

THE CAMPER

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ABSTRACT. Camping is one of the fastest growing outdoor recreation activities in the United States. The role of public agencies in providing camping opportunities is outlined. A profile of socioeconomic characteristics of campers is discussed, together with some of the reasons why they camp. Management implications are offered for public-agency personnel, based upon current trends in the camping market and the decision about what kinds of campers should be attracted to public campgrounds.

RAPID GROWTH and change have been characteristic of many forms of outdoor recreation. Few activities have surpassed camping in rapidity of growth, absolute increase in numbers, and changes in equipment. One is tempted to add, "and in changes in the type of person participating"; but time-series research in camping is too scant to permit that.

In 1965 a national survey indicated that more than 14 million persons 12 years and older camp compared with fewer than 11 million 5 years earlier (ORRRC 1967, 23). This 35-percent increase in 5 years surpassed the rate of increase of most activities studied. The 14 million persons represented 10 percent of the studied population in 1965, and indications are that growth has continued. We believe that over 10 percent of our Nation's population camped this past year, and that this proportion will continue to climb in the next decade.

The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation suggests that substantially more camping will be done in the future. They suggest that the 97 million camping occasions in 1965

may increase to 173 million by 1980, a 78-percent increase (ORRRC 1967, 20).

A PUBLIC CONCERN

Camping has some elements that we believe make it particularly interesting when considering the involvement of public agencies in outdoor recreation. One of these has already been noted—camping equipment has changed radically in the past several years.

Years ago, the common camping equipment was the tent—but no longer. Today in most large campgrounds vehicles—trailers, recreation vehicles, tent-trailers, or pickup truck campers—are the most common form of shelter. With these vehicles come demands for hookups for water, electricity, and even sewage disposal. The vehicles used and hookups desired have dramatically altered site facilities requested at campgrounds. This has impacted nearly all public recreational agencies, for those agencies involved in outdoor recreation have typically provided tent sites and tent

facilities. Thus changes in camping equipment place unusually extreme pressures on public agencies.

One might consider the importance to the Forest Service or State Parks of similar radical changes that have occurred in ski-lift design. Those changes have not had as great an impact on agencies, for only occasionally do you provide ski-lifts as part of your recreation program. But historically your agencies have provided not only the lands for camping, but also the facilities; so additional pressures arise when new facilities are needed to meet changing equipment demands.

Another variant of camping from many other forms of outdoor recreation is related to equipment and "style" of camping—the vast range of campsites that may be needed to accommodate the varying interests of people. This interest is frequently reflected in the equipment they take camping.

Consider the range of opportunities people seek in camping compared with other recreation activities such as swimming. It is difficult to envision a range in swimming areas sufficient to encompass the range represented by wilderness campers using natural materials for shelter to the person in a lavish travel vehicle with its own electrical system, stereophonic sound, and television. This wide range in style of camping is rapidly revealed when one attempts to talk of "campers".

It seems appropriate to identify whom we are speaking of when we speak of campers, or at least to identify those we are excluding. A camper means one who camps, specifically one who spends the night in the open or in a structure not closed on all sides, or in a structure moved at least twice a year. Thus trailers, tents, and those just sleeping under the stars, users of lean-tos, and other similar persons incorporate our view of "campers".

We will focus only on the unorganized camper in this paper. Campers belonging to groups that provide their own camps such as Boy Scouts, private summer camps, and the like form a discreet grouping of campers best studied through examination of the group. If one wants to know about

campers at Boy Scout camps, his approach would be to study Boy Scout campers, not all campers.

This view can be extended to campers in less organized situations. Any organization providing camping opportunity may develop a unique clientele. If we view data from the Northwest (*Burch 1965; Burch and Wenger 1967*) or the Midwest (*Brown 1969; Lucas 1970*) or the East (*Carruthers 1966; Roenigk and Cole 1968*), we see unique aspects throughout. It is this activity, locational, and facility differential that Shafer (*1969*) highlighted in discussing the average camper.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CAMPERS

From camping studies in the Northeast and elsewhere, a profile of camper characteristics can be assembled. Some caution must be used because most of the camping studies have been biased by being based upon on-site interviews rather than on interviews with campers at their place of residence. Thus the resource base of a particular campground or other attractions in that area has influenced the types of people represented in the sample.

Residence

As a result of the increasing urbanization of the U.S. population, one would expect to find a majority of campers residing in urbanized rather than rural areas. However, *Burch and Wenger (1967)* and *Roenigk and Cole (1968)* concluded that a disproportionate share of campers reside in suburban areas, and center-city residents are underrepresented in the camping population. Place of residence has a high correlation with other socio-economic characteristics; namely, income and occupation. As a result, it is difficult to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between residence and camping.

Another factor should be mentioned: original place of residence versus present place of residence. Persons who were brought up in rural areas and were exposed to outdoor activity have been found more likely to be wilderness-type campers, ac-

cording to Burch and Wenger (1967), reporting on a Forest Service study in the Northwest. Persons with only an urban experience during their childhood were more likely to be easy-access type campers; that is, they utilize campgrounds located along major highways. Thus the impact of place of residence on camping participation is interrelated with numerous factors.

Composition of Party

It has long been assumed that camping is a family activity, and recent studies bear out this conclusion. In the Northeast, Buxton and Delphendahl (1970) and Roenigk and Cole (1968) found that over 90 percent of the camping parties were families—either individual families or families camping with friends. The mean size of the camping party ranges between four and five persons. Thus camping is primarily a family activity among young adults and heads of households up to approximately 50 years of age with children present in the family. Nonfamily groups of friends accounted for less than 10 percent of camping parties.

Income

Campers tend toward higher incomes than the general population. Buxton and Delphendahl (1970), in a study in Maine, indicated that over one-half of their respondents had annual incomes of more than \$10,000. In studies in the early 1960's in New York and Delaware, over one-half of the respondents had incomes of more than \$8,000.

Studies to measure income differences between groups of campers preferring different types of facilities have shown that there is no significant difference in income levels. Thus preference for types of facilities and areas—for example, forested area versus beach area or remote wilderness versus easy-access along a highway—indicates that there are no income differences between these groups.

Education

A pattern also is emerging with regard to level of educational attainment among

campers versus the general population. Carruthers (1966) and Roenigk and Cole (1968), in comparative studies in the Finger Lakes area of New York, the Poconos in Pennsylvania, the Catskill Mountains in New York, and in Delaware, indicated that the mean level of educational attainment was more than 12 years. Burch and Wenger (1967), in a Forest Service study, found that 31 percent of the male campers had some college education, while only about 16 percent of the State's adult male population had attained that level of education. Almost 27 percent of the camper heads of household had done post-graduate work, compared with only 5 percent of the State's adult male population. Bond and Ouellette (1968) reported that campers in Massachusetts had a higher level of education than among the general population.

Further analysis reveals differences in educational achievement among groups of campers. In the Forest Service study it was concluded that educational attainment was highest among campers who used both easy-access and wilderness facilities, and lowest among campers who exclusively used the easy-access variety. Roenigk and Cole (1968) found in Delaware that the educational level among campers in forested areas was significantly higher than among campers at seashore campgrounds.

Buxton and Delphendahl (1970) found that 53 percent of the respondents had completed 1 year of college and 37 percent had graduated from 4 years of college. Only 5 percent of the campers in the sample had less than a high school education. These findings are similar to those derived in a nationwide study done for the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission in 1962.

Occupation

A disproportionate share of campers come from among the professional-technical categories and other responsible positions, including managers and sales persons. A person's occupational status is closely correlated with his educational level. Since campers tend to have a higher educational level than the general population, this is to be expected. Buxton and Delphendahl

(1970) reported that in Maine 46 percent of the respondents were professionals or managers compared to only 25 percent of that occupational grouping among the adult male population. Campers who were farmers, laborers, or service workers were under-represented in the camping population compared to the overall population. This may be related to minimal leisure time or income.

Burch and Wenger (1967) found that farmers who camped were more likely to prefer wilderness areas whereas the persons with no rural experience were more likely to camp in the easy-access locations where there were more conveniences. Roenigk and Cole (1968) found a higher percentage of professional, technical, and managerial people camping in forested areas compared to seashore areas. In the seashore area a significantly higher percentage of craftsmen, foremen, and laborers was found.

Age of Campers

Participation in various forms of outdoor recreation activity is related to the age of the participant. The Maine study (Buxton and Delphendahl 1970) is illustrative of the age distribution found among campers. The age distribution of all persons included in the sample indicated a relatively low proportion in the 13-to-24 age group, most likely due to a high level of interest in other recreational activities among the young persons. Thirty percent of the campers in the Maine study were under 12.

Burch and Wenger (1967) concluded that married males in the age range 30 to 44 were most over-represented in the sample of campers compared to the male age distribution of Oregon's population. About 50 percent of the married campers were in that age group compared to only 34 percent in the State.

Age distribution also was found to be associated with type of camping in Oregon. For example, campers 65 and over were over-represented in the easy-access camping areas, while campers in age group 30 or less were under-represented. Conversely, campers over 65 were under-represented among the wilderness campers, as most of

the interest in the remote camping area is among the age group 45 to 64.

Persons with no children were proportionately under-represented among campers. From among age group 25 to 54 the presence of children in the family appears to be an important factor in predisposing one to camping. Hypotheses may be established about the relationship of children in the family and camping. Perhaps parents in this age group want their children to have the outdoor experience, whereas when the children are grown or when no children are present, adults participate in other forms of outdoor recreation activity and use substitute forms of lodging while on vacation and weekend trips.

An important conclusion by Burch and Wenger (1967) is the strong possibility that campers tend to shift from one camping style to another during their life cycle, and that perhaps the young to middle-age family groups who prefer wilderness camping may later change to convenience camping as they grow older.

Length of Vacation

Length of vacation has often been cited as an influence on camping participation, because of its influence on leisure time. However, Burch and Wenger (1967) found that shorter vacations were not particularly a deterrent to camping participation. In fact, campers with only 1 week of vacation were over-represented in their study, while persons with 3 weeks or more of vacation time were under-represented. Apparently the 2 week period of vacation was the most prevalent, and camping participation by that group was about as could be expected in relation to the proportion of the population.

Bond and Ouellette (1968) and Roenigk and Cole (1968), in studies in the Northeast, indicated that campers tend to be very mobile; and even though they might have 1 to 2 weeks or more of vacation, they move about between campgrounds during that time. Another influence in addition to vacation time is weekend activity. The combination of weekend trips and mobile vacation trips with moves between campgrounds resulted in a median length of stay

of approximately 3 nights in the Delaware study and in the Massachusetts study, even though over 70 percent of the campers were found to be on vacation.

WHY PEOPLE CAMP

The reasons why people camp are closely associated with the type of camping area they choose and the experience they expect to find there. Burch and Wenger (1967) concluded that campers who chose the wilderness areas desired to have interchange with members of their own camping party but were attempting to avoid association with other campers. In contrast, those who chose the easy-access camping areas were in search of social interchange, which could be found in making new friends from among campers in more crowded areas. This helps to explain the apparent camper satisfaction with small and more crowded campsites, which are often found in private campgrounds, versus the more spacious and often more inaccessible or remote sites located in public campgrounds, including National Forests and some State parks.

Roenigk and Cole (1968) compared campers who chose the ocean-beach areas with campers who chose the inland forested areas. The forested-area camper was more likely to choose the area for a weekend of relaxation while the ocean-beach camper was there to enjoy fishing, swimming, and other more active sports.

The reason a person camps is also closely associated with the facilities that he expects to find. A definite pattern that has emerged from studies by the Forest Service in the West, as well as numerous studies in the Northeast, indicates that there are definite facilities that existing campers expect to find in a campground if they are to be happy with their stay and if they are to increase their length of stay beyond 1 or 2 days.

Tops among the facilities expected are swimming areas, either fresh water or salt water. The majority of campers tend to participate in some type of swimming or other water-related activity. Thus it is evident that a campground needs to be located on or near the water to have a wide appeal to campers in today's market.

Among current users there is a demand for flush toilets, hot showers, picnic tables, and some type of fireplace or access to a central area for a fire that may be enjoyed during the evening.

Campers in general appear to be relatively well satisfied with the facilities they encounter and the particular type of campground they find. Of course this is heavily influenced by their decision as to where to camp, based upon prior experience or recommendations from friends who have camped at this particular location. Campers were asked to indicate their preference for private versus publicly owned campgrounds in both the Massachusetts study and the Delaware study. In both cases campers indicated that they preferred publicly owned campgrounds. However, numerous reasons were cited for a preference among either type of ownership.

Reasons most often cited in the Massachusetts study for public campgrounds included: (1) they were less expensive and had more uniform rates; (2) they had larger and well-spaced campsites, which minimized the feeling of overcrowding; and (3) they had professional personnel and exhibited a greater degree of excellence relative to management and facility maintenance.

Reasons cited for favoring private campgrounds included: (1) reservations could be made, and the length of stay permitted was longer; (2) private campgrounds provided more luxury facilities and organized recreational programs; (3) they had a friendly or less regulated atmosphere; and (4) camper preference for supporting private enterprise was also noted.

Though persons in the Delaware study frequently stated a preference for public campgrounds, the only available sites were often in private campgrounds, so most campers in that study used those campgrounds.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Though we find these characteristics of campers extremely interesting, we feel that the more important question remains: How should these influence the management of

campgrounds by public agencies? We are timorous in attempting to respond to that question because we do not have the management responsibilities so many of you do. This makes us particularly vulnerable to criticisms of being impractical, but has the advantage of permitting us to more easily raise what could be perplexing and discomforting questions.

The first implication to managers would seem to be that any kind of a campground will be used by some persons! We see as the most important management question not What do people seek from camping? but rather Why does your agency supply camping opportunity? There could be many reasons. Indeed most agencies probably have several objectives in mind when establishing a campground. Before an agency decides what sort of facilities and program will occur at the campground, it seems important to decide what purposes they hope to achieve by providing camping opportunity. A number of possible purposes exist. Let's look at a few of these and the potential management implications resulting from these varied objectives.

It is frequently suggested that camping is provided by public agencies to offer inexpensive lodging areas. If this were the prime objective, a location near heavily traveled roads would seem to be indicated. Facilities could be fairly rustic; privies and dirt roads would suffice. Laundromats would be useful, perhaps necessary.

Some agencies indicate not only inexpensive lodging as an important role but in addition identify a rationale of permitting individuals to get closer to nature. If this is a purpose, then certainly flush toilets would not be needed, but nature trails and trails would. Electricity would not be needed, but interpretive centers would be essential. Swimming pools would be a hindrance, but planting of wildlife foods would be of great benefit.

A different objective and one seldom heard explicitly stated would be to please the "power structure". No agency spells this out as an objective; but to stretch our imaginations, let's see what we would do if this were an important objective. The power structure can be thought of as those

persons having power—when they support a proposal it usually wins (*Wilson 1966*). They tend to be better educated upper-income persons. To accommodate their needs and interests, we would need accommodations for substantial trailers (paved roads and broad roadways with trees trimmed well back). Electricity and individual water hookups would seem a priority item. Bathrooms should have flush toilets, and hot showers would be desirable. A boat mooring or a marina should be nearby; so should golf courses and a swimming area, preferably with a diving board and large beach frontage. These would seem important in providing desirable camping sites for those in the power structure.

Perhaps an agency would be bold enough to say that their objective was to insure that an opportunity for camping be made available for all people. If this were the case, we would suggest that most of the agencies' efforts would be directed not at the physical facilities but rather at *potential* campers. Surely sewer lines, showers, and paved roads do not seem essential in meeting the objective of providing camping opportunity for all people. If we want to insure an opportunity for *all* people, we must meet several criteria. We must have a site where one can camp; but more, we must be certain that people know of this opportunity and even more specifically, know exactly where they can camp. Further, we must be certain that people can get to the campground, and finally we must be assured they have the equipment necessary to camp. If we reflect on this list we quickly see how few public agencies have actively attempted to meet the objective of insuring that an opportunity for camping be made available for all people.

We know of no public land-management agency that has made a serious attempt in this direction. By serious we mean their having devoted extensive resources and efforts to achieving the various components noted above. Let's look at how some agencies do attempt to handle aspects of this objective, and perhaps in this way we can envision what a public agency might do if this were their objective.

For illustration, look at the organized camping groups. For example, the Boy Scouts of America have involved millions of boys in camping. How? They own lands or at least identify lands that scouts can use for camping; thus they insure the opportunity. This, of course, is also done by virtually all of the agencies represented at this conference. Further, the Scouts extensively publicize the existence of these facilities and of their availability to Scouts. Many Federal and State agencies, too, provide extensive notification of the availability and location of their camping areas.

The Scouts, however, find a particular problem in insuring that persons have the opportunity to get to the campsites. Most Scouts are too young to drive; and few areas are close to good public transportation; so there is no way to get to the camping area. The Scouts have overcome this particular problem by providing transportation, in some cases through buses, in other cases through organized car pools—parents driving boys. That agency recognizes that if they say they are going to provide all Scouts an opportunity to camp, that it is a sham, a fake, to suggest this can be done without providing transportation for those members of the potential clientele who cannot themselves provide transportation.

You may feel that this is not a problem faced by the public agencies; but if so, it is apparent that we have not brought up the important differences between campers and the general public. Few people from welfare families are found at campsites. One could argue that this is because those people do not enjoy camping. We doubt that anyone would be bold enough to make such an unsubstantiated assertion.

What is quite clear is that many families, particularly from our urban ghettos, have no way of getting to public campsites. Further, if they were to get there, they would be unable to meet the final criteria we mentioned above—having the necessary equipment. Again, the Boy Scouts recognize that many segments of their public do not have the necessary equipment, so they provide it through communal fashion—the troop or pack owning tents or cooking gear.

Where is the public agency that rents equipment at low cost or perhaps provides it free of charge to welfare families? Approaches to this are made by some agencies that provide trail-side shelters or lean-to's, but clearly this is not an adequate response to the need. We are not arguing that this is the best way to supply equipment to low-income families, nor that it is appropriate for the agencies represented here to do so. We are arguing that, if an agency says they are attempting to provide camping opportunity for all people, such efforts would be a necessary aspect in attaining that objective.

The objective actually selected as appropriate for an agency's campground will influence most management decisions. If our objective is to provide low-cost facilities or opportunity for everyone, then very clearly fees should be set at a low level—in fact one might argue that zero cost would be most appropriate. Note however, that very few facilities would be provided, and these would be extremely rustic. In addition, some mechanism for rationing use of areas would very likely become necessary with these low costs. This might take the form of advanced registration. Clawson (1968) has suggested a number of reasons why this form of regulation might have many benefits to the user.

Attempting to implement an objective of providing the opportunity for camping to virtually all people would presumably gain widespread support from the public if our appraisal of attitudes common today is correct. Elevating disadvantaged groups has been identified as an appropriate governmental activity. A wide variety of public programs exist to carry out this function. Some of the programs for low-income groups would doubtless be interested in working cooperatively with land-management agencies to see if recreational opportunities could be enhanced through judicious use of funds for equipment or transportation.

Our general conclusion is that some campers can be attracted to almost any campground. This is particularly true if we are willing to increase the value received by providing extensive facilities and services and yet charge an extremely low cost.

We believe the more important question is not How do we attract the camper? but What camper do we wish to attract? The

response to that question will be markedly influenced by the public, the supervisor, and the man on the ground.

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