

Look at Leisure

Participation

Introduction

This bulletin examines the current participation patterns of Albertans and their households. The Bulletin focuses only on participation rates as defined by the proportion of households and individual respondents reported in the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey*. The bulletin also examines trends within demographic groups through comparisons for selected individual activities and activity groupings.

Overview of Participation

As in previous years, the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* asked respondents about the recreational and leisure activities they and members of their households take part in. Walking for pleasure has the highest rate of household participation at 93% with gardening ranking second (72%) and doing a craft or hobby third at 64% (Table 1).

The top 20 activities can generally be categorized into those that are relatively passive (e.g., gardening), those that are exercise-oriented (e.g., walking), and those that are creative or cultural (e.g., attending live theatre). The top 20 involve little formal organization and can be performed relatively informally. There is also a degree of social interaction in many of the leading activities and most of them need limited equipment or facilities to support participation.

The top five activities from the 2000 survey are largely the same in 2004. The only exception is visiting a museum or art gallery which dropped from third to tenth, and was replaced by crafts and hobbies.

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Table 1
Top 20 Recreation Activities

Activity	% Participating Households
Walking for pleasure	93.0
Gardening	72.1
Doing a craft or hobby (e.g., photography, woodworking, sewing)	63.8
Attending a sports event as a spectator	60.0
Attending a fair or festival	56.7
Bicycling	56.0
Swimming (in pools)	54.1
Playing video, computer or electronic games	53.0
Attending live theatre (not movies)	51.9
Visiting a museum, art gallery	50.9
Overnight camping	45.3
Golf (other than driving range or mini-golf)	44.9
Aerobics/fitness/aquasize/yoga	43.9
Attending educational courses	43.3
Picnicking (within a city)	38.0
Picnicking (in the countryside)	37.3
Weight training	36.1
Day hiking	35.8
Jogging/running	35.6
Swimming (e.g., in lakes, rivers, ponds)	32.6

Participation by Category

Using categories to break up the long list of activities that Albertans take part in is helpful to see more clearly how participation rates are associated with types of activities. The categories used are:

exercise-oriented	creative/cultural	team sports
social/passive	mechanized outdoor	snow sports
non-mechanized outdoors	water sports	

Participation in exercise-oriented activities for households and individual respondents is summarized in Table 2. Walking for pleasure, bicycling, swimming and golf are the most popular activities, followed by aerobics/fitness, weight training, and jogging.

A review of who participates in the five most popular exercise-oriented activities produces the profiles in Table 3. Of note is that participation can be distinguished by gender (e.g., bicycling for males, swimming for females), age (e.g., golf attracts young and older participants but aerobics is for the under 35s), and swimming appears to be an accessible activity for those on limited incomes.

Table 2
Participation in Exercise-Oriented Activities

Exercise-oriented Activity	Participating Households		Participating Respondents	
	Number	%	Number	%
	Walking for pleasure	2,993	93.0	2,907
Bicycling	1,802	56.0	1,451	45.1
Swimming (in pools)	1,741	54.1	1,373	42.7
Golf (other than driving range or mini-golf)	1,446	44.9	1,177	36.6
Aerobics/fitness/aquasize/yoga	1,411	43.9	1,080	33.6
Weight training	1,161	36.1	888	27.6
Jogging/running	1,146	35.6	849	26.4
Swimming (e.g., in lakes, rivers, ponds)	1,048	32.6	902	28.0
Ice skating (not hockey)	951	29.6	688	21.4
In-line skating	671	20.9	361	11.2
Badminton	432	13.4	245	7.6
Tennis	360	11.2	275	8.5
Skateboarding	333	10.4	52	1.6
Wall climbing	305	9.5	119	3.7
Table tennis	296	9.2	243	7.6
Track and field	268	8.3	50	1.6
Gymnastics	225	7.0	41	1.3
Martial arts (e.g., judo, karate)	210	6.5	96	3.0
Squash	173	5.4	112	3.5
Racquetball	132	4.1	79	2.5
BMX racing	47	1.5	16	0.5

Table 3
Exercise-Oriented Activities Profiles
For the Five Most Popular Activities

<p><u>Swimming (in pools)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • females • under 45 years of age • couples with children, single parents, households with two or more unrelated adults • experiencing financial difficulties • college or university education 	<p><u>Golf</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males • under 25 years of age and between 46 to 55 years of age • couples with children • financially comfortable • technical education
<p><u>Bicycling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males • under 55 years of age • couples with children • financially comfortable • university level education 	<p><u>Aerobic/fitness/aquasize/yoga</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • females • 18 to 35 years of age • single parents, households with two or more unrelated adults • financially comfortable • university level education
<p><u>Walking for pleasure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With almost all Albertans walking for pleasure (93%) most demographic groups are similarly represented in the profile. 	

Interestingly, the profiles indicate that where there are similarities, there are opportunities for cross-participation: females like to swim and take part in aerobics, while males from households with children like to bicycle and golf. Likewise, where there are differences, we know that participants are more likely to be unique: swimming is popular for females under 45 years of age while males between the ages of 45 and 55 are more likely to be golfers. These principals can be further applied by considering the profiles associated with activities from each of the other participation categories.

In Table 4, demographic profiles have been prepared for a selection of the activities belonging to the other activity categories identified on page 2. Similarities and differences are evident. For example, couples with children are more likely to attend sporting events and fairs but less likely to be taking part in hobbies. Team sports appear to be the domain of males, although soccer equally attracts males and females, and are generally activities for those under 45 years of age. Curling is an exception with an older age profile.

Other contrasts include differences between participants in downhill and cross-country skiing where age and gender profiles are quite different. Mechanized outdoor activities also appear more popular with males than females, but females are more likely to be involved in non-mechanized outdoor activities and water sports.

Table 4 – Demographic Profile of Activities By Activity Category

Creative/Cultural	Social/Passive	Team Sports	Non-mechanized Outdoor Activities
<p><u>Crafts, hobbies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • females • 18 to 35 years of age • couples with no children and single parents • technical and college level education 	<p><u>Gardening</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • females • 46 to 75 years of age • couples with or without children • financially comfortable • technical education 	<p><u>Softball/baseball</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males • 18 to 45 years of age • households with two or more unrelated adults • college level education 	<p><u>Overnight camping</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males and females • 18 to 45 years of age • couples with children, households with two or more unrelated adults • technical and college education
<p><u>Attending a sports event as a spectator</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males • 18 to 55 years of age • couples with children, single parents, households with 2 or more unrelated adults • financially comfortable • university level education 	<p><u>Playing video/computer/electronic games</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males • under 45 years of age • various household types, single parents, couples with children • financial difficulties • college level education 	<p><u>Ice hockey</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males • 18 to 45 years of age • couples with children, households with two or more unrelated adults • financially comfortable 	<p><u>Day hiking</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males and females • 18 to 55 years of age • couples with children, single parents, households with two or more unrelated adults • financially comfortable • university level education
<p><u>Attending a fair or festival</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • females • under 45 years of age • couples with children, single parents, households with two or more unrelated adults • financially comfortable • university or college level education 	<p><u>Attending educational courses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • females • 18 to 35 years of age • households with two or more unrelated adults and single parents • financial difficulties • college and university education 	<p><u>Carling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males • 46 to 55 years of age • financially comfortable 	<p><u>Birdwatching</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males and females • 56 to 75 years of age • couples with no children • financially comfortable
		<p><u>Soccer</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males and females • under 45 years of age • couples with children, single parents, households with two or more unrelated adults • university level education 	<p><u>Mountain biking (offroad)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • females • 18 to 45 years of age • couples with children, household with two or more unrelated adults • financially comfortable • university education
			<p><u>Fishing/hunting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males • under 25 years of age • couples with no children, households with two or more unrelated adults • technical education

Table 4 – Demographic Profile of Activities By Activity Category
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Snow Sports	Water-based Sports	Mechanized Outdoors
<p><u>Downhill skiing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● males ● 18 to 45 years of age ● couples with children, households with two or more unrelated adults ● financially comfortable ● university education 	<p><u>Motor boating</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● males and females ● under 25 and 36 to 55 years of age ● couples with children, households with two or more unrelated adults ● financially comfortable ● technical education 	<p><u>ATV/off-road vehicles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● males ● 18 to 25 years of age ● couples with children, households with two or more unrelated adults ● technical or college education
<p><u>Cross-country skiing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● males and females ● 56 to 65 years of age ● single adults ● financially comfortable ● university education 	<p><u>Canoeing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● males and females ● under 25 and 36 to 55 years of age ● financially comfortable ● university education 	<p><u>Snowmobiling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● males and females ● 18 to 25 years of age ● households with two or more unrelated adults ● financially comfortable
<p><u>Snowboarding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● males and females ● 18 to 25 years of age ● Households with two or more unrelated adults 		

A Closer Look at Walking and Cycling

The 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* included a series of questions to explore in greater detail how Albertans take part in walking and bicycling.

Walking

The survey found that 42.3% of households walk for transportation purposes, such as to work (Table 5). This includes 36.2% of respondents.

Walking on streets appears as the most popular form of walking. Trail walking ranks second (66.3% of respondents did this) a form that can be considered to be special purpose walking or walking specifically for recreation. At least two-thirds of Albertans do this, pointing to the value of ensuring communities allow residents access to trail systems.

Table 5
A Profile of Walking

	% of Households	% of Respondents
Walking as transportation to work and elsewhere	42.3	36.2
Walking a pet	35.1	32.3
Walking on trails	69.0	66.3
Walking on streets	83.7	81.2

Cycling

Table 6 shows that cycling on streets (48.6%) and cycling on trails (38.5%) are the most popular forms of cycling and, as with walking, provides an indication of the value of trails and accessible spaces for recreation. This tends to be further backed up with the relatively limited use of cycling for the more utilitarian purpose of traveling to work.

Table 6
A Profile of Cycling

	% of Households	% of Respondents
Cycling as transportation	22.2	15.5
Long distance bicycle touring	3.9	2.8
Cycling on trails	38.5	32.1
Cycling on streets	48.6	38.8
Mountain bike riding on challenging terrain	11.4	8.3

Bicycle touring and mountain biking attracts the lowest rates of participation but this seems to be due to the niche nature of these activities. Mountain biking is popular amongst males, those under the age of 45, and with post-secondary education. Touring is for a slightly older group (25 to 45), generally male with a university education.

Implications for Practitioners

The top 20 activities show that Albertans enjoy a variety of activities. These are readily accessible and do not require extensive facility, equipment or organizational infrastructures, yet they offer opportunities to exercise in an environment that fosters social interaction. Preferences for walking and bicycling show the importance that trail development can have in facilitating participation and reflects a need for urban design concepts such as 'Walkable Communities'.

We cannot ignore the important role that other recreational activities have for specific groups within the population. Outdoor recreationists have specific needs that participants in team sports do not share, and vice-versa. There are also important differences, for example, in the activity preferences of young adults compared to older adults and these require recognition in view of our aging population. Together, these similarities and differences create a diversity of opportunities from which Albertans can select and enjoy the benefits of recreation.

Furthermore, as the demography of the population changes, programming and facility needs will also change. The diverse range of activities in which Albertans take part point to a need for flexible spaces that can be easily transformed.

It is also important that practitioners are able to provide future program opportunities that meet the needs and interests of Albertans developed from the early years of their life leisure experiences. The needs of the next generation of seniors will not be the same as the generation that went before them, as lifestyles, attitudes and behaviours can be expected to be different.

The participation patterns highlighted in this bulletin provide a framework for decisions-makers and practitioners. The data provided by the 2004 *Alberta Recreation Survey* is important to understanding how Albertans take part in recreation and what participation means for meeting future program and facility needs. The wealth of data collected as part of the survey provides a resource from which additional analysis can further assist practitioners with meeting the needs of Albertans.

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