

The National Parks: America's Next Challenge



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THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA'S NEXT CHALLENGE

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) is the U.S. federal agency that manages a variety of properties, including national parks and monuments, national recreation areas, parkways, and even seashores, among many others. In 2010, more than 280 million visitors went to one of the properties managed by the NPS. To put this number into perspective, the amount of people that attended a Major League Baseball (MLB) or National Football League (NFL) game was not even 90 million. However, compared to 2009, the NPS saw 4,276,172 less visitors last year. Data like this suggests that there could be a visitation problem and this study focuses on people from Eastern Pennsylvania and what they are seeking from the national park system as a whole and how those reasons relate to sociocultural issues.

The relevance and importance of this study is based on the simple fact that, like most other free-choice learning venues, the National Park Service needs visitors and support from the public. Being able to accommodate the needs of millions of people is essential to the continued protection of the national parks. Specifically, there is a growing concern within the National Park Service that there is a lack of minority visitors to the national parks. "Studies and surveys show that visitors to the nation's 393 national parks - there were 285.5 million of them in 2009 - are overwhelmingly non-Hispanic whites, with blacks being the least likely group to visit" (Navarro, 2009). This is particularly evident at Yosemite National Park and a survey in 2009 revealed that 77 percent of visitors are white, 11 percent are Latino, 11 percent are Asian, and 1 percent are African American (Navarro, 2009). While data supports a shortage of certain minority visitors, other groups of individuals lack a presence as well. Now, more than ever, there is a need to understand why people go, but also why certain people do not go to the national parks in order to continue their preservation and protection.

Methodology

In order to find out the thoughts of people from Eastern Pennsylvania, data was collected from the four following focus groups:

1. Emmaus High School students - 141 students grades nine through twelve were given 82-question surveys to complete in their class periods. These surveys were completely anonymous to encourage them to answer freely and honestly.
2. Emmaus High School parents - All students were given 15-question surveys to take home and give to their parents and 40 of them were returned completed by one of their parents or guardians.
3. Emmaus High School staff/faculty - 100 staff/faculty members answered a 15-question survey online that included similar questions to what the parents answered.
4. Emmaus High School panel discussion group - 11 students of different cultural backgrounds met in an hourlong organized discussion

All four groups of people are from Eastern Pennsylvania and thus, this study is based solely on people from Eastern Pennsylvania and is not representative of the entire country. The nearest national park is 300 miles away at Shenandoah National Park and after that, it requires a 380-mile drive to get to Cuyahoga National Park in Ohio. However, several other sites such as Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and Independence National Historic Park are within a 2-hour drive from the Lehigh Valley.

Purpose and Importance

Within the extensive surveys, there are a few primary questions that were the motivation behind this study:

- (1) How do people of different races/ethnicities view the national parks and their own leisure time?
- (2) Do young adults differ from middle-age adults in terms of their view of leisure time and destinations around the country? Also, is there a difference in what they seek specifically within the national park system?
- (3) What is the correlation between the recent difficult economy and the resulting vacations that people are now taking?
- (4) How were today's young adults raised in comparison to middle-age adults in terms of exposure to nature and the outdoors?

Conducting studies like this in different areas of the country can help the NPS determine what people want from the national parks and why they are going, or not going. There is a great amount of data provided by the National Park Service Public Use Statistics Office that covers many different areas of research, including annual visitors and forecasts. Based on their data in 2010, they had a total of 281,303,769 visitors, which is a 1.5% decrease from the previous year. Quite simply, the National Park Service lost 4,276,172 visitors from 2009 to 2010. However, their forecast for 2010 did predict a decrease in visitors, but not to this extent, as they were off by 3,045,069 visitors. Despite the overall decrease from 2009 to 2010, some venues are seeing more visitors while others, like the national parkways, are seeing huge visitation deficits.

National Park Visitors - Who Are They?

A significant portion of the surveys completed by students and parents was a section asking them which national parks they have been to, parks that they have heard of and not visited, or parks they have never heard of before. Instead of offering them the 363 parks managed by the NPS, they were given a list of the 25 national parks that had the most visitors in 2010, along with 4 other sites managed by the NPS that are significant in the northeast.

To show the data, various groups of people were analyzed and their park visitations are shown as "parks visited per person." This reflects the 29 parks they were able to choose from. Results can be seen in Table I and it is clear that there are other groups of people that can be categorized and warrant just as

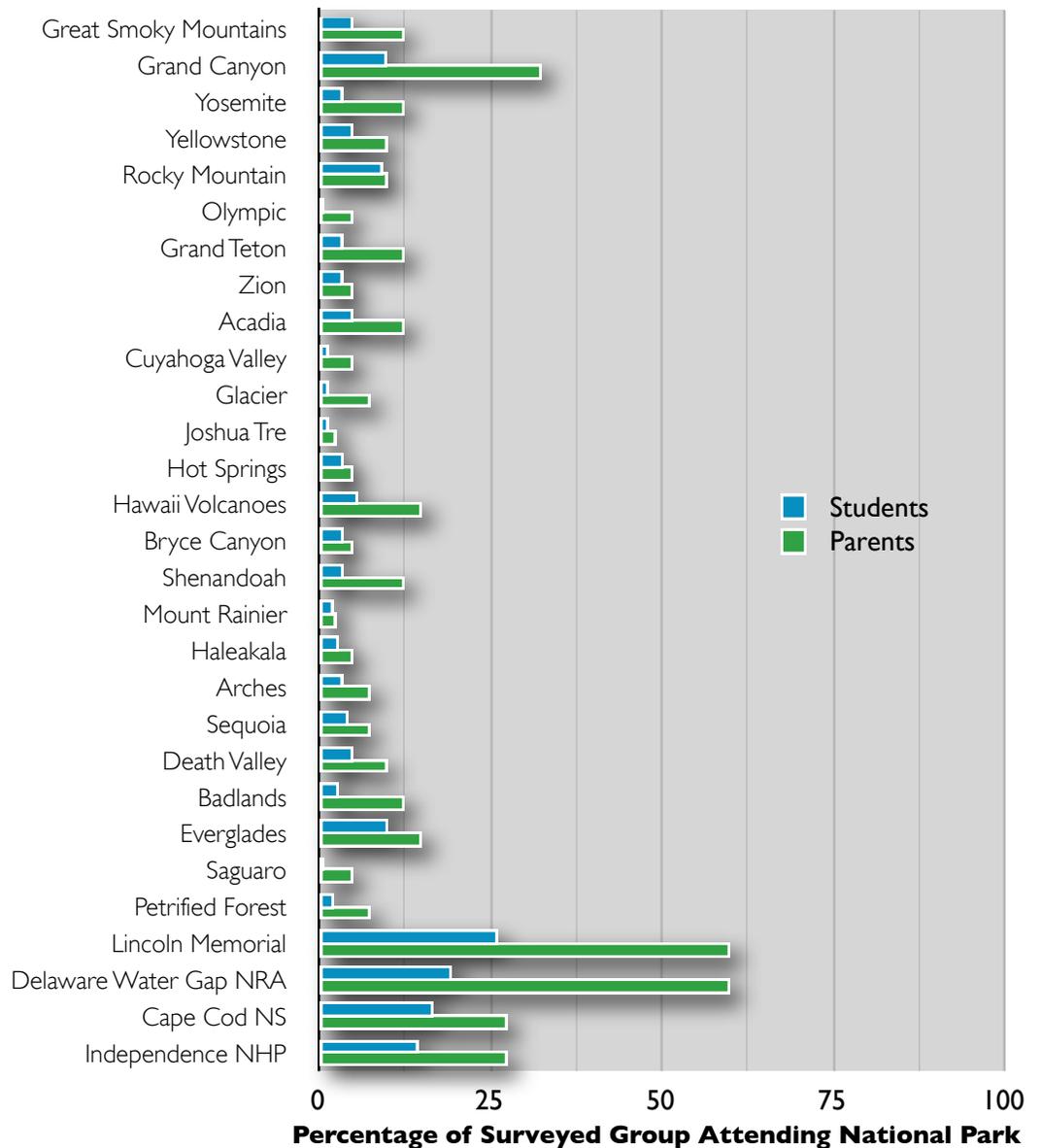
Surveyed Group of People	Average parks visited per person
EHS Students	2.21
EHS Parents	4.22
Caucasian Students	2.42
Minority Students	1.58
Caucasian Parents	4.62
Minority Parents	2.57
Adults who grew up camping	4.65
Adults who did not grow up camping	1.60
Kids who have grown up camping	2.52
Kids who have not grown up camping	1.09
Parents with above average income	5.20
Parents with average income	3.0
Parents with below average income	1.83
Parents that feel an appreciation for the outdoors is extremely important	4.88
Parents that feel an appreciation for the outdoors is somewhat important	3.55
* Students and parents surveyed only answered to the following parks: Great Smoky Mountains NP, Grand Canyon NP, Yosemite NP, Yellowstone NP, Rocky Mountain NP, Olympic NP, Grand Teton NP, Zion NP, Acadia NP, Cuyahoga Valley NP, Glacier NP, Joshua Tree NP, Hot Springs NP, Hawaii Volcanoes NP, Bryce Canyon NP, Shenandoah NP, Mount Rainier NP, Haleakala NP, Arches NP, Sequoia NP, Death Valley NP, Badlands NP, Everglades NP, Saguaro NP, Petrified Forest NP	
** Students and parents surveyed only answered to the following sites: Lincoln Memorial, Delaware Water Gap NRA, Cape Cod NS, Independence NHP	

much attention as race and ethnicity. For instance, the difference in amount of park visits by Caucasians and minorities is less than the difference between those adults who grew up camping versus those who had not. If the NPS is trying to increase the amount of annual visitors, targeting these categories of individuals may produce the desired results.

Based on the surveyed groups of students and parents, the parents who reported above average income status have averaged the most parks visited of anyone. Students who have not grown up camping show the least amount of park visits per person, and those adults who did not grow up camping reported the least amount of park visits per person of the different parent subgroups. As expected, parents outnumber their children in every category and Caucasians outnumbered minorities.

When it comes to the different national parks that they have visited, parents identified Grand Canyon National Park as the most popular visit with 32.5% of parents having been there before. Students reported Everglades National Park as being the most popular visit with 10.1% of them having been there (for the purpose of this study, there is a difference in the type of parks managed by the NPS. While they consider many establishments to be parks, only those with the title “National Park” will commonly be considered a park in this study). Beyond the parks, the Lincoln Memorial is clearly the top site with 26.1% of students and 60% of parents having been there.

Figure 1: National Parks Visited by Emmaus Students & Parents



Race/Ethnicity and Our National Parks

There is a growing concern within the National Park Service that there is a lack of minority visitors to the national parks. “Studies and survey show that visitors to the nation’s 393 national parks - there were 285.5 million of them in 2009 - are overwhelmingly non-Hispanic whites, with blacks being the least likely group to visit” (Navarro, 2009). This growing concern was made public by Mr. Shelton Johnson, a park ranger at Yosemite National Park in California when it became revealed that he wrote a letter to Oprah Winfrey requesting her to visit and help share the gift of the national parks to the rest of the world, but especially people of African American descent. Yosemite National Park, in particular, is a great place to start. It has reputation for being one of the most beautiful parks in the country with iconic figures such as Half Dome and El Capitan, but also features wildlife, the work of photographer Ansel Adams, and displays of the cultural history of Yosemite’s native Miwok and Paiute people. Despite all it has to offer people of different interests, a survey in 2009 revealed that 77 percent of visitors are white, 11 percent are Latino, 11 percent are Asian, and 1 percent are African American (Navarro, 2009).

These reports of African Americans not going to Yosemite and other national parks are consistent with what students and parents at Emmaus High School are reporting as well. Table 2 shows how Caucasian and minority adults compare, along with park visitation data reported by current Emmaus High School students broken down by ethnic group. Of the few African American adults that did respond to the survey, not one of them reported a national park visit in their lifetime. The African American students surveyed reported very limited visitation and were clearly the racial group with the least amount of reported visitation to the parks (see Table 2).

Another area of concern beyond park visitation for people of different ethnicities is just the overall exposure to camping and experiencing the outdoors. Of all the Caucasian students surveyed, 85.8% claimed that they have gone camping before, whereas only 53.8% of Hispanics and 42.9% of African Americans and Asians reported the same (see Table 3 on following page). This particular statistic is important because those who have gone camping are more likely to go again. Among Emmaus High

Surveyed Group of People	Average # of National Parks attended *	Average # of visits to regional parks **	Total # of parks visited
Caucasian Adults	2.67	1.79	4.56
Minority Adults	1.14	1.43	2.57
Caucasian Students	1.09	1.33	2.42
Asian Students	1.71	1.29	3.00
African American Students	0.29	0.43	0.72
Hispanic Students	0.46	1.0	1.46
* Students and parents surveyed only answered to the following parks: Great Smoky Mountains NP, Grand Canyon NP, Yosemite NP, Yellowstone NP, Rocky Mountain NP, Olympic NP, Grand Teton NP, Zion NP, Acadia NP, Cuyahoga Valley NP, Clacier NP, Joshua Tree NP, Hot Springs NP, Hawaii Volcanoes NP, Bryce Canyon NP, Shenandoah NP, Mount Rainier NP, Haleakala NP, Arches NP, Sequoia NP, Death Valley NP, Badlands NP, Everglades NP, Saguaro NP, Petrified Forest NP			
** Students and parents surveyed only answered to the following sites: Lincoln Memorial, Delaware Water Gap NRA, Cape Cod NS, Independence NHP			

Table 3: Race/Ethnicity Breakdown of Camping-related Topics				
	Caucasian	Hispanic	African American	Asian
Percentage of Surveyed Students	73.8%	9.2%	5.0%	5.0%
Percentage of Students Who Have Gone Camping	85.8%	53.8%	42.9%	42.9%
Percentage of Students who have camped that are glad they did or wish to go on more camping trips	93.8%	100%	100%	100%
Percentage of Students Who will take their children camping in the future	85.5%	76.9%	57.1%	42.9%
Percentage of Students Involved with Boy/Girl Scouts or any similar type of group/organization	52.5%	15.4%	0.0%	28.6%

School students, there were only 6 students who have been camping and wished they never did. All of them were Caucasians. Every single minority student who went camping before reported that they are glad they did and/or wants to go more. This type of return supports the claim that if anyone goes camping, no matter what their race or ethnicity, they are very likely to do it again in their lifetime.

While the data clearly shows that African Americans are not going to the national parks, there are a wide variety of answers and explanations for this. When asked this very question, an African American junior who has never been to a national park said, “black people would rather do something else than waste their time and camp.” When asked why African Americans do not find camping as interesting as other activities and ways to spend time, this same student replied, “the music that we listen to does not mention camping and we’re influence by the music we listen to.” She was genuinely surprised to find out that Shelton Johnson once said, “All Snoop Dogg has to do is go camping and it would change the world” (Fimrite, 2009). Apparently, there is some truth to what Shelton Johnson has been saying for years.

A female African American student who also has never been to a park, but was part of the discussion group added that, “minority people make minority children and you don’t take them nowhere.” She also mentioned that family dynamics play a huge role when it comes time to decide where to go on vacation. She sited family members in North Carolina and Ohio and most vacations usually include them and elderly grandparents that would not be able to handle much intense activity or long drives. Likewise, Latino families typically vacation in large groups with more than just the immediate family members and this can greatly affect locations because many people must be considered in terms of wealth, age, and physical condition.

A third African American student, a male senior, also expressed no interest in camping or the outdoors. He mentioned survival shows on television and asked, “why would I want to go through that at a national park?” While accidents can surely happen at national parks, most visitors would report that they entered and left without incident, but others who have not experienced this for themselves are influenced by their family and what they witness through the media.

Two other African American male students were interviewed and one of them said that if he wants to go camping, he will just go outside and lay down in his backyard under the stars. The other, when asked

why he never went camping before, mentioned that his parents never brought that to his attention and that he feels “nice clothes are more important than camping.”

These five students shed some light on the fascinating mentality that some African American students have on the national parks, outdoors, and camping. Many would argue that they do possess misconceptions regarding the outdoors in general, which plays a significant role in prevent them from experiencing nature. This mentality and attitude towards the outdoors is a problem because it will also likely prevent them from sharing the gift of America’s national parks with future generations.

The Role of Parents

Students in the discussion panel revealed a lack of desire or a lack of opportunity when they had to explain why they have never gone camping. This lack of opportunity extends beyond the present and originates with the major decision makers, namely, their parents and/or guardians.

87% of the parents who responded to the survey went camping during their childhood. Of those who have gone camping, 80% have taken their current family on camping/outdoors trips. More revealing, though, is that none of the parents who did not go camping in their youth have have taken their family on a camping/outdoors trip.

When broken down by race, 73% of Caucasian adults grew up going on family camping trips, whereas only 43% of minorities grew up going on similar trips. One would then assume that those same Caucasian parents would be more likely to take their children on camping trips than minority parents. Data confirmed this with 69% of those Caucasian parents and 57% of minority parents taking their current family on camping trips

Table 4: Attitude towards the outdoors			
	Percentage that feel an appreciation for the outdoors is extremely important	Percentage that feel an appreciation for the outdoors is somewhat important	Percentage that feel an appreciation for the outdoors is not important
Students	54.3%	43.6%	2.1%
Parents	52.5%	45.0%	2.5%
Faculty/staff	72.0%	26%	2.0%

One of the suggestions or reasons that parents take their families and children camping is due to their personal opinion that it is important for their children to have an appreciation for the outdoors. The parents were asked if an appreciation for the outdoors is extremely important, somewhat important, or not important. Of all the parents, 52.5% said it was extremely important, 45% said somewhat important, and 2.5% said it was not important (see Table

4). Broken down further, there is a difference in attitude by race. Only 14% of minority parents answered that it was extremely important, compared to the 52% of Caucasians. Of all the parents who felt it was extremely important to appreciate the outdoors, 84% have taken their current families camping. Even more interesting is the striking similarity in attitude that students and parents share, demonstrating the strong influence their parents have on determining their children’s acquired values.

Perhaps one of the oddest discrepancies in data between students and parents lies within the idea of family vacations. When asked if they have gone on a family vacation within the last two years, 96.8% of parents reported they have gone a vacation, but less than 85% of the students have gone on a family vacation within the same time frame. The difference is not great, but enough that this became a topic at the discussion panel. It turns out that 9 of the 11 students reported times when they were left behind by their parents for a vacation. In fact, they revealed that this was a common occurrence for financial and school attendance reasons. General feelings from the discussion included slight bitterness, but most accept that it is now commonplace for their parents to go without them. Combine this with 42.8% of the surveyed students thinking their parents would not listen to them if they suggested a potential destination for a vacation and it becomes apparent that there is some disconnect between the parents and children.

While some parents may be traveling without their children on vacations, the kids would have similar thoughts if they had it their way. When surveyed, 80.3% of the students would prefer to go on a vacation or trip with their friends as compared to parents. They were also presented with a potential scenario in they would be spending two weeks in Yellowstone and they could bring their cell phone, computer, best friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, or their family. 37% of the students picked their boyfriend or girlfriend and another 36% picked their best friend. Another 18% picked their family, while the rest went with technology.

Non-Campers and Their Future

The national parks have a reputation for being beautiful places that are seen by millions of people in this country each year. People who claim they will take their future families camping someday are likely to view these beautiful national parks as a possible destination the same way families wanting to take their kids to a professional baseball game would look into Major League Baseball games. One of the ways to increase the likelihood that future generations come to the national parks is by providing them with opportunities to experience the outdoors in their youth by allowing them to go camping.

Survey Question	Students who have camped (Campers)	Students who have not camped (Non-Campers)
Plan on taking their future families camping someday	91.3%	51.6%
Involved with Boy/Girl Scouts as a child	100%	25.8%
Wish they never went on camping trips or glad they never did	6.2%	46.1%
Identified a national park as their ideal destination	20.7%	5.7%

91% of kids who have camped before said that they will take their future families camping later in life, but only 52% of kids who have never camped said the same (see Table 5). This would appear to be very important for the National Park Service to consider since people may not have a desire to go camping or enjoy the outdoors if they have never had the opportunity before. It seems that once the kids do have the opportunity, they do not express regret based on the data provided.

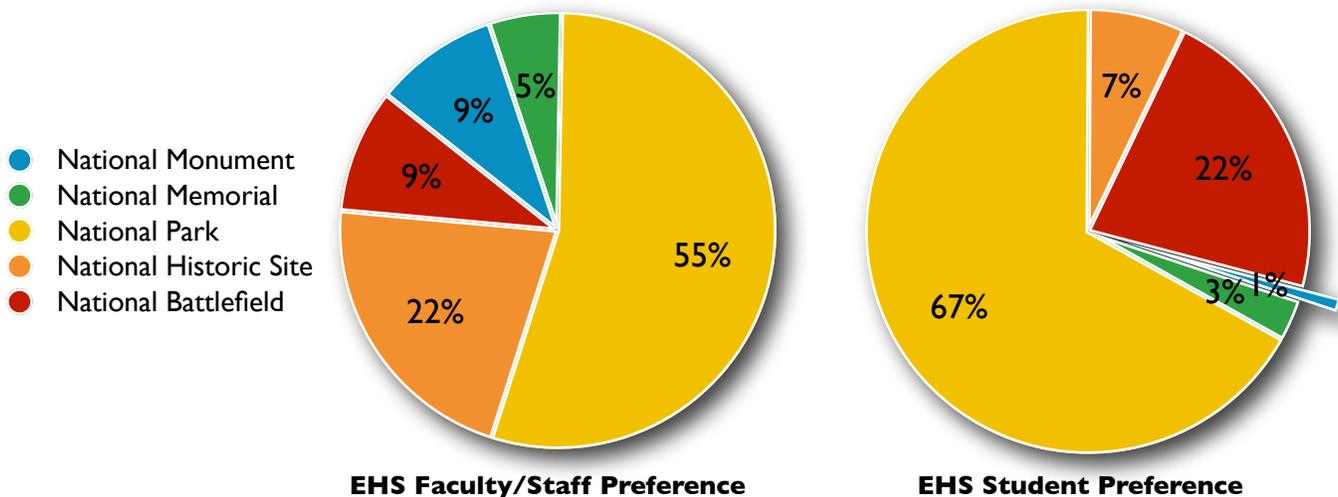
As for the kids who have never had the opportunity to go camping, 46.1% of are glad that they have not gone and have no desire to go in the future. This percentage is alarmingly high and suggests that they just do not know what is out there for them to see. This is supported by the 93.8% of campers who disagree and are glad they were raised going on camping trips or want to go on more. Only 6.2% experienced regret regarding camping trips they have been on and this supports that there is a great chance that once kids go camping, they'll have favorable feelings towards the experience and want to do it again.

There is also an emotional aspect to camping that some people may not be aware of if they have not done it before. During the panel discussion, one senior female student revealed that she was sick to her stomach the night before a thirteen-day school camping trip to Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming. This is the same girl that is now going to Alaska this summer and wants to eventually attend the University of Colorado because she fell in love with the surroundings. The fact that she was so nervous for a field trip with her peers in the Rocky Mountains speaks volumes about the level of fear kids have for camping if they lack prior exposure. What makes this particular student's story so fascinating is that she was asked what was the most memorable trip she has ever taken in her lifetime and she answered with this same trip that made her sick. This goes to show that the national parks do a great job of providing visitors a reason to go back, but initial exposure is needed before that can happen for millions of people.

Economic Impact on Families and Travel

To many, the national parks seem to be a cheaper way of vacationing as many park campgrounds offer prices of less than \$20 per night per tent site. The amount of money spent on activities could also be less with responsible spending and planning as the parks offer endless trails and sights for a small entrance fee as compared to admission to an amusement park. However, it is difficult to determine the impact of the economy on national park visitation because it varies based on geographic region. For example, traveling closer to home and shorter in length seriously limits people in Eastern Pennsylvania when it comes to visiting the national parks. The closest national park to Eastern Pennsylvania is Shenandoah National Park, more than 3.5 hours away. There are certainly more areas run by the National Park Service closer than that, but consider what most citizens want. When surveyed, students and teachers all preferred national parks to other sites managed by the NPS (see Figure 2 below).

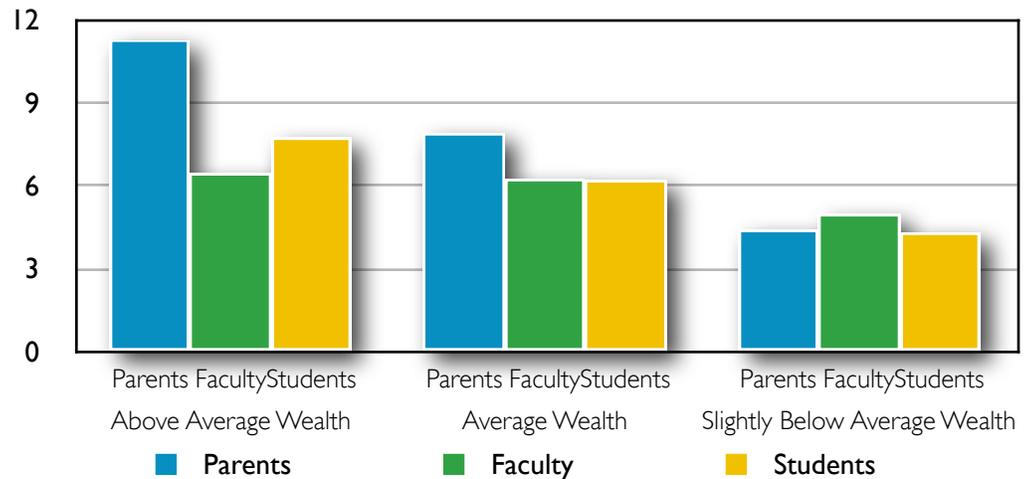
Figure 2: Personal Preference Regarding Managed Sites by NPS



As one would imagine, there is also a definite trend developing between financial status/income and length of vacations taken. In Figure 3 below, the average length of vacation decreases with decreasing wealth. All three groups of surveyed people showed the same downward trend in length of vacations, but most are still going.

The Emmaus High School teachers represent the upper-middle class citizens as 84% of the teachers described their financial status as about average or above average. Despite today's economic struggles in our country, 88% of teachers and 96% of parents are still taking vacations and have within the past two years, but 65% are taking vacations closer to home or shorter

Figure 3: Average Length of Vacations by Wealth



in length because of the economy. Furthermore, 100% of those teachers who consider themselves to be slightly below average in terms of income are all traveling closer to home or taking trips shorter in length. This data suggests that people are still traveling, but just becoming more frugal financially and keeping trips smaller and more affordable.

Surveyed adults have reported that they are taking shorter trips and traveling closer to home due to the economy. One would expect those national parks in Alaska and Hawaii to be experiencing losses and this is true. In 2010, Denali National Park saw 29,835 less than the average number of visitors between 2006 and 2010. Likewise, Haleakala National Park reported 124,127 less visitors and Hawaii Volcanoes had 73,000 less in 2010 compared to the five-year average. Channel Islands and Virgin Islands National Parks also decreases of 61,285 and 31,929 visitors, respectively.

The Role of Media and Technology in Our National Parks

Ken Burns and his crew produced a documentary focused on America's national parks in 2009, The National Parks: America's Best Idea, but it did not reach everybody in this country. In a separate survey, only 2/75 students at Emmaus High School have seen this show, but it is tough to find a kid who has not seen Deadliest Catch or heard of Man vs. Wild's star, Bear Grylls. Both Deadliest Catch and Man vs. Wild are some of the classic Discovery Channel shows that have been on for several years now, but there has been a recent trend of these extreme, reality, or survival shows on television. The fact that more students have not seen Ken Burns' documentary is a problem in that efforts to showcase the parks are going unnoticed by the young adults, who are the same people that will be planning their own spring break, summer, and winter vacations in just a few years.

It is also worth considering what people are taking away from survival shows that are on television. For instance, Man vs. Wild and Survivorman both have episodes that take place in the Sierra Nevada

Mountains, a place associated with Yosemite National Park. Likewise, Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, TLC, and National Geographic have all filmed shows in Alaska this past year. People tuning in to Sarah Palin's show can see an episode where they were later accused of fishing too close to bears. Alaska State Troopers shows the alcohol problem across the State of Alaska. Alaska Wildlife Troopers shows what happens when moose come too close to human beings. Man vs. Wild shows Bear Grylls crawling through a crevasse in cold, glacial ice. Deadliest Catch shows absolutely miserable conditions fishing off the coast of Alaska. Flying Wild Alaska will show how quickly the weather can change in Alaska and emphasize how inhabitable some locations are in Alaska. If this is all a person knows about Alaska, it is no wonder why they are not in a hurry to go to Alaska. While it may make for great ratings, students have other thoughts about these shows that are all part of the free-choice learning menu on television. An African-American student said in a panel discussion, "I see that stuff on survival shows - why would I want to do that? I like the comfort of my own couch."

As previously mentioned, when asked why African Americans do not find camping as interesting as other activities and ways to spend time, this same student replied, "the music that we listen to does not mention camping and we're influence by the music we listen to." This sounds strikingly similar to what Mr. Shelton Johnson said that all it takes is for Snoop Dogg to go camping. The goal should be to not only reach out to them, but to influence them. Advertising needs to sway from documentaries to songs. Mr. Johnson is right when thinking of the impact Oprah would make with just one episode in Yosemite. Time will tell how influential her episodes were when 2011 comes to a close and Yosemite enjoys an entire year after Oprah's visit.

The students in the discussion panel also pointed out that the only advertising they seem to hear nowadays through the media is for tropical destinations, places near the beach, or cruises. They sited an example of winning a free cruise as something they might hear on the radio - never have they heard about winning a free trip to the Grand Tetons. It is nothing new that our country, and possibly the world, has a strong obsession with the beach as 67% of students, 68% of parents, and 69% of faculty/staff all selected tropical islands or coastal beaches as their favorite destination. It makes sense that advertising is geared towards these destinations if that is what most people are after. Regardless, advertising the parks better would seem to have a strong impact.

It goes without saying that kids today have more technology around them than they did just five or ten years ago. Students in the discussion panel overwhelmingly agreed that the amount of texting that occurs is astronomical and that kids today are worse at communicating in person. They discussed their opinions of cell phones and how they are an extension of themselves and the device that keeps them within their social networks. To inquire about the dependance upon cell phones and technology, students were given a hypothetical scenario and were asked how many days they would choose to spend in any national park for free without the use of a cell phone. 45% of the students reported that they could only last 0-10 days, while 25% would not make it past 20 days. This is significant because of the social implications of this reliance on a cell phone. The same group of students not being able to last more than 10 days would be putting social networking above leisure time, vacationing, and the outdoors. This does not mean they do not value their leisure time, but at their age, social groups are more important to them.

Education of the National Parks in Schools

One of the problems that the National Park Service faces is how to increase overall awareness to kids in schools and the rest of the public. Efforts have been made to increase the awareness through the work

of people like Ken Burns, Shelton Johnson, and Oprah, but it may not always reach the younger generations. If the parks continue to lose visitors each year and the economy is causing people to stay closer to home for shorter time periods, kids will not be as likely to see parks over a thousand miles away. As mentioned previously, the media is not effectively advertising and a strong argument can be made that they are not learning about them in schools either.

At Emmaus High School, there are several Earth and Space Science elective courses taught. Data was compared between Geology students who have learned about various national parks within the curriculum to students in Oceanography and Meteorology, other electives where national parks are not stressed. Table 6 below shows what percentage of students have not heard of the park before in their lives showing no acknowledgement that the park even exists. Geology students clearly demonstrate more awareness of the different parks proving that education does help increase awareness.

Even though it is encouraging that

Table 6: Percentage of people that have not heard of different parks

National Park	% of Geology students who have not heard of park	% of other students who have not heard of park	% of Parents who have not heard of the park
Great Smoky Mountains NP	0.00	27.78	7.50
Grand Canyon NP	0.00	3.33	2.50
Yosemite NP	1.96	15.56	12.50
Yellowstone NP	0.00	3.33	2.50
Rocky Mountain NP	1.96	3.33	10.00
Olympic NP	1.96	45.56	45.00
Grand Teton NP	7.84	60.00	25.00
Zion NP	19.61	63.33	55.00
Acadia NP	9.80	37.78	35.00
Cuyahoga Valley NP	66.67	75.56	67.50
Glacier NP	11.76	41.11	25.00
Joshua Tree NP	60.78	65.56	60.00
Hot Springs NP	27.45	25.56	22.50
Hawaii Volcanoes NP	5.88	13.33	12.50
Bryce Canyon NP	5.88	60.00	45.00
Shenandoah NP	9.80	53.33	27.50
Mount Rainier NP	3.92	60.00	32.50
Haleakala NP	58.82	70.00	67.50
Arches NP	7.84	63.33	70.00
Sequoia NP	27.45	44.44	42.50
Death Valley NP	0.00	14.44	15.00
Badlands NP	7.84	47.78	35.00
Everglades NP	1.96	7.78	5.00
Saguaro NP	66.67	64.44	77.50
Petrified Forest NP	58.82	58.89	35.00
Lincoln MEM	13.73	12.22	2.50
Delaware Water Gap NRA	37.25	37.78	10.00
Cape Cod NS	33.33	16.67	22.50
Independence NHP	27.45	28.89	35.00
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE	19.88	38.66	31.21

Geology students performed better due to more exposure, there are still many problems and alarming statistics that exist. First, these parks had the most annual visits in 2010 and are the most popular and famous. The fact that more than 50% of non-Geology students have not heard of 11 of the top 25 visited parks is disappointing and discouraging. It is ridiculous to think that they will seek out a park in their future or have excitement going there if they have never heard of it before. Also, more than 60% of non-Geology students have not heard of Mount Rainier National Park. One might argue that this is alarming due to its proximity of Seattle and how it is one of the more famous and geologically significant mountains in the country. Even more problematic is the percentage of students who have never heard of Delaware Water Gap NRA considering it is less than an hour away.

Table 6 also includes the percentage of parents that have never heard of those identified national parks. It is easy to see that the Geology students outperform parents when it comes to national park awareness. These parents are the same ones who have reported growing up camping and feeling it is important to have an appreciation for the outdoors. Yet, their awareness of the national parks, or lack thereof, is a clear indication that people just do not know what is out there.

What Students and Adults Seek from Vacations and the National Parks

Another area worthy of consideration in terms of visitation is what exactly people are looking for when it comes to vacation, leisure time, and free-choice learning opportunities. When surveyed, an overwhelming number of students, parents, and faculty/staff all preferred physical activity over photography, museums/galleries, and camping, when given the choice. Within this data, it is important to note the lack of students that would choose the museum or gallery and this shows what the younger generations are after. To challenge the students one step further, they were given four options at Yosemite and Denali National Parks in two separate questions.

First, the students were given the option of choosing the Ansel Adams Gallery, Yosemite Museum, Yosemite Valley Visitor’s Center, or the Happy Isles Nature Center. Each were provided with a description taken directly from Yosemite National Park’s website. It turns out that 49.6% of the students preferred the Nature Center at Happy Isles. The other three options were very equal, all having 15-18% of the students preferring those choices instead.

Secondly, the students were given five activity options at Denali National Park in Alaska - the sled dog kennels, a flightseeing tour, the visitor’s center, wildlife viewing, or hiking. Students selected hiking as the primary desired activity with 27% of the votes, but wildlife, flightseeing tour, and the dog kennels were all within 22-26% (see Figure 5). The visitor’s center was not selected by any of the 141 students.

The most popular activities for Yosemite and Denali were both physical in nature. At Yosemite, the Nature Center was the only option that offered short trails in the description.

Figure 4: Activity Preference in National Parks

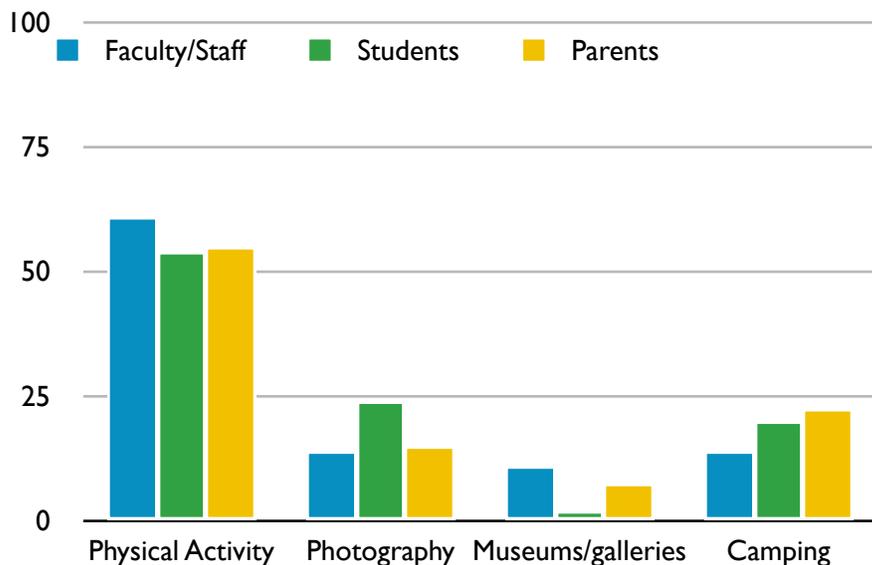
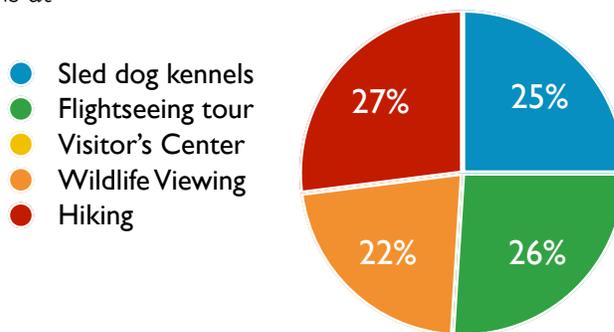


Figure 5: Activity Preference in Denali NP



At Denali, the physical activity of hiking was preferred over the other rather stationary choices. This data certainly agrees with the data in Figure 4.

The students in the discussion panel talked about this data and despite their own personal differences on opinions, none of them were surprised with this data. They made it very clear that they would rather see than do when it comes to museums and national parks. When asked what it would take for more students to seek museums, they all agreed that they liked nature walks that allowed them to physically explore, but also see an occasional exhibit. One particular student suggested that the NPS emphasize the physical beauty of the parks more than the museums, and several students suggested that the parks take a different approach and make their museums stand out instead of blending in with the surroundings.

To investigate more concerning their desire to learn at national parks, all of the students were given an option of hiking on their own or joining a park ranger for a nature walk. 75% of the students preferred hiking on their own as compared to learning from a park ranger while hiking. When brought up at the discussion panel, one student offered some very interesting thoughts that every student agreed with. He said, "people like the mystery of not knowing and it gives them a reason to go back." This might come as a disappointment to rangers as the students view the exhibits and ranger programs in a way that almost ruins the mystery and answers all of the questions for them. This is not what the students interviewed want from a park and this is an aspect of free-choice learning that should require some further investigation.

Conclusions

As it turns out, all of the groups in this study value their leisure time. After all, 86% of students agreed with the quote, "The meaning of life is to be found less in one's occupation, and more in one's leisure or lifestyle" (Falk, J.H., & Dierking, L.D., 2000). However, what is changing in the world is the nature of the younger generations. Technology is changing and improving each and every day, but with that, social networking is becoming more important and of higher priority for our youth. The media continue to influence them in a variety of ways, but there is a lack of encouragement to see the national parks. Parents play a major role, their education influences them too, and the list can go on and on.

This study has found that people of all ages all have their own reasons for going or concerns preventing them from going in the first place. Even though students like those in the discussion panel think that "people like the mystery of not knowing," the reasons that people are not going to the national parks are not hidden or mysterious. They are very clear and apparent, staring us in the face every day. Those reasons are across from kids at the dining room table at dinner time, but also in their pant pockets. Those reasons are on the Discovery Channel, but also in their schools. Those reasons are not the problem. The problem is that there is not enough being done to encourage these generations to being playing in the playgrounds that Shelton Johnson loves so much.

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