



Canadian Heritage  
Parks Canada

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# 1996 Interpretation Survey Mountain District



Reductions in interpretive program spending are changing the ways in which interpretive programs are offered to clients. Monitoring the quality of interpretive programs being conducted during and after these changes will enable Parks Canada to measure the ability of programs to deliver park mandated messages in the future. As part of an inter-regional initiative, the Mountain District Interpretation Survey was conducted in the summer of 1996 to collect baseline data on client satisfaction and demographics, as well as to establish standards of performance. Additionally, the survey collected information on visitors' willingness to pay for interpretive services in order to assist with setting fees to recover costs.

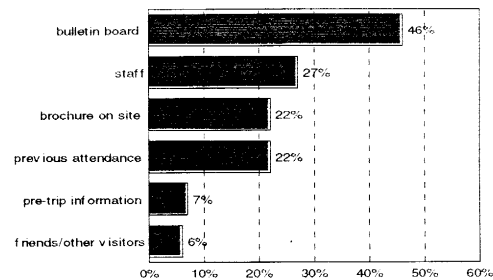
Survey questionnaires were distributed primarily during the months of July and August. Respondents were selected randomly at guided interpretive events and evening campground programs in Jasper, Yoho, Kootenay, Lake Louise, Banff and Waterton National Parks, with a choice of French or English questionnaires. A total of 1637 surveys were completed for a response rate of over 55% for the district, providing a confidence level of 95% for the results. Response rates varied by park with rates approximately 65% for Lake Louise, Yoho, and Banff, and lows of 44% for Waterton and Jasper.

## AWARENESS

Respondents were asked if they were aware this interpretive activity was available prior to arriving at the Park. For the district, approximately 50% said they were aware, with less awareness in Jasper (38%) and Lake Louise (40%), and high awareness in Kootenay (59%) and Waterton (55%) likely due to their significantly higher proportion of Canadian visitors.

The majority of visitors indicated they had learned of the activity on-site through bulletin boards, brochures, and staff, or through previous attendance. Less than 10% indicated learning of activities through pre-trip information (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: How did you learn about this interpretive activity?



## PERFORMANCE

Respondents were asked to rate the interpretive activities performance on various aspects using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 = **Very Poor** and 5 = **Very Good**. If the service was not available or respondents did not use them, respondents were asked to skip the question and results are shown as a percentage of non-response (N/R) in the table on the next page.

Performance ratings for interpretive events were very high with scores ranging from 4.27 to 4.76.

Highest performance scores were given to the content of the activity and the interpreters' communication skills and knowledge. Greatest room for improvement was in the category of increasing visitors' understanding regarding the park. This finding could be due to the fact that very little is known about the respondents' former levels of understanding prior to attending the interpretive event.

How well are we doing?	Very Good					Very Poor	N/R	Mean Scores
	5	4	3	2	1			
Length of Activity	61	30	8	1	0	6	4.51	
Content of Activity	70	24	5	1	0	6	4.63	
Interpreter's								
Communication skills	78	18	3	0	0	5	4.73	
Interpreter's knowledge	80	18	3	0	0	6	4.76	
Facility or location	66	27	7	0	0	5	4.59	
Media/props used	64	28	7	1	0	8	4.55	
Increasing Understanding of:								
Park's themes/stories	55	33	10	2	0	10	4.41	
Park's main features	50	31	15	3	0	10	4.27	
Issues facing the Park	55	30	15	4	1	11	4.34	
Park overall	51	33	13	3	1	11	4.31	
Made visit more interesting	69	26	5	1	1	7	4.62	
Fun & enjoyable for children	63	24	10	6	1	20	4.45	

Scores for Lake Louise tended to be the highest, with lower scores being given for Kootenay and Waterton. The lower performance scores appear to be the result of a higher percentage of Canadian visitors who tend to have higher expectations of interpretive events than non-domestic travellers. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents stated they would recommend this activity to a friend.

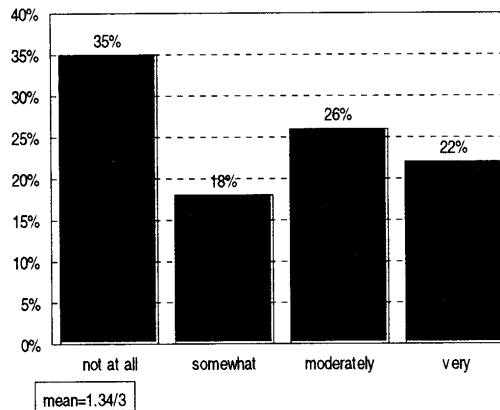
**CLIENT PARTICIPATION**

Respondents were asked how many interpretive activities they had already or intended on participating in during their visit. The most common response was two or three; however, approximately 20% indicated four or more. Waterton had the highest percentage of respondents attending the most number of interpretive activities. In terms of the affect the availability of interpretive activities had in the clients' decision to visit the National Park, Figure 2 shows that approximately 65% said the availability had some level of importance.

**CLIENT PREFERENCES**

Relating to participation, clients were asked how important it was that the interpretive activity be

Figure 2: Importance of available interpretive activities in decision to visit the National Park?

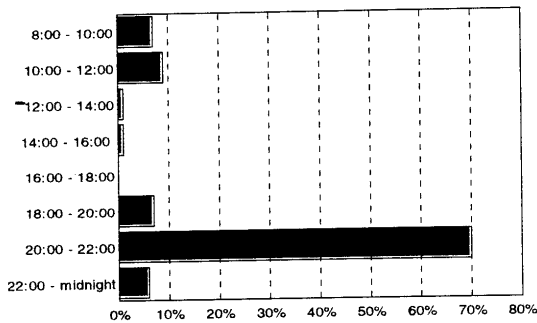


delivered by a Parks Canada employee. The majority of the respondents indicated that this was an extremely important factor to them.

The majority of interpretive events surveyed took place in the evenings between 6:00pm and 10:00pm, while Banff and Lake Louise offered the most number of daytime events (Figure 3). Respondents were asked if there was a more preferable time of

day at which the interpretive activity should be offered. While most respondents felt the time should remain the same, a small proportion preferred evening time blocks. Preference for any other time block was indicated by less than 5% of respondents. Therefore, it appears that program times mesh with visitors' timetables.

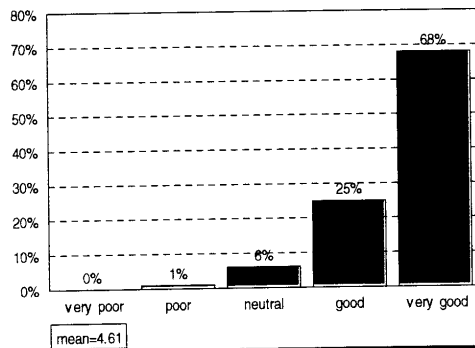
Figure 3 : Time interpretive activity began



**CANADIAN HERITAGE OBJECTIVES**

Part of Parks Canada's responsibility is to present and educate Canadians about the special and unique features of its National Parks and Historic Sites. Fundamental to achieving this goal are the content and availability of interpretive events to visitors. To obtain a benchmark measure for this goal, survey respondents were asked to rate how well the uniqueness and special features of the park were presented (see Figure 4). The 1996 interpretive

Figure 4: How well did we present how this park is unique and special?

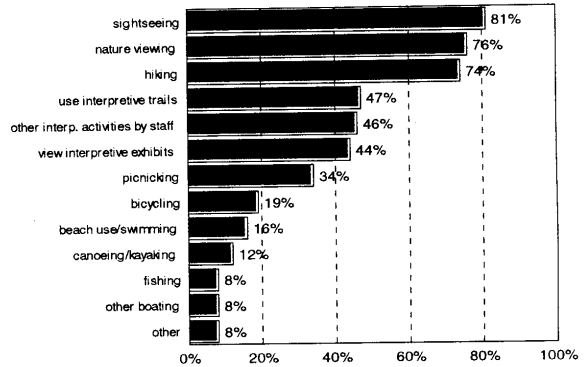


programs did very well in meeting the objective set by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the challenge will be to meet or exceed these benchmarks in the future. The limitation is that it is unknown specifically what visitors learned.

**ACTIVITY PATTERNS**

Respondents were asked to indicate which other activities they had already or planned to engage in during their park visit (see Figure 5). Sight seeing, nature viewing, and hiking were the most popular activities.

Figure 5 : Other activities engaged in during this Park visit



**VALUE**

Fees were charged to participate in some of the guided events and campground programs in Banff, Lake Louise and Jasper. Some of the fees had been in place for several years, other events were still free. Respondents who had paid a fee for the interpretive event were asked if they received good value for the interpretive fee paid. Value for the interpretive fee paid was positive with a mean score of 4.55.

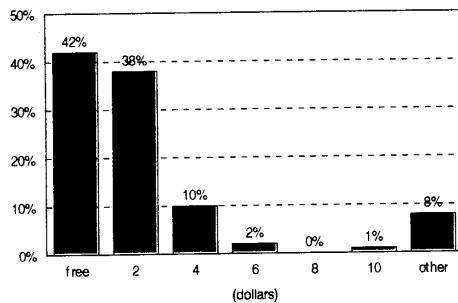
Respondents who had paid a fee for the interpretive event they attended were also asked if they were prepared to pay 20% more than what they had paid.

Visitors in Banff and Lake Louise were divided on whether they would be willing to pay the fee increase. Results were slightly more positive for Jasper where 50% were willing to pay the increase and only 20% were not.

Survey respondents who had not been required to pay a fee were asked what they felt would be an acceptable price for the event they participated in (see Figure 6). Less than 20% were willing to pay more than \$2.00, and under 40% were willing to pay \$2.00. The most frequent response to the 'other' category was a fee of \$1.00, followed by donations and including the cost in the campground fee. These results suggest interpretive fees of \$2.00 per adult as a maximum price would be received with the greatest success, particularly for campground programs. Guided events which have longer duration and smaller group sizes, should be successful at higher prices.

All respondents were asked if they felt that part of the cost of this interpretive activity should be covered through other park fees such as entrance and campground fees. Overall 60% agreed with this statement while close to 80% were in agreement with percentages approaching 80% in Kootenay and Waterton. The heavy Canadian participation in these parks suggest resistance probably due to "ownership" and taxes already being paid.

Figure 6: If you had to pay for this interpretive activity, what would be an acceptable fee (adult)?



## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Participants of the Mountain Parks' interpretive event were primarily Canadian (66%) or American (21%), with relatively few Europeans or other nationalities. Canadians were concentrated in Kootenay and Waterton, while Yoho received the highest proportions of European and Overseas visitors. Interestingly, events in Lake Louise were attended by more Americans (41%) than Canadians (39%).

### VISITOR RECOMMENDATIONS

There were several recurring suggestions for improving interpretation programs noted in all parks. These included the following:

- involve the audience
- take questions
- offer more interpretive opportunities and programs
- improve advertising; existence, content, location, what to bring
- use more slides, videos, films and movies
- use "guest speakers" (i.e. researchers and qualified individuals)
- schedule evening programs earlier (particularly noted in Jasper)
- provide more detail/technical information/ further reading material (i.e. handouts)
- separate programs for children

For more information, please contact the Business Service Group in Calgary Service Centre, (403) 292-4047