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RESEARCH NOTES

SCHOOL OF FORESTRY
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

GLACIER PARK CHALET VISITS;
AN INTRODUCTION TO WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

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To determine socio-economic characteristics of wilderness (back country) users and to explore the components of wilderness experience as a guide to standards for wilderness management, a study of three Montana areas was started in 1963. These areas are Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area and the Mission Mountains Primitive Area -- all located in western Montana. This is a progress report on the first (1963) phase of the study, during which overnight guests at the Sperry Chalet in the back country of Glacier National Park were interviewed by Mrs. Kay Luding, manager of the Chalet, and her employees. Interviewing was done during the period from July 1 to September 2, 1963, using a simple questionnaire with open end (detailed answer) questions.

Built around 1913 by the Great Northern Railway as a trailside hotel for hikers and horseback parties visiting the famous Sperry Glacier, the Chalet is now owned by the Government (National Park Service) and leased to Mr. and Mrs. B. R. Luding as operators. It is located six and one-half miles east of Lake McDonald Hotel, well up the steeply rising trail to Gunsight Pass.

Every tenth registered guest was selected for interview. Only persons 15 years of age and over were eligible for interview. Group leaders were chosen where the tenth registrant was a member of a group. Park employees were omitted and husbands, since they were usually leaders, were selected over wives in most cases. On this basis 41 out of a total of 450-plus guests were interviewed (39 men, 2 women). Only five persons refused to be interviewed. An interview took some 45 minutes.

Respondent Characteristics: Party size ranged from one to fourteen persons, with 47 percent of the parties containing one or two persons. Users included members of organized horse parties, participants in National Park Service ranger

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hikes and independent hikers. Almost all were on vacation and their stay at the Chalet usually was not over two days. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents had received college training or a degree and 90 percent were from out-of-state. The largest out-of-state segments were from California (15%) and North Dakota (10%). In age respondents ranged from 15 to 68 years, with 61% under 40 years. Total annual family incomes of interviewees were relatively high, with 63% over \$10,000 and 44% being in the business-education occupational group.²

Data Results and Analysis: The other results of the questionnaire components of the wilderness experience can be grouped for interpretation into eight general categories: (1) Knowledge of the Chalet; (2) Wilderness understanding and vicissitudes; (3) Party make up; (4) Trip activities; (5) Sense of accomplishment; (6) Feelings about the trip; (7) Feelings about the Chalet; (8) Other leisure activities and residence preference.

(1) While many of the older people had visited the Chalet before and some had learned about it from travel guidebooks or magazine articles, approximately 40 percent of the interviewees obtained initial Chalet information from naturalist programs or National Park Service literature.

(2) It is apparent that over half the respondents were not acquainted with wilderness, its meaning or the problems of wilderness and back country travel. Except for the hike, or a horseback ride away from roads, many felt the chalet trip was much like other phases of a visit to the developed portion of the Park. Younger people seemed to expect more elaborate accommodations and facilities, others complained of horse manure on trails and mosquitoes. Some 37 percent were poorly prepared for the trip (lacked boots, raincoats, hiking or riding clothes, and insect repellent).

(3) Sixty-three percent of the parties were family parties. However, misgivings were expressed about taking young children to the Chalet and many wives were apparently not interested in leaving the developed park area.

(4) Hiking, photography, nature study are apparently the main attractions to Chalet users. Approximately 12% of the interviewees felt the 6.5 mile hike to the Chalet and Sperry Glacier was enough walking for the summer.

(5) Some 22% of the respondents felt the hike to the Chalet was quite an accomplishment in outdoor living. They had completed something that many of their peers could not undertake. All interviewees were much opposed to any road development that would make the Chalet accessible by car.

(6) Hikers expressed the sense of accomplishment in walking, enjoying the beauties of nature, quietness, peace, intimacy with surroundings and being away from people. On the other hand, the people met on the trip and in the Chalet were much enjoyed, probably because of common interests and outdoor experiences. On this trip the respondents, with only five exceptions, felt free, rested and refreshed.

²A National Park Service, Glacier National Park visitor study for the period August 10-19, 1963 showed 12.2% California visitors and 8.21% Alberta visitors as the highest out-of-state groups with 84.1% of park use from out-of-state.(3) For the 1963 U.S. population only 19.9% of total family incomes exceeded \$10,000.(2)

(7) About 88 percent of the respondents felt there should be more chalets and all users seemed pleased with their chalet trip.

(8) Many of the interviewees expressed a feeling of being rushed at home and of having no leisure time. Thirty-four percent carry on leisure activities at home that are related to mountain hiking. Some 37 percent of the respondents would prefer to live in the country. The others prefer a city, suburb or small town.

Though some questions used in the survey were probably superfluous, much valuable information was obtained about 1963 Sperry Chalet users, their characteristics, probable motivations, and desires. Viewing this user study in the light of similar studies of users in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area of Montana (1), it would seem to us that Sperry Chalet users are somewhat different from Bob Marshall Wilderness users (and probably other users of wilderness lands). They are less prepared for a wilderness trip which, of course, is short. The Chalet forms a key part of their experience, since it is a place to meet like-motivated persons. In the Bob Marshall, in contrast, people may seldom see other parties, the experience is usually not so relaxing (since it requires much more foresight and effort without served meals, except in guided parties) and it requires elaborate planning.

On the other hand, Chalet users, like those of more remote wilderness lands, express feelings of accomplishment, aversion to roads and development, and enjoyment of scenery, privacy and physical well-being.

While this note reports on merely the first phase of a broader study of wilderness users in Montana, the data are presented at this stage because they relate to a completed unit of the study. They reveal some characteristics of wilderness users in a special type of experience and provide the basis for later comparison with results obtained in 1964.

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