

# A Look at Leisure

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## FAVORITE ACTIVITIES AND WHY PEOPLE ENJOY THEM

This bulletin discusses the activities people enjoy and the reasons why they participate in those activities. The findings are based on the 1988 *General Recreation Survey*, conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks.



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## THE IMPORTANCE OF LEISURE

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 examines 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:

- Camping, walking for pleasure, golf, and fishing rank highly as favorite activities.
- Activities in the exercise-oriented category were most frequently mentioned as favorite activities.
- The most important reasons for participating in recreation activities are pleasure, relaxation, physical health or exercise, doing something different from work, enjoying nature, and socializing.
- Reasons for participating in recreation activities vary with age.

## FAVORITE ACTIVITIES

Respondents were asked to name their favorite recreation activities. In total, 78 different pursuits were mentioned. The activities which ranked most highly as favorite activities are listed in Table!.



Table 1 : Favorite Recreation Activities (1988 and 1981 )

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

*n/a Not available for 1981.*

Many of the activities were mentioned by a relatively small number of respondents. It was therefore necessary to group them into categories for further analysis. The activity groupings were the same as those developed for the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* so that comparisons could be made across surveys.

The ten categories 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 (by 30% of respondents). This was followed by creative-cultural activities (10%), camping (10%), team sports (9%), fishing/hunting pursuits (8%), and golf (8%).

How do Albertans' favorite activities in 1988 compare with those of 1981? Table 1 (above) ranks the individual favorite activities for the two years. For these top-ranked activities, we found the following changes from 1981 to 1988:

- Walking for pleasure, swimming, bicycling, and gardening have increased in popularity as favorite activities.
- Downhill skiing, ice hockey, hunting, and dancing ranked lower as a favorite activity in 1988 than in 1981. This was also apparent for racquetball, bowling,



jogging, tennis, and cross-country skiing. These activities ranked highly in 1981, but did not appear in the top eighteen favorite activities in 1988.

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

Table 2 shows how favorite activities are linked to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. For example, team sports, golf, and fishing/hunting are more likely to be favorite types of activities for males. More females favour activities in the exercise-oriented, creative-cultural and social-passive groupings.

Interest in golf increases with age, while camping is most likely to be enjoyed by those in the mid-adult age range.

## Activiiv Cateuon Profiles

### 1. *Exercise-Oriented Activities* (30%)

Examples: Walking for pleasure, swimming, bicycling.

Profile: 40% of the females reported a favorite activity in this category compared to 24% of the males; 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* (10%)

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* (10%)

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* (9%)

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* (8%)

**Profile:** More likely to be favoured 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* (8%)

**Profile:** More likely to be favoured by males than females; interest increases with age.

**Main Reasons:** Pleasure, physical health or exercise, relaxation, socializing, and skill development.

7. *Social-Passive Activities* (6%)

**Examples:** Board and table games, entertaining, reading.

**Profile:** More likely to be favoured 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* (6%)

**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* (4%)

**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* (3%)

**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.

**Table 3: Favorite!**

**Activities in 1481 and 1488**

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



## WHY PEOPLE PARTICIPATE

What does leisure mean to people? What needs are being satisfied by leisure? Why do people choose 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 1988 *General Recreation Survey* examined the importance of 20 reasons for participation in favorite recreation activities. Figure 1 shows the percentages of respondents indicating that each reason was important to them.

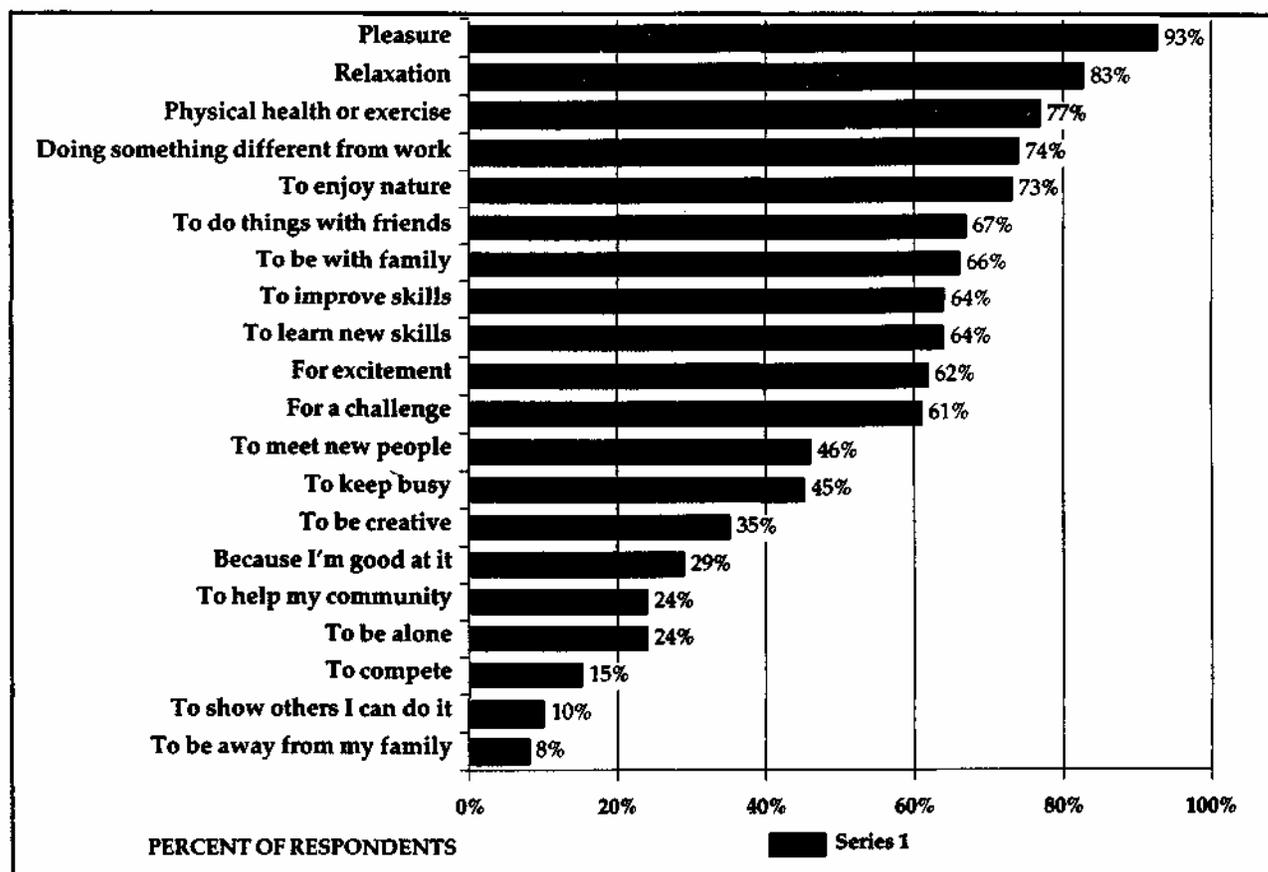
The highest ranked reasons for participation were pleasure, relaxation, physical health or exercise, doing something different from work, and enjoyment of nature. Reasons such as competing, showing accomplishments to others, and being away from the family ranked relatively low in importance.

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:

- **Intellectual** - involving learning and creativity;



**Figure 1:** Percent of Respondents Indicating Reason to be Important or Very Important Pleasure



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

The 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation* also looked at reasons for participation in favorite recreation activities (see *A Look at Leisure No. 3*). The ranking of the reasons was very consistent in 1981 and 1988. Reasons for participation thus 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 ten 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.

*Importance declines with age for the following reasons:*

- 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.

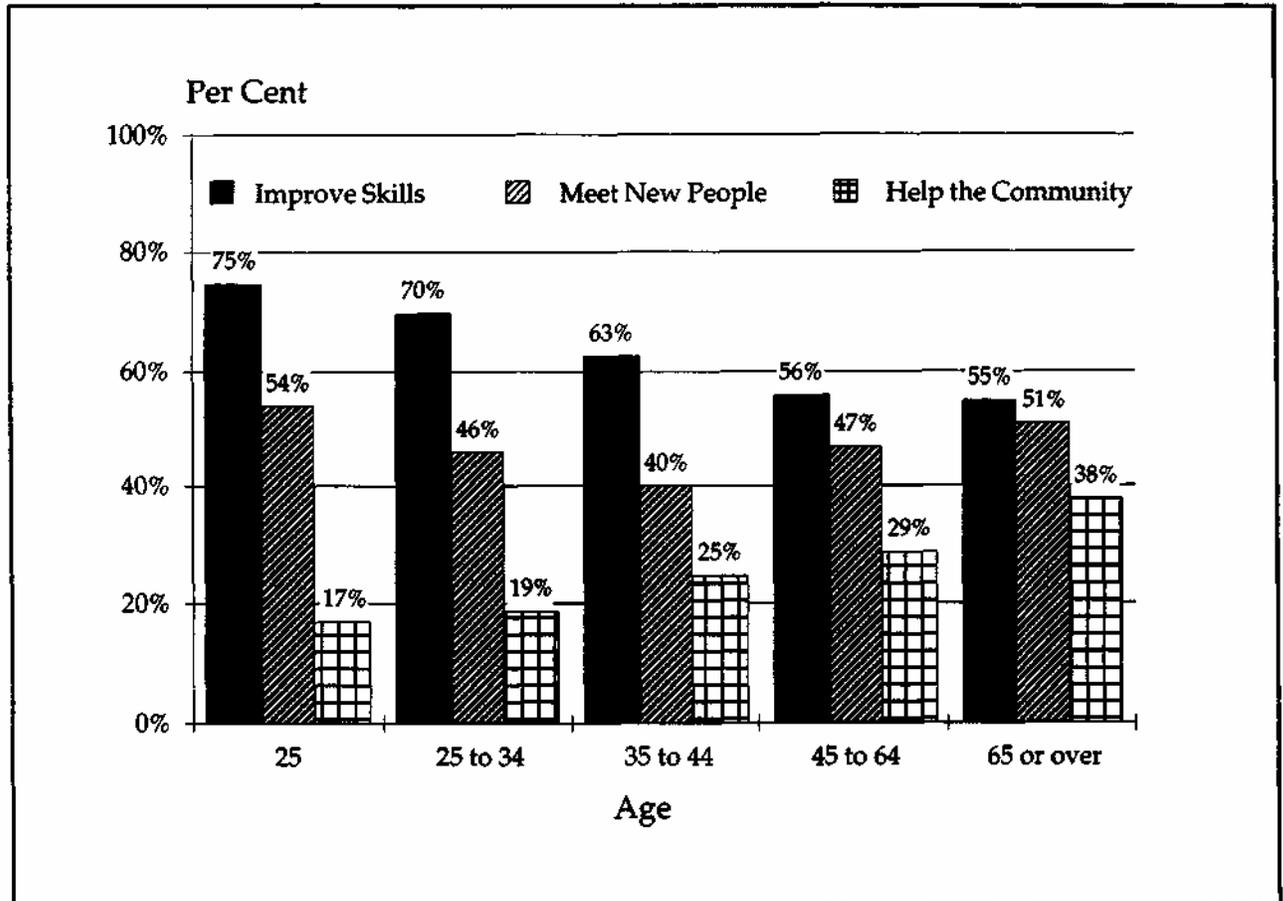
*Importance increases with age for the following reasons:*

- To help my community
- To enjoy nature.
- Relaxation.



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

**Figure 2:** Age-related Changes in the Importance of Reasons for



- Showing others I can do it
- To keep busy
- To be creative
- To do things with my friends
- To meet new people
- Because I am good at it

The importance of pleasure was very stable across age groups, while the importance of relaxation increased gradually until the retirement years. The importance of physical health and exercise declined slightly to age 65, then increased 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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## **FUTURE ISSUES**

The next issue of *Look at Leisure* will focus on barriers to recreation participation.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

From time to time, special analyses of the *General Recreation Survey* data are carried out. If you have any analysis requests, please let us know. We may be able to help. We can also provide copies of the questionnaire used in the survey.

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

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