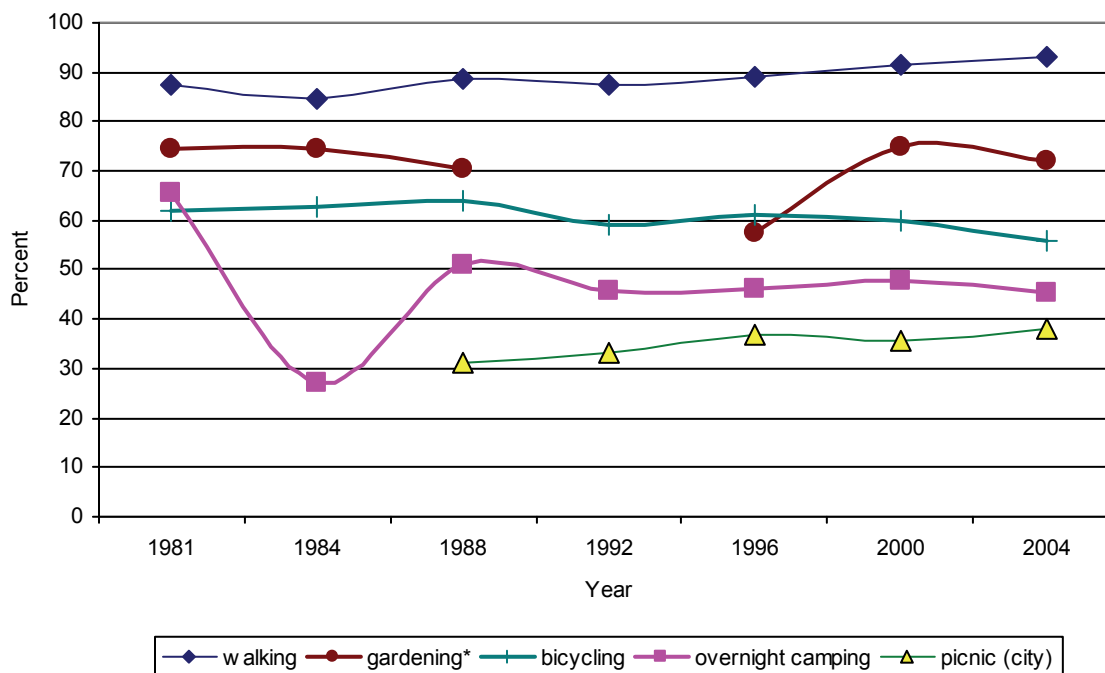
Almost all households walk for pleasure (93.0%) and close to three-quarters take part in gardening (72.1%). The next most popular activity is bicycling (56.0%) followed by overnight camping (45.3%). Of the 15 activities with the highest levels of participation only one is a team activity (soccer) while the remainder are activities that involve individual participation (e.g., fishing, day hiking) or participation in a social environment (e.g., picnicking, tobogganing).

Outside of the top 15 outdoor pursuits the only team sport to attract participation among more than 10% of households is baseball/softball (17.2%). Football (7.7%) and rugby (2.7%) rank behind other activities such as canoeing (13.4%), ATV use (11.6%), tennis (11.2%), water skiing (11.2%), and skateboarding (10.4%). The activities with the lowest participation were orienteering (1.9%), BMX racing (1.5%), sailboard/windsurfing (1.0%) and moto-cross (1.0%).

Trends In Participation

Since the early 1980's, there have been some noticeable changes in the rates of participation in outdoor activities among Alberta households. The rate of participation in walking, for example, has increased from 84.5% in 1984 to 93.0% in 2004 (Chart 2). Gardening, which is the second most popular activity, experienced a decline between 1984 and 1998, but has recently seen an upward trend while bicycling has remained relatively stable over the last 20 years.

Chart 2
Participation in the Five Highest Rated Outdoor Activities,
1981-2004



*gardening was not included on the 1992 Alberta Recreation Survey

Overnight camping has also remained relatively stable since 1984 at close to 50.0% while picnicking in the city has exhibited a steady increase from 31.3% in 1988 to 38.0% in 2004. By way of contrast, picnicking in the countryside has shown a decrease from 45.7% in 1988 to 37.3% in 2004, suggesting a stronger demand to urban settings that support picnicking.

Some other trends of note for activities outside of the top five include:

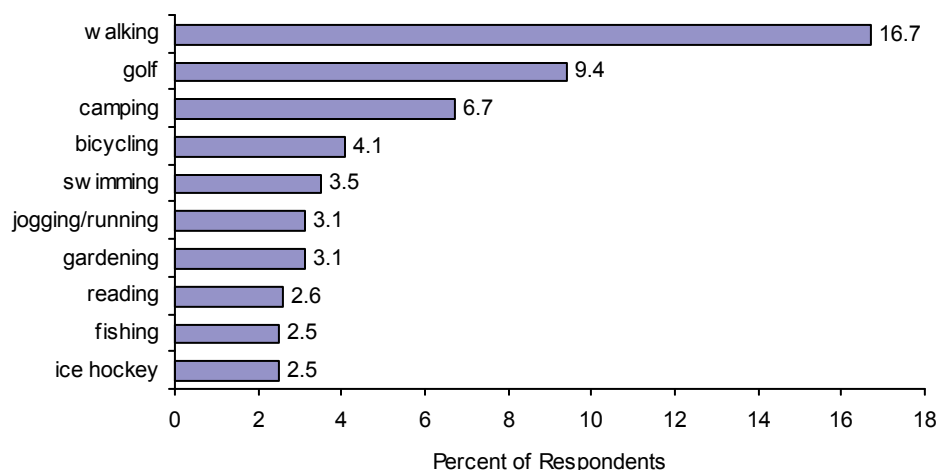
- Baseball/softball participation has dropped from 42.4% in 1981 to 17.2% in 2004
- Football has decreased from 24.1% in 1981 to 7.7% in 2004
- Fishing has decreased since 1981 from 51.8% of Alberta households to 29.3% in 2004
- Motor-boating has decreased from 47% in 1981 to 19.6% in 2004.

Favourite Outdoor Pursuits

The *Alberta Recreation Survey* gives respondents the opportunity to report their favourite activities among all the activities in which they take part. Of all activities reported, 57.3% referred to outdoor activities, an increase over the 46.5% who similarly reported in the 2000 survey.

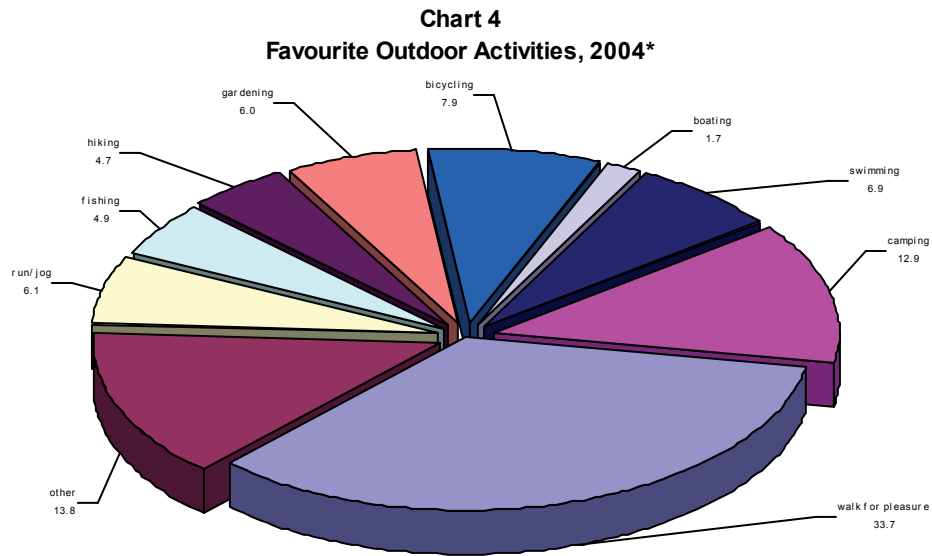
Indeed, outdoor pursuits occupy seven of the ten leading favourite activities (Chart 3). Walking ranked first overall accounting for 16.7% of responses, and was followed by golf (a facility-based outdoor activity) at 9.4%. Camping (6.7%), bicycling (4.1%), swimming (3.5%), gardening (3.1%), and jogging/running (3.1%) occupy the third to seventh ranks. Reading ranks eighth (2.6%), fishing ninth (2.5%) and ice hockey tenth (2.5%).

Chart 3
Ten Highest Ranking Favourite Activities*



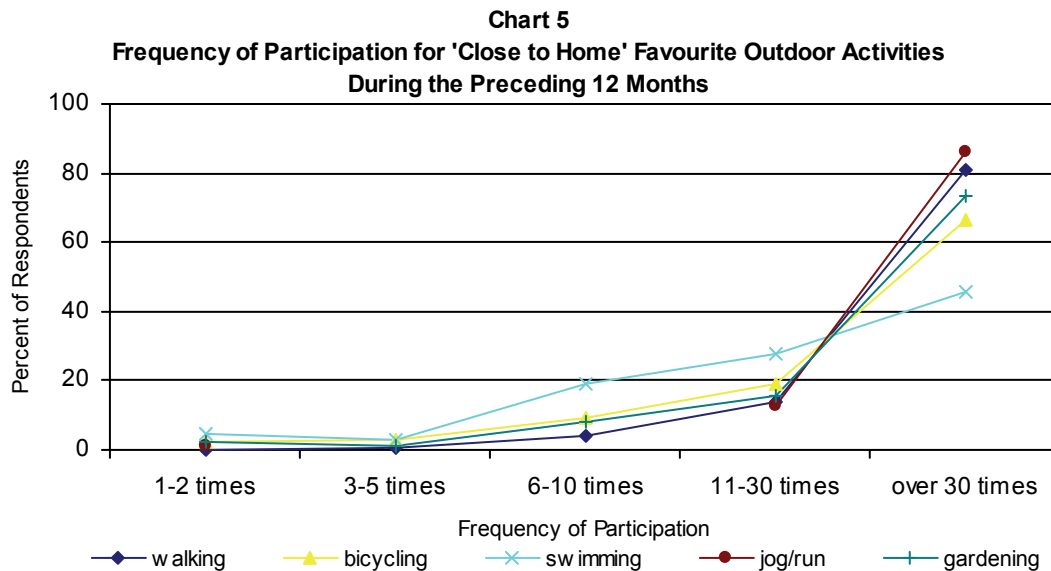
* based on activities reported as 'first favourite'

With specific regard to only outdoor activities reported as favourites, 33.7% of respondents identified walking as their favourite outdoor activity (Chart 4). The second favorite was camping (12.9%) and the third was bicycling at 7.9%.

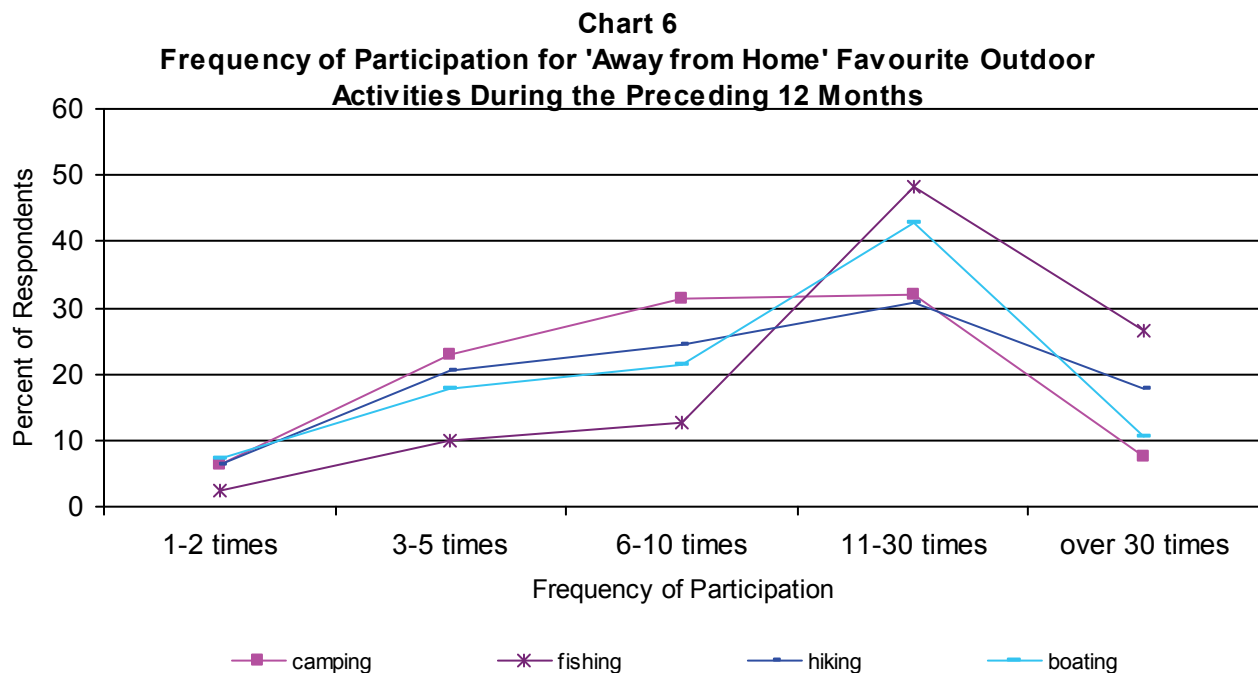


* base is all outdoor activities and excludes non-outdoor activities

Chart 5 shows that the frequency of participation among the leading favourite activities exceeded 30 times in the preceding 12 months. These activities can typically be done close to home. This applies to jogging/running, walking, gardening and bicycling.



Fishing, hiking, camping and boating, activities that typically require participants to travel from home and require specific types of equipment were pursued up to 30 times in the preceding year but there is a decline after this point (Chart 6) suggesting that participation may be constrained by factors related to distance and cost.



Profile of Favourite Outdoor Activities

A closer look at the make up of respondents who reported their first favourite outdoor activities is summarized in Table 1. There are some specific demographic characteristics that distinguish some activities from others. The profiles associated with gender, age, household composition and location are presented below.

Gender

Walking is an activity that females are more likely to take part in as are residents of Edmonton, but which appeals to all age groups and all household types.

Females are also more likely than males to select swimming and gardening as favourite outdoor pursuits. Males, however, are more likely to select bicycling, fishing, hiking and boating. Camping and jogging/running appeal at approximately equal rates to males and females.

Age

Walking is popular across all ages but the popularity of other favourite outdoor activities is linked to specific age groups. Gardening's popularity appears to begin in the mid-thirties and participation steadily increases from there. Fishing is also more linked to age groups above 45 while the popularity of jogging/running appears to cross adult age groups being a favourite among those in the 46 to 55 group and those in the 26 to 35 group.

Those in the 26 to 55 age group are most inclined to prefer bicycling and hiking while those under age 26 are most likely to report swimming as a favourite pursuit.

Household Composition

There may be a link between the age profile of favourite outdoor activities and household composition, or life-cycle stage. While all household types take part in walking, couples with children are the most likely to report favourite activities as being camping, swimming, hiking and boating. These activities suggest a degree of family participation. Jogging/running is also popular with these households but this may reflect the parents' interest in this activity.

Couples without children tend to be older and prefer fishing and gardening, and single adults are the group most likely to identify bicycling as their favourite.

Location

There appears to be a regional variation in favourite activity preferences. Edmonton residents are the most likely to prefer walking and bicycling, and they share their interest in jogging/running with Calgary residents. Calgarians have a preference for hiking and boating, the latter interest being shared with residents from elsewhere in the Province. Residents from outside of the Province's two major urban centres report their favourites as being gardening, fishing, swimming and camping.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Leading Favourite Activities

| | | Favourite Activity | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| | Walking | Camping | Bicycling | Swimming | Jogging/running | Fishing | Hiking | Boating | Gardening | | |
| Gender | Female | Male/female | Male | Female | Male/female | Male | Male | Male | Female | | |
| Age group | All age groups | 36 to 55 | 26 to 55 | 25 and under 36–45 | 26 to 35 46 to 55 | 46 to 55 Over 65 | 26 to 35 | 36 to 65 | Over 65 | | |
| Household type | All household types | Couple with children | Single adult | Couple with children | Couple with children | Couple with no children | Couple with children | Couple with children | Couple with no children | | |
| Location | Edmonton | Other Alberta | Edmonton | Other Alberta | Edmonton Calgary | Other Alberta | Calgary | Calgary Other Alberta | Other Alberta | | |

Implications for Practitioners

Of the top 10 favourite activities reported in the *Alberta Recreation Survey*, five are activities that can be done close to home and done regularly. Practitioners have the opportunity to support these preferences by encouraging participation among residents and reducing inactivity. This may be done through various educational programming as well as by encouraging community design that encourages community residents to be more active. Design can be a key factor as Rosenberger, Sneh & Guvitch have shown that physical activity reduces proportionately to the amount of land managed by public agencies and municipalities.

Outdoor recreation is traditionally associated with pursuits such as camping, fishing, hiking and boating. As Ford (1988, p. 45) argues outdoor recreation represents a holistic activity that involves the environmental amenities combined with the personal motivations and interests that stimulate/encourage participation. Effectively, outdoor recreation involves being outside and doing something that brings the social, physical and mental benefits needed for a healthy lifestyle. The 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* results suggest that traditional pursuits are subject to certain constraints while the close-to-home activities are the highest ranking activities.

Further to this are the specific health benefits of outdoor recreation. Rosenberger, Sneh and Guvitch (2005, p. 231) found that rates of obesity were positively associated with physical inactivity which, in turn, contributes to higher health care costs. Rosenberger, Sneh and Guvitch (2005, p. 232) goes on to argue that recreation practitioners can promote educational campaigns that support the health benefit framework of outdoor recreation and, in turn, can be supported by facilitating the accessibility of recreation sites and facilities. This may be somewhat more straight-forward when sites or facilities are publicly owned but challenges change somewhat when land ownership patterns involve private interests, as is often the case in trail developments (Rosenberger, Sneh & Guvitch, 2005, p. 232).

The creation of opportunities for outdoor recreation can be influenced by the potential investment benefits associated with it. Nicholls and John (2005) report that greenways or trail developments can positively influence property values. They argue that the design of residential developments can not only improve returns for buyers but also bring additional economic benefits to municipalities (Nicholls & John, 2005, p. 339).

The incorporation of outdoor recreation opportunities into the municipal revenue base has both advantages and disadvantages. Some have argued that using increased tax revenues as a result of including outdoor recreation opportunities can reduce the need for user-pay approaches. Huhtala (2004, p. 40) suggests that user pay is preferred over tax assignment because of an altruistic value among outdoor site users in that they believe that they are supporting conservation.

Conclusions

The results from the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* show that Albertans have a preference for activities that can be done frequently and that are close to home. It is also apparent that Albertans enjoy those outdoor activities that foster family and social interaction rather than more competitive team activities. These interests seem to support the view that outdoor recreation is a way to enjoy many benefits including personal growth and improved health. Practitioners can encourage participation by building on the benefits associated with being physically active and providing support to community initiatives to integrate outdoor opportunities into new urban developments.

References

- Ford, Phyllis. (1988). Outdoor recreation - The holistic leisure pursuit. <http://www.iub.edu/~outdoor/bponline/bp1988/bp88ford.doc>
- Huhtala, Anni. (2004). What price is recreation in Finland? - A contingent valuation study of non-market benefits of public outdoor recreation areas. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 36 (1), 23-44.
- Nicholls, Sarah & Crompton, John. (2005). The impact of greenways on property values: Evidence from Austin, Texas. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 37 (3), 321-341.
- Rosenberger, R, Sneh, Y. & Guvitch, R. (2005). A spatial analysis of linkages between health care expenditures, physical inactivity, obesity and recreation supply. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 37 (2), 216-235.

Further Information:

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Appendix

LIST OF OUTDOOR-BASED ACTIVITIES

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Archery | Moto-cross | Skateboarding |
| ATV/off-road vehicles | Motor boating | Snowmobiling |
| Bicycling | Mountain biking (off-road) | Soccer |
| Birdwatching | Orienteering | Softball/baseball |
| BMX racing | Overnight camping | Swimming (in lakes, rivers, |
| Canoeing | Picnicking (in the countryside) | Tennis |
| Cross-country skiing | Picnicking (within the city) | Tobogganing/sledding |
| Day hiking | River rafting | Track and field |
| Fishing | Rollerblading | Trail biking (motorized) |
| Football | Rollerskating | Walking for pleasure |
| Gardening | Rugby | Water skiing |
| In-line skating | Sailboarding/windsurfing | |
| Jogging/running | Sailing | |