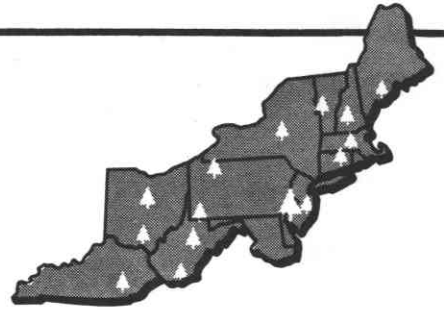


Northeastern Forest Experiment Station



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HIKER PREFERENCES FOR TRAIL FEATURES AND MAPS

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Abstract. Hikers at a Pennsylvania state park were asked what items were essential to their trail experience. From a list of 18 items, an overwhelming majority of hikers wanted to see trail names and directional signs along a natural surfaced trail.

INTRODUCTION

Walking was once the only way to get from one place to another. Times have changed. We now have faster ways of traveling, but people still walk. They walk, or hike, on city sidewalks, along suburban streets, and in wooded areas. The number of hikers has increased to the point where city planners, park supervisors, and resource managers have become concerned about their needs.

Within limited budgets, trails and trail maps are being developed every day. Trail builders and managers want to design each trail so that it gives hikers the most from their trail experience, but they often lack information about what the users want. The purpose here is to provide a better understanding of what hikers feel is essential to their

trail experience. This will help to bridge the gap between what users want and what trail managers provide.

STUDY AREA

The study was conducted at Lackawanna State Park, Dalton, Pa., which opened in 1972. The trail system was designed and built during the spring and summer of 1976. The estimated number of people who used the trail during the summer of 1977 was 800.

Eighty-five percent of the park visitors live in the Scranton urban area. Almost all of the trail users camp at the park. A few special groups—Girl Scouts, birdwatching clubs—join the park naturalist for nature walks.

Figure 1.—Lackawanna State Park Trail System.

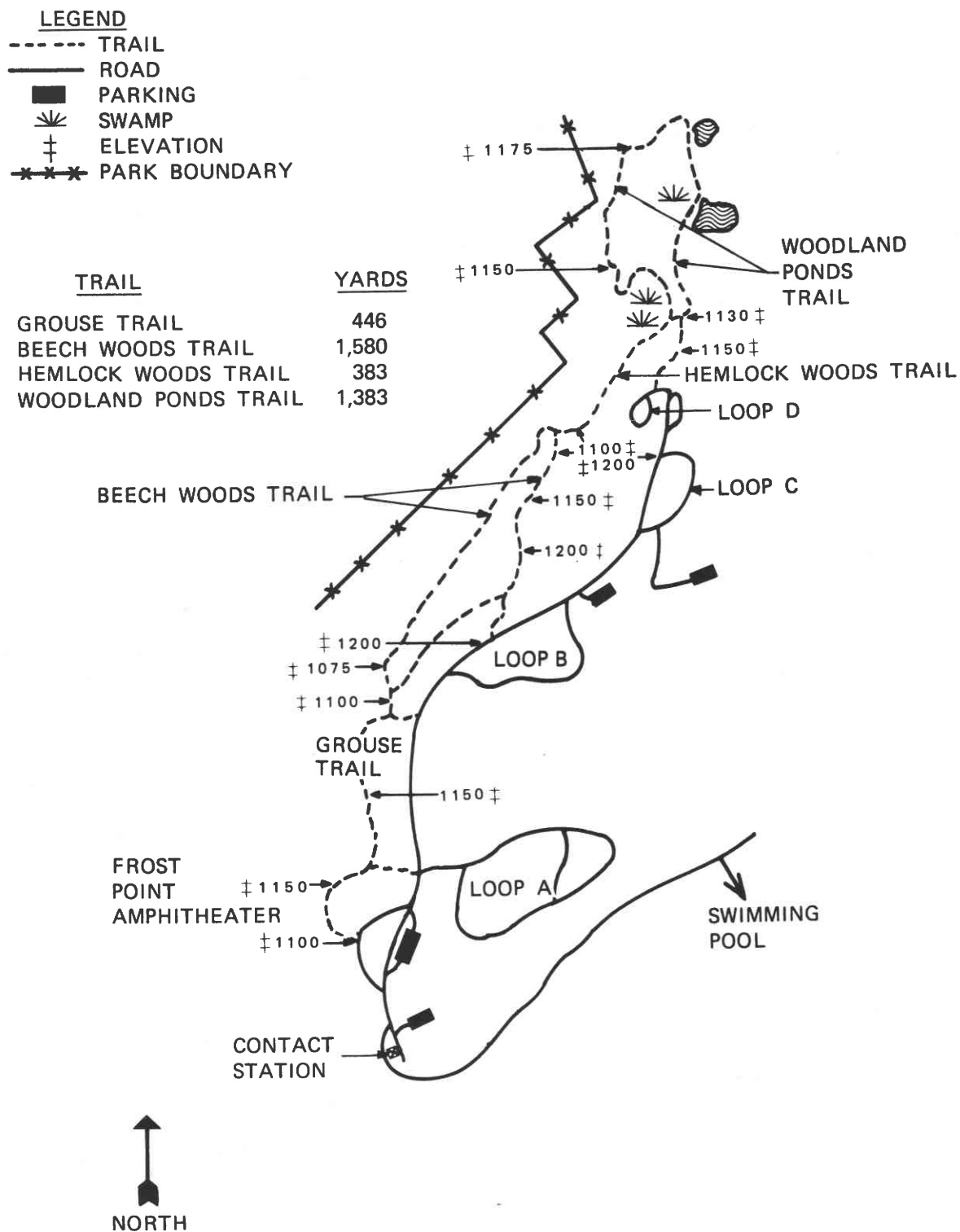


Table 1.—Percentage of hikers' responses to "This item was absolutely essential to the trail experience" for 18 items

Item	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Hard to decide	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
A trail map	64	19	4	9	4
Items on map					
Trail distances	51	33	12	2	2
North arrow	41	41	10	5	3
Elevations at selected points	37	40	12	7	4
Contour lines	39	25	20	12	4
Property boundaries	45	39	9	5	2
Trail names	66	27	2	3	2
Major features	76	16	4	4	—
Rest stops	52	25	7	14	2
Items on trail					
Trail name signs	75	19	—	1	5
Direction signs	80	13	3	2	2
Rest stops	54	23	5	16	2
Wildlife feeding stations	53	29	8	10	—
Natural surface	77	13	5	3	2
Manmade surface	24	21	12	22	21
Litter containers	51	26	11	9	3
One-way trails	41	20	12	20	7
Guide books	59	26	11	2	2

PROCEDURE

The study was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, in the summer of 1976, we solicited general information about what trail features are important to users and what should be included on trail maps. About 65 hikers responded to a map-and-questionnaire form that had been placed in a box on each trail. This information was used to develop the map (Fig. 1) and the response form (Table 1) for the second phase of the study.

Data for the second phase were collected in two ways. A box with an instruction sign was placed on each trail head. Hikers took a map from a box, walked the trail, filled out the response form on back of the map, and returned it to a box. Also, the park naturalist asked each individual who attended his Saturday and Sunday afternoon nature walks to fill out a response form. A total of 166 usable responses were returned.

The form asked the trail user to respond to the statement "This item was absolutely essential to

the trail experience" for each of 18 items. One of five responses, which ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," could be checked.

RESULTS

Hikers strongly agreed or tended to agree that all but 1 of the 18 items listed were essential to their trail experience (Table 1). Hikers were about equally divided between those who agreed a man-made surface was essential (45 percent) and those who did not (43 percent), with 12 percent undecided.

An overwhelming majority of the hikers wanted trail names on the trails (94 percent). The majority also indicated that directional signs (93 percent), natural surface (90 percent), guide books (85 percent), and wildlife feeding stations (82 percent) were essential to their trail experience.

The item hikers most wanted to see on trail maps were trail names (93 percent), major features

(92 percent), distances (84 percent), property boundaries (84 percent), and a north directional arrow (82 percent).

Data in this study indicate that hikers at Lackawanna State Park agree that many items are essen-

tial to their trail experience. They especially want to know where a trail leads, length of the trail, and what can be found along the trail. Within the limits of his trail budget, the trail manager can use this information to provide those items the hikers want.

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