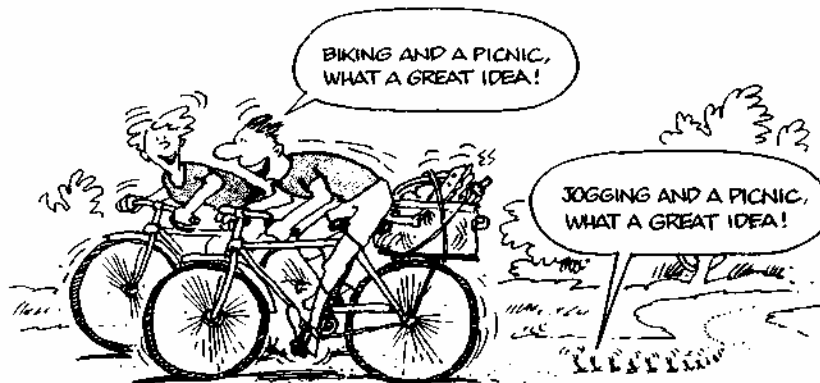


A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1984 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks No. 13

PARTICIPATION PATTERNS

This is the thirteenth bulletin in a series, published by Alberta Recreation and Parks, which presents results of general recreation surveys conducted by the department. These surveys gather current information on the recreation practices, preferences, and opinions of Albertans. The focus of the present issue is the discussion of findings from the 1984 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*, as well as some comparisons with results of the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*.



INTRODUCTION

This bulletin examines participation in a variety of social, creative, cultural, outdoor, and sports activities. The first part of the presentation looks at participation by all household members, including adults and children. The second part looks at the outdoor and sports pursuits in which individuals answering the survey participated most often in the past year. The bulletin also compares findings from the 1984 and 1981 *Public Opinion Surveys on Recreation* in order to identify participation trends in the province.

Participation in recreation activities may take a variety of forms, from very spontaneous and individual, to formal and well-organized. The diverse range of recreation pursuits which are available meet a variety of needs for the individual and the family, including physical, social, and psychological needs. As society changes, it is recognized that leisure, and the recreation activities enjoyed during free or discretionary time, are becoming increasingly important for the quality of life of the individual and the community.

HIGHLIGHTS

These are a few of the main findings from the 1984 survey:

Similar to the finding in 1981, many of the highly ranked activities have strong social and entertainment qualities.

Physical activities with the highest household participation rates are walking for pleasure, swimming and bicycling. These activities were also ranked highly in the 1981 survey.

There is an increase in household participation in swimming, clubs, video and electronic games, gardening, ice hockey, bicycling, and golf since 1981.

Participation in dancing, bowling, roller skating, reading, camping, and jogging has decreased since 1981.



HOUSEHOLD PARTICIPATION

The survey looked at household participation in 71 activities. Twenty-one of these were social, creative, and cultural activities, while 50 were outdoor and sports pursuits. For each activity, it was possible to identify "participating households". These were households which had at least one member who participated in the activity during the previous year. The involvement of both adults and children was considered in this part of the survey.

Most of the social, creative, and cultural activities included in the survey had relatively high levels of participation. Close to 90 percent of the households took part in the top four activities, including visiting friends, watching TV, listening to the radio, and dining out. The percentages of households reporting participation in each of the social, creative, and cultural activities are summarized in

TABLE 1.

Activity	Percentage*
1. Visiting friends/ relatives	91%
2. Listening to radio, records	90%
3. Watching TV	90%
4. Dining out	86%
5. Playing cards, board games	82%
6. Reading	81%
7. Driving for pleasure	78%
8. Gardening	75%
9. Attending a movie	74%
10. Crafts and hobbies	73%
11. Spectator at sports events	71%
12. Participating in groups or clubs	70%
13. Visiting a library	70%
14. Visiting a museum, art gallery, or live theatre	62%
15. Dancing (social, folk)	61%
16. Attending educational courses	58%
17. Volunteering for a club or group	55%
18. Home improvement	55%
19. Playing video/ electronic games	52%
20. Engaging in drama, music, drawing	45%
21. Playing bingo, casinos	27%

* Percent of households participating

For the most part, these social, creative, and cultural the following table.

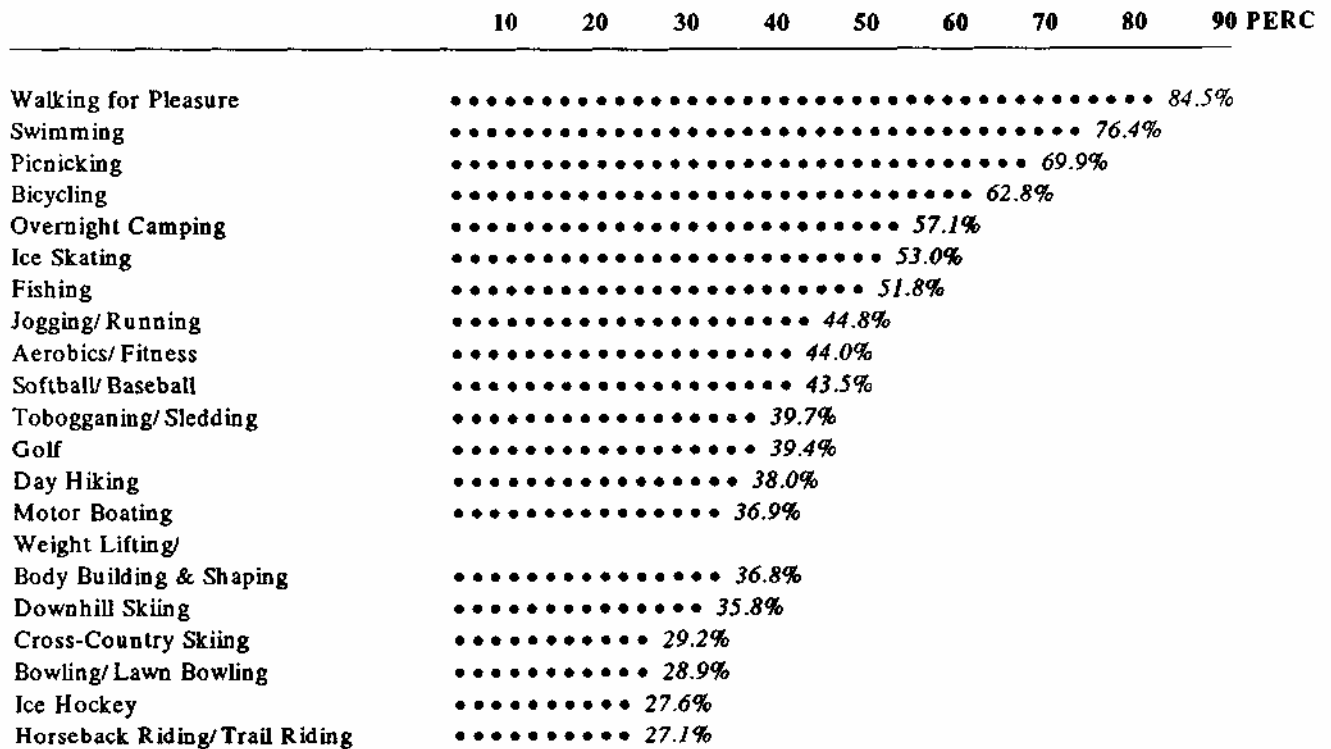


activities do not require a high level of physical exertion, and may be enjoyed by people of all ages. Many of the pursuits have an important entertainment function, and are likely to be self-provided, without the need for special facilities, equipment, or training. The private or commercial sector may also provide many of these opportunities.

Household participation information for the top 20 outdoor and sports activities is shown on the graph on page 5. Walking for pleasure, swimming, picnicking, bicycling, and overnight camping are the five activities with the highest percentage of participating households. Softball and baseball are the highest ranked of the team sports, with about 44 percent of the households reporting participants. Activities with lower levels of participation are not shown on the graph. Examples of activities in which fewer than ten percent of households participated are sailing, archery, river rafting, windsurfing, judo, rugby, and ringette. In general, activities in which fewer people participate may be seasonal in nature, or may be recently introduced into the province. Many of these pursuits may require special skills, equipment, or facilities, or may not be suitable nor attractive for all age groups. There will be a closer look at factors which limit participation in activities in a future issue of *A Look at Leisure*.



GRAPH 1. TOP 20 OUTDOOR AND SPORTS ACTIVITIES OF ALBERTANS, 1984



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TRENDS IN THE PROVINCE

How do these findings compare with the participation data from the 1981 *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*? In both surveys, activities with the highest household participation levels tended to be **in** the social, creative, and passive group. The outdoor and sports pursuits with relatively high participation rates were identical in both surveys, and included walking, swimming, picnicking, bicycling, camping, ice skating, and fishing. There were also some interesting differences when 1984 and 1981 household participation was compared. Although it is difficult to assess long-term trends from just two sets of data, it is possible to identify several activities for which there was an increase or a decrease in participation from 1981 to 1984.

The most marked increases in household participation, from 1981 to 1984, were seen for the following pursuits:

- Swimming
- Video and electronic games
- Gardening
- Participation in an organized group or club
- Golf
- Bicycling
- Ice hockey

For example, 76 percent of households participated in swimming in 1984, compared to 70 percent in 1981, and involvement in video and electronic games was reported by 52 percent of households in 1984, compared to 44 percent in 1981.

On the other hand, there were several activities in which participation declined from 1981 to 1984. The activities in this group included:

- Social dancing
- Bowling
- Roller skating
- Reading
- Camping
- Jogging



The most marked decline was for social dancing, in which 61 percent of households participated in 1984, compared to 77 percent in 1981. The percentage of households involved in bowling was 29 percent in 1984, down from 43 percent in 1981.

There are many things which may contribute to changing patterns of participation in activities. In some cases, more opportunities for participation may be provided. Technology may contribute to new forms of recreation, as may be seen in the recent popularity of computer-related leisure activities. Interest in certain pursuits may reflect lifestyle trends, such as concern about health and fitness. Economic factors also play a role, with high expenditure activities tending to decline in popularity during difficult economic times.

It is also important to understand the role of demographic patterns in participation. By looking at profiles of participants, it is possible to identify certain segments of the population which show increases in participation, and those whose participation is declining. For example, decreased participation in camping from 1981 to 1984 was particularly apparent for households with adult members over 50 years of age. Lower participation in bowling was most evident in households having school-age children, or with adults under 50 years of age. The survey results also suggested that increased participation in golf was more likely for members of households in the mid-income categories (\$20,000 to \$40,000 per year), than in other income groups. There was an increase in participation in swimming among most types of households, but this increase was most marked in families having preschool-age children, and in higher income families. In 1984, there was also more involvement in bicycling by higher income families, compared to 1981.

Such patterns, taken together with changing population characteristics, may suggest future trends of interest to recreation planners and practitioners. In addition to looking at changing market characteristics, it is also a



challenge for the recreation researcher and practitioner to try to assess why these patterns may be occurring.

FAVORITE OUTDOOR AND SPORTS PURSUITS

The survey also looked at outdoor and sports pursuits in which the respondent (i.e., the individual answering the survey) participated during the past year. The activities covered in this question varied from mountain climbing to walking for pleasure, and respondents were asked to indicate the three activities in which they participated most often. Most of those answering the survey had taken part in at least one outdoor or sports activity during the previous year. With this information, it was possible to look at characteristics such as age, education, and sex of the respondent to see how they were associated with participation in specific activities.

As might be expected, age was a particularly important factor related to participation. On the whole, involvement in outdoor and sports pursuits was more common for people under 45 years of age. This was most likely to be true for vigorous activities such as team sports, aerobics/fitness, and racquetball, in which participation declined noticeably with increasing age.

There were, however, several activities in which participation tended to be higher for people in the older age categories. These included curling, fishing, golf, hunting, picnicking, and walking for pleasure. There was also a third grouping of activities, in which participation peaked in the mid-adult years. Cross-country skiing, day hiking, camping, and motor boating were activities in this category. Activities which appeared to be enjoyed to the same extent by people of all ages included horseback/ trail riding, snowmobiling, and swimming.

Participation in activities was also related to education. For example, activities such as aerobics/fitness, jogging/running, golf, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, and hiking tended to appeal to respondents reporting higher levels of education. There were also some



interesting rural-urban differences for several of the pursuits. Rural residents were more likely than those living in urban centres to participate in curling, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, and horseback riding. In contrast, urban residents indicated more involvement in bicycling, golf, racquetball, tennis, and weight lifting/body shaping.

With this type of information, it is possible to develop profiles to describe the most likely participants in various activities. Examples of participant profiles for downhill skiing, fishing, jogging/running, racquetball, and softball/baseball are provided below:

Downhill Skiing:

- participation decreased with age;
- more likely to be enjoyed by single persons;
- participation increased with education and income levels;
- more likely for Calgary residents than for those living in other areas of the province.

Fishing:

- participation increased up to 64 years of age, and declined slightly for the older age group;
- three times as many males as females participated;
- more common for rural than urban residents.

Jogging/ Running:

- participation declined with increasing age;
- particularly likely among single persons;
- more common for those in higher education and income groups;
- greater participation in the major urban centres than in the rest of the province.

Racquetball:

- participation declined as age increased;
- more participation by those with higher education and income levels;
- more likely in urban than rural locations.

Softball/ Baseball:

involvement peaked in the 25 to 34 year age range and



- declined as age increased;
- more common for males than females;
 - greater participation by those with high school and technical vocational education, and those in the middle household income bracket;
 - more likely in northern Alberta than in other areas of the province.

Profiles such as these provide insights into current recreation markets. This is one step in a process called "market segmentation". This approach provides descriptions of "who" participates in "what" activities. By looking at residence or geographic variables, such as region of the province, it is also possible to identify "where" market segments are located. This is basic information for a marketing approach to the delivery of recreation services. It helps practitioners to identify where recreation needs are not being met in the community, and provides an understanding of target markets for agencies which may be interested in promoting or encouraging participation.

IMPLICATIONS

Information on recreation participation can be an important tool for recreation practitioners concerned with meeting the recreation needs of their communities. By looking closely at participation patterns, and by observing who is participating, agencies can determine if they are providing a full range of opportunities for diverse segments of the population.

The survey results have identified that activities with the highest participation tend to be provided by individuals and the commercial sector. However, recreation agencies can play an important role in providing opportunities which individuals cannot provide for themselves. Recreation agencies can also assist in the development of skills which individuals can take with them to many settings. Recreation service providers also have an important function in leisure education, such as informing clientele about the benefits to be gained through positive use of leisure.

Many activities with relatively high levels of participation



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have social and entertainment qualities. These appear to be important factors which attract people and encourage them to participate. Do your programs offer opportunities for participants to meet other people or to share their activities with friends and family?

The survey results indicate that participation in activities varies among different groups in the population. Factors such as age, education, rural or urban location, and region of the province are all important. Communities may vary in their socio-demographic makeup. For example, some may have higher numbers of older residents, while others may have many young families. Are you aware of the characteristics of your community? Is the profile of the community changing? How do these factors influence your choice of programs?

Recreation participation patterns may be influenced by a number of things, including new technology, economic conditions, and general interest or fads. Do you try to anticipate future demand for programs and services by looking at trends in other parts of the province or country? By keeping up on current information, recreation practitioners may be able to adjust their program offerings to meet changing needs and interests, and avoid a decline in participation.

The findings presented in this bulletin provide an overview of the participation data obtained from the *Public Opinion Survey on Recreation*. The discussion indicates how information on participation is useful in identifying recreation market segments, and in determining trends or changing recreation patterns. By observing patterns and trends in your own community, you may be better prepared to develop programs to meet a broad range of needs, and to assess whether you are reaching all segments of the community with your program offerings.

THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue in the *A Look at Leisure* series will focus on **LEISURE ACTIVITY CHOICES**. It will examine activities which have recently been started by respondents, and look at the reasons or motivations underlying these activity choices.



INFORMATION

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