

# A SURVEY ON RECREATIONAL AWARENESS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR: PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

A. W. BIGNELL<sup>1</sup>, B. D. MURPHY<sup>2</sup> and B. N. P. SMITH<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Only a few attempts have been made in New Zealand to systematically explore and describe recreational awareness, attitudes, and behaviour. This paper discusses the initial findings from a survey of urban Aucklanders, which focused on recreation in general and forest recreation in particular. As well as demonstrating the obvious need for greater publicity about forest recreational opportunities, the survey clearly indicates the public's desire for minimal facilities catering for a wide range of age and interest groups. Some brief points are made on the implications of these findings for forest recreation policy-makers and planners.*

## INTRODUCTION

New Zealand's rich endowment of natural resources provides tremendous scope for recreation but only the 150 000 km coastline has become well used nationally for recreation. The 7 million ha of forest land which covers 26% of New Zealand's total land area offers a natural recreation reserve that is relatively less used. Half of this forest area is administered by the New Zealand Forest Service which is charged under the 1976 Forests Amendment Act with developing forest management policies according to the concept of "balanced use". Accordingly, recreation, timber production, and protection of natural resources are to be considered on an equal basis.

This shift in legislation from a predominantly "production" orientation should promote a greater degree of flexibility in the way in which the problems besetting forest management are approached and solved. It is to be hoped that it will also encourage a greater number of forest managers to see forest recreation as a "respectable" and not just a legislative responsibility.

Flexibility of policy is vital in effective resource planning simply because planning philosophy determines, to a large extent, the

<sup>1</sup> N.Z. Forest Service, Private Bag, Wellington

<sup>2</sup> Department of Economics, University of Auckland

<sup>3</sup> Forest Research Institute, Private Bag, Rotorua

form of the questions which planners ask about various future options. Decisions which are made about the options, however, should be based on answers to these questions, and not *solely* on a set of philosophical assumptions. It is here that systematic research must play a part, and it is here also that much of the difficulty facing the development of forest recreation in this country lies.

The considerable effort expended overseas on research in this field has not been matched in New Zealand and, because societies vary in the way in which they locate and treat "problems" (including recreational ones), use of overseas material in assessing New Zealand's "problems" may be of limited value. Only a small number of local studies have been carried out so it is very difficult for our planners and managers to gauge the likely effectiveness of their ideas for the management of local environments. If best use is to be made of our forests as a recreational resource, managers and planners must have available to them local research which provides an indication of what people think and how they might use forests for recreation.

To help provide this information, a survey was conducted by the National Research Bureau in March-April 1979 in Auckland, chosen as an example of a large urban centre with easy access to both forest and coast. A randomly selected sample of 1000 people 15 years of age and over living in the Auckland urban area was interviewed, and a brief description of the preliminary findings is presented here. Further studies are planned in other centres to test the applicability of these findings to New Zealand as a whole.

## GENERAL RECREATION FINDINGS

### *Attitudes*

What people choose to do for recreation depends on what they believe their leisure time can provide for them. Above all else, those surveyed felt the need to seek a sense of freedom. Recreation is seen by many as a means of escaping from everyday routine, of experiencing the pleasure of overcoming challenges while meeting the need for some physical exercise. On the other hand, it appears that much less emphasis is placed on solitary pursuits such as getting away from other people into the backblocks. There is a desire to actually do things with other people rather than to just tell them about these things, an emphasis on group recreation — particularly in family groups and in a circle of friends.

*Behaviour*

The favourite leisure-time activities of those questioned are indicated in Table 1. Of these favourite activities, 51% are outdoor and 49% indoor. Within the broad group in Table 1 the three specific activities most favoured were sports 15%, reading 13%, and gardening 9%.

TABLE 1: FAVOURITE LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES

|   | <i>Percentage of<br/>Those Surveyed</i> |
|---|---|
| Gardening and other domestic activities .....                             | 17                                      |
| Swimming, fishing, walking, and<br>miscellaneous outdoor activities ..... | 16                                      |
| Sports .....  | 15                                      |
| Visiting, TV viewing, and other casual activities .....                   | 15                                      |
| Reading and philosophical activities .....                                | 14                                      |
| Driving, boating, flying .....  | 8                                       |
| Cultural and artistic activities .....                                    | 7                                       |
| Hobbies .....   | 4                                       |
| Animal-related activities .....   | 2                                       |
| Club activities .....   | 2                                       |
|   | 100                                     |

On average, during the autumn week preceding the survey 27 hours were spent on leisure-time activities; of these, 16 hours (59%) were devoted to indoor activities and 11 hours (41%) to outdoor activities. However, the analysis shows that about 53% of leisure time over the whole year involved outdoor activities.

In this same week, 47% of people involved in outdoor activities and 86% of people pursuing indoor activities did so at home. Some of them were also among the 32% of the "outdoor people" and 17% of the "indoor people" who were involved in activities in their own suburb, and the 35% of outdoor people and 24% of indoor people who ventured further afield (respectively, 12% and 9% of them out of Auckland). Eighty percent of the sample, though, had undertaken full-day leisure-time activities out of the city during the last 12 months. These were mainly outdoors, with swimming well ahead of miscellaneous activities, followed by boating, fishing, sports, picnics, and driving. Eighty percent had also been on out-of-city trips lasting more than a day. Again these involved mainly outdoor activities, with miscellaneous casual

activities well ahead of swimming, followed by driving, camping, fishing, and boating.

The most frequently visited places (either casually or on planned trips) out of the city during the previous 12 months were beaches and ocean (80% of those surveyed making about 15 visits), homes of friends and relatives in other centres (65% making about seven visits), farmland (45% making about eight visits), lakes and rivers (40% making about six visits), forests (36% making about five visits), and mountains (22% making about six visits).

## FOREST RECREATION FINDINGS

### *Awareness*

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents claimed to know the distinction between exotic and indigenous forests — 52% correctly. The word “forest” is associated equally with native and pine trees, but the colloquial term “bush” seems to be preferred over the more formal “native forests” for areas of native trees, and the technical term “indigenous forests” was virtually not used at all. Areas of pine trees were termed “pine forest”, seldom “exotic forest”. The 10 best-known forest areas in New Zealand are Kaingaroa Forest (named by 32%), Waipoua Forest (35%), central North Island forests (23%), Waitakere Ranges (15%), Rotorua forests (15%), Northland forests (12%), Woodhill Forest (10%), West Coast South Island forests (10%), Urewera Ranges (8%), and Tongariro National Park (7%). The news-making forests of Pureora and Whirinaki were named by 4% and 2%, respectively.

Of the 81% who believed that the public are allowed only limited access to Forest Service land, 88% believed that they have free entry to officially designated recreation areas, and 52% believed that State Forest Parks and open indigenous forests can be entered freely. Forest Sanctuaries and State forest lands were considered freely accessible by only 8% and 4%, respectively.

Respondents were shown a card with three ways in which native and exotic State forests can be used. They were asked whether equal importance is given to each use or whether one is given more importance than others. They were then asked if equal importance *should* be given to each use or if one use should be given more importance than the others. A summary of the responses is given in Table 2.

TABLE 2: ATTITUDES TO FOREST USE OPTIONS

| <i>Importance of Forest Use</i>                                     | <i>Percentage Response</i> |                       |                       |                       |
|---|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|   | <i>Perceived Use</i>       |                       | <i>Desired Use</i>    |                       |
|   | <i>Native Forests</i>      | <i>Exotic Forests</i> | <i>Native Forests</i> | <i>Exotic Forests</i> |
| <i>Equal importance given to production, protection, recreation</i> | 21                         | 11                    | 39                    | 32                    |
| <i>More importance given to</i>                                     |                            |                       |                       |                       |
| Production of timber  | 42                         | 61                    | 7                     | 43                    |
| Protection of natural resources within and around forests           | 23                         | 11                    | 39                    | 12                    |
| Recreation and education  | 3                          | 2                     | 7                     | 3                     |
| Don't know  | 11                         | 15                    | 8                     | 10                    |
| Total   | 100                        | 100                   | 100                   | 100                   |

These results suggest that the Auckland public may not be aware of the Forest Service's current forest management policy of balanced use. The results indicate a desire for emphasis to be placed on the protection aspect for native State forest, and on the production aspect for exotic State forest.

### *Attitudes*

Forests are considered to provide a pleasant, safe, but nonetheless challenging environment for physical recreation. They are seen as good places to get away from civilization to enjoy nature, and the need to travel out of the city does not diminish their recreational attraction. However, for holiday purposes beaches are preferred to forests, and coastal scenery is considered more pleasant than forest scenery.

Sixty-five percent of those surveyed would like all native forests to be made protected reserves. The desired manner of protection is reflected more explicitly in the figures in Table 2 — 39% wanting protection as the main use of native State forests, and 39% wanting protection to be included equally with recreation and production for balanced use of native State forests.

The public want access to forests, but there is no desire for extensive development of recreational amenities in forests. In this respect there was strong support for multi-activity options such as:

“Short easy walks for people of all ages and health conditions including educational nature rambles around named trees; longer,

rougher tracks for the more adventurous, and trackless areas for experienced trampers; picnic sites for day trippers and camp sites by roads for those staying longer, and huts for trampers in the back country."

However, even where formed tracks are provided, there is still a desire for relatively unrestricted movement on and off tracks so as to touch the trees and pick up leaves, having first accepted the responsibility to avoid damage.

Native forests are preferred to pine forests for both recreation purposes and scenic attractions.

When given a list of 26 activities that could be pursued in forest areas, the popularity rankings that emerged, listed from most popular to least popular, were:

1. Going for short walks
2. Driving through on a sightseeing trip
3. Picknicking
4. Educational trips
5. Nature study
6. Camping
7. Day tramping trips
8. Photography
9. Swimming
10. Fishing
11. Collecting things
12. Picking fruit and berries
13. Tramping trips of more than 1 day
14. Picking up firewood
15. Painting
16. Orienteering
17. Climbing
18. Canoeing
19. Jogging/running
20. Horse riding
21. Caving
22. Car rallying
23. Motor cycling
24. Hunting for food
25. Hunting for trophies
26. Hunting for sale

### *Behaviour*

Nearly half of those in the sample had visited a forest at least once during the last 12 months. The top 10 forest areas visited

were Waitakere Ranges (visited by 32%), Waipoua Forest (14%), central North Island forests (13%), Rotorua forests (11%), Northland forests (10%), Coromandel Ranges (9%), Woodhill Forest (8%), Kaingaroa Forest (8%), Tongariro National Park (5%), and Waiuku Forest (4%).

The typical forest visitor went to a forest three times in the summer and autumn months of the last year. Visits were made in family groups of about five people who normally spent about half a day per visit. These visits generally involved short walks, sightseeing, driving, and picknicking.

In terms of potential demand, an examination of their forest recreation intentions for the next 12 months showed that 38% of those surveyed could be labelled "hard-core forest recreationers". This group (which represents about 200 000 Aucklanders 15 years of age and over) "definitely intended" to visit a forest during this time. Of the remainder, 48% were "merely interested" in forest recreation, and 14% were completely "uninterested" in forest recreation. Analysis indicates that previous forest recreation experience or the lack of it, based mainly on youthful family experiences, is the key factor behind this three-way split. Also, compared with the "merely interested" and the "uninterested" groups, the "potential users" were more youthful, wealthier, employed in upper white collar and blue collar occupations, less settled in Auckland, and more mobile with an associated tendency to spend more time on outdoor activities away from home.

## FOREST MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

There is little doubt that there is a great deal of interest in forest recreation; the opportunity exists for forest managers and planners to generate public goodwill by acknowledging this interest and so begin to refurbish a somewhat tarnished media image. Encouragement should be given to the public to indulge in their already popular pastime of short walks, and, with the provision of swimming facilities, forests could be promoted as suitable alternatives to the ever-popular coastal beaches. The study suggests that any development should be limited to a *minimum "spartan" level* to cater for those wishing to experience a sense of freedom when visiting a forest, to commune with nature, to do "their own thing". A multi-activity set of amenities is required to satisfy, in the main:

- (a) The sightseeing driving family who can pull into a layby and take a 15 minute nature ramble on an all-weather path among named trees.
- (b) The family who can picnic at a layby, then embark on a 1 to 2 hour walk along a roughly formed track, with the opportunity to swim in an adjacent safe swimming area.
- (c) Campers who can stay for an extended period at a permanent campsite with limited facilities, adjacent to swimming areas.
- (d) Trampers who can stay overnight in huts in "trackless" back-country areas.

Catering in this way for a wide range of interests and ages would enhance and maintain a desire for forest recreational opportunities.

The research suggests that the public would welcome and support an "open forest, come and see for yourself" approach to recreation policy. This implies a need for greater effort and emphasis in education and publicity. It is worth noting that one of the major constraints which "prevented" people from becoming more involved in forest recreation was the lack of readily accessible information about the forest environment.

The aim of this ongoing research is to provide a starting point from which to explore the extent and form of the public interest in forest recreation. On the basis of the analysis carried out so far, the following suggestions for recreational planning are offered. Some of these will already be in use in one form or another in some New Zealand forests and firm endorsement is given to the planning directions taken in these particular areas.

- (1) An educational publicity campaign as a prerequisite to free forest access, to be couched in colloquial terms (bush instead of indigenous forest and pine instead of exotic forest). This should be aimed at developing public responsibility towards fire prevention and towards safety of humans, flora, and fauna.
- (2) The establishment of family forest walks of two main types:
  - (a) 15-minute nature rambles around named trees on well-formed all-weather tracks, such as the Arataki nature trail in the Waitakere Ranges, and the Mangiangina Reserve on the fringe of Puketi Forest (but *without* the prohibition on stepping off the track and touching the trees).



- (b) 1 to 2 hour walks along roughly surfaced tracks, such as used to exist in the Manginangina Reserve.
- (3) The provision of picnic areas in suitable layby areas (*e.g.*, disused skid sites in the cut-over area of Pureora Forest), with rough-hewn tables, rubbish receptacles, toilet facilities, adjacent to safe swimming facilities (sea, lake, river, or dammed stream).
- (4) The provision of permanent camp sites with minimal facilities in all coastal forests adjacent to a beach, and in selected inland forests adjacent to suitable swimming areas.
- (5) The maintenance of spartan hut accommodation in back-country areas.
- (6) The publication of the location of amenities in (2) to (5) in a free, widely distributed leaflet.
- (7) The preservation of relics of forestry history such as skid areas with haulers and tractors, bush tramways, sawmills, and mill villages, as is done successfully with mining history relics.
- (8) The holding of open days to show all aspects of the balanced-use policy for forests at work, particularly emphasising resource stewardship such as sand-dune reclamation, hill-country protection, and native forest regeneration.

The general aim of this study has been to make a careful assessment of the views people have about recreation and also to gain some idea as to what people do and, given the options available, prefer to do in their leisure time. Particular attention has been paid to the forest environment as a place for recreation. On the basis of a research exercise such as this the level of validity of the many suppositions surrounding this aspect of human activity can be established.

Further analysis from this survey, together with an evaluation of the data which emerge from other studies the authors will be carrying out in different regions of New Zealand, will allow a picture to be built up of what a forest recreation policy for New Zealand should look like.