

Northern BC Tourism and Development Foundation Project

Parks Campground Users Survey Report

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20 December 2005

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Background

The 'Northern BC Tourism and Development Foundation Project' builds upon the research experience developed within UNBC's Community Development Institute through the Northern BC Economic Development Vision and Strategy Project. That earlier work identified tourism (in its various forms) to be an important but poorly understood part of northern BC's economy. The current Project made use of our extensive network of community contacts to further explore the opportunities and challenges for the tourism sector across northern BC. The purpose of the Project was to create a foundation of knowledge and connections to support new community economic development work and create opportunities to leverage future research/development funds.

The Project timeline was from April 2005 to December 2005. The research plan involved interviews and data collection with economic development and tourism industry actors across northern BC. The interviews were conducted from April to October 2005 in communities from 100 Mile House to Atlin, and from the Alberta border to the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Introduction

BC's provincial parks are a key feature within our tourism economy. Since the 1950s, the provincial park network has been considered one of BC's signature welcoming cards for visitors and an 'ambassador' for *Super Natural BC*. The provincial park system has experienced a number of changes over the past two decades in response to a range of pressures. In addition, it is anticipated that the coming two decades will also generate changes which will impact the way in which the provincial parks operate and the way that they contribute within our tourism economy. As part of the Northern BC Tourism and Development Foundation Project, the research team had an opportunity to visit many provincial parks across the region. From these visits, a series of observations were made which suggest the potential for additional research work in the future. This report summarizes some of the core results from those observations and suggestions.

The provincial parks observations exercise was developed as a convenience product of the Northern BC Tourism and Development Foundation Project. As such, it is based on observations made on the dates, and at the times, when the research team was present in the individual provincial parks. It reflects how one 'travel party' encountered northern BC's provincial parks facilities. It is not meant as a comprehensive study. Neither is it a research study in that the research design has several pitfalls. Key among these is that no

form of sampling framework was applied by type of park and period over which the observations were made.

Observations Summary

During the course of this project, the research team visited 22 BC Provincial Parks: Barkerville, Beaton, Beaumont, Boya Lake, Buckinghorse River, Bull Canyon, Cedar Point, Horsefly Lake, Juniper Beach, Kiskatinaw, Lac La Hache, Lakelse Lake, Liard River Hot Springs, Meziadin Lake, Moberly Lake, Naikoon - Misty Meadows campground, North Thompson River, Paarens Beach, Swan Lake, Ten Mile Lake, Tweedsmuir – Atnarko Campground, Tyhee Lake
In each of these Parks, a simple observations report card was filled out to gauge service levels.

- Is there a Park Host?

Yes (2)

No (20)

Only two of the provincial parks had a Park Host present when the observations were done. It should be noted that these are voluntary positions and many are only available on weekends and during the “peak” occupation periods. However, given that our intention was to record how one travel party encountered the host program ‘on the ground’, this particular amenity was quite thin.

- Is the Park Facility Operator identified; and where are they located?

Twenty-one of the 22 provincial parks visited had Park Facility Operators clearly identified. In some parks, however, the Park Facility Operators were not present during the time period when the observations were done. In one park, operations were by ‘self registration’.

Sixteen of the provincial parks visited had the Park Facility Operator located within the park itself, while an additional 5 had the Park Facility Operator located immediately adjacent to the park. One of the provincial parks visited had the Park Facility Operator located in a neighbouring park about 20 km away.

- Is there park information available?

All 22 of the provincial parks visited had displays and/or handouts for communicating information about the park and the surrounding area. In most cases, this information combined materials on both the human and physical landscapes of the park/area. This information also included campground maps and instructions on the operations and rules of the park. In one of the provincial parks visited, interpretation services were provided by an on-site person.

- Types of Vehicles and Primary Accommodations in campground

Accomm'n Vehicle	Tent	Tent trailer (pop up)	Camper (top of truck)	Trailer	Motor-home	5 th Wheel	Van conversion
Motor bikes							
Bicycles							
Car	(6)	(1)					
Truck	(5)		(3)	(43)		(45)	
Motor Home					(36)		
Van Conversion							(3)

In the 22 provincial parks visited, the research team noted approximately 142 occupied campsites during the nights we were in the parks. This camper traffic is dominated by trucks towing either a travel trailer (~30%) or a 5th wheel trailer (~32%). Camping parties driving motor homes accounted for the third most common units (~25%). There were relatively few of the other types of camping units tracked found in the visited provincial parks across northern BC.

- Place of origin of vehicles?

Canada	Count	USA	Count
BC	(98)	Washington	(5)
Alberta	(15)	Oregon	(3)
		California	(1)
		Idaho	(1)
		Alaska	(4)
		Vermont	(1)

Using vehicle license plates as identification, the observation project made note of the ‘places of origins’ of vehicles in provincial parks campsites. The places of origin are at the scale of Canadian provinces and US states. In the 22 provincial parks visited, the research team was able to identify the place of origin for approximately 128 vehicles during the nights that we were staying in the respective parks. This camper traffic is dominated by vehicles registered in British Columbia (~77%) with the next largest share coming from neighbouring Alberta (~12%). Camping parties from the United States accounted for the remainder of the license plates recorded, with most of these coming from Washington State (~4%), Oregon (~2%), and Alaska (~3%). The only other US states to show up included California, Idaho, and Vermont. That more ‘local’ users showed up in the vehicle license plate scan is not surprising (as it follows a number of economic and tourism research assumptions), but it does raise the question of how the long-distance travelers are routinely being accommodated as they travel through northern BC.

- Park facilities?

The research team also used the observations project to record the availability of a number of fairly standard amenities. For example, in the 22 provincial parks visited, the research team noted that all had pit toilets and that 6 also had some form of flush toilet facilities.

The availability of plumbing/septic disposal systems for flush toilets extended to the availability of shower facilities. Again, only 6 the 22 provincial parks visited had showers available for campers. In 2 of these provincial parks, the showers were coin operated with a fee of approximately \$1 per 4 minutes use.

Another plumbing/septic disposal systems investment extended to the availability of sani-dump facilities for the holding tanks of campers, travel trailers, 5th wheel trailers, and motor homes. These are usually stand alone facilities located away from the camping sites themselves, often along the entrance or exit ways into/out of the park. In this case, 12 of the 22 provincial parks visited had sani-dump facilities available. This is important given the dominance noted above of these types of camping units within the parks. In all cases where the parks had a sani-dump facility, a flat fee of \$2 per use was charged.

A final plumbing/septic disposal systems investment extended to the availability of drinking water taps within the parks. In this case, all 22 of the provincial parks visited made fresh water available to campers through standpipes with taps.

Other amenities explored included the availability of children’s play areas. Of the 22 provincial parks visited, 16 had special areas set aside for a children’s playground. Each of these areas had a range of play structures for children to use.

Another amenity enjoyed by campers in BC’s provincial parks is the ability to have a small fire in the campsites. These fire pits are generally constrained within small iron containers about half covered with bars to form a top grill. Of the 22 provincial parks visited, all 22 made firewood available to campers for use in the fire pits. In one case, the firewood was provided free of charge while for the other 21 parks the firewood was made available at the rate of \$5 per bundle.

Picnic sites were provided and maintained in 18 of the 22 provincial parks visited.

In terms of extra, or ‘user’ fees, only one of the parks we visited charged a day use fee while two others charged a group camping fee (for use of a group camping area that was set aside from the rest of the campground.

- Other Amenities?

A number of other types of campground amenities were tracked through the observations project for the 22 provincial parks visited:

Group Shelter	(5)
Changing Rooms	(4)
Recycling	(5)
Dog Beaches	(1)
Equipment Rental	(5)
Trails	(19)
Interpretive Trails	(2)
Boat Launch	(11)
Docks	(4)

- Number and Type of Sites

For the 22 provincial parks visited, the observations project counted approximately 1,236 individual camp sites.

Many of the 22 provincial parks also provided special types of camping sites:

Camp site types	Number of parks available in
Wheelchair	15
Group Camping	4
Lake Front	6
Tenting Sites	15
Pull Through	1

- General Cleanliness

For the 22 provincial parks visited, the observations project made a general evaluation of the cleanliness of the facility as encountered by a ‘traveling party’. This included the campsites themselves, the washrooms, the picnic or playground areas, the sani-dump area, together with the range of other amenities available at the individual parks. A 10 point scale was used with 1 = ‘extremely dirty’ and 10 = ‘extremely clean’.

Average score for all 22 provincial parks visited was 7.1. The lowest rating was 3 (for one provincial park) while the highest rating was 10 (for three provincial parks).

Parks Observations on Future Research

A number of recommendations for future research work come from the parks observations project. These recommendations build upon other findings from the Northern BC Tourism and Development Foundation Project.

In parks close to small towns and urban centres, many of the users are from the local community. While research work is needed to estimate the general economic impact of provincial parks on the local economies of these small towns and urban centres, more focussed work is also needed on the composition of this benefit as contributed by local, regional, provincial, Canadian, and American campsite users. According to one park operator, local users comprise up to one-third of the park’s campground users. Future research should also include the economic impact of these ‘local tourists’ on communities adjacent to a provincial park.

When questioned in conversation, park visitors identified security, and proximity to nature, as key among the motivators for staying in a provincial park. Future research work could include an in-depth survey of park visitors to identify key motivators for staying in a provincial park. A secondary set of research questions could focus upon identifying differences in motivations, if they exist, between different types of park visitors (vehicle type, socio-demographic type, local compared to distant visitors, short-term compared to long-term stays, and American compared to Canadian visitors).

Many park visitors identified the desire for more professional park staff who could provide an additional learning dimension to the visitors' stay. These professionals included park rangers, guides, naturalists, and interpretation staff. Future research could include an in-depth study of park visitors to identify the range of educational opportunities they would like to have included in their park experience. These may range from self guided interpretive trails to evening "campfire" talks by local experts. This desire by tourists, especially the 'baby boomer' generation, to include a learning dimension to their leisure experience was identified in the Northern BC Economic Development Vision and Strategy Project.