

The Camping Experience:

Results from a survey of the *Parks Listens* Panel

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About this research

- The last of the four surveys given to the *ParksListens* panel during the trial phase focuses on camping.
 - The objectives of this survey are to collect some quantitative information about camping and to gather some qualitative descriptions about the camping experiences of panellists.
 - The majority of the questions are open-ended to allow panellists to describe their experiences in their own words. The open-ended responses are coded into themed categories for presentation in this report.
 - The full written responses to each question appear in the Appendices at the end of this report.

- The response rate for this study was 47%, with 1,648 of the 3,532 invited panellists completing the questionnaire.
 - Responses are weighted by origin, gender, and gate to correspond to the 372,000 visitors who purchased their personal use fee at one of the 10 mountain park gates in July 2006.
 - The 1,648 responses have an associated margin of error of +2.4% when representing the 371,885 independent visitors who purchased PUF during the panel recruitment period.
 - There is a degree of error associated with samples that is based on the sample size in relation to the population. This is referred to as the “margin of error.” With a margin of error of +/-5%, if 40% of the respondents answered yes to a question, the true value should lie between 35% and 45%).

Previous Camping Experience

- Ninety percent of the panel reported that they had camped before.
 - Of those who have camped, 63% reported that they had camped this year.

Last Time Camping

	All Panellists	Campers
Never	10%	
This year	57%	63%
2001 - 2005	14%	16%
2000 or earlier	19%	21%
Total	100%	100%

- Just over two-thirds (68%) of panellists reported that they had camped in a mountain park at some time.
 - Of those who have camped in a mountain park, 57% reported camping in a mountain park this year.
 - Overseas visitors (84%), were far more likely to report camping in the parks this year than were visitors from all other origins.
 - The proportion of Albertans, Other Canadians, and Americans who reported camping in the parks this year were very similar (@55%).

Last time Camping in a Mountain Park

	All Panellists	Mountain Park Campers
Never	32%	
This year	39%	57%
2001 - 2005	13%	19%
2000 or earlier	17%	24%
Total	100%	100%

- The 30% of our panel that reported camping in Banff, Jasper, Kootenay, and Yoho on the visit they received their invitation to join the panel replicates the 31% that reported camping during the same period with the 2003 survey of visitors to Banff, Jasper, Kootenay, and Yoho National Parks.
- For panellists who visited Waterton Lakes, the 20% who reported camping was also quite close to the 16% that we found during the same period in the 2005 survey of visitors to Waterton Lakes National Park.

Previous Mountain Park Camping Experience

- Most of the reasons cited for not camping in the mountain parks are personal in nature. Few relate to operational items that could be changed or perception issues that could be better communicated to encourage greater use of the mountain parks campgrounds.
 - Even when we just focus on the responses of those from Alberta, no clear pattern emerges.
- We cannot identify a clear pattern to the question of why campers have not camped in the mountain parks. The responses to this item do not give us the information that can be used to develop an action plan for encouraging campers to camp in the mountain parks
- It should be noted that asking an open-ended question asking people to identify the reasons that people don't do something is not the best way to gather this information.
 - Qualitative (focus group) research with these same panellists could result in a better understanding of the barriers that may lead to campers not camping in the mountain parks.
- Almost one-quarter (24%) of panellists had camped, but not in the mountain parks.
 - Only 15% of campers from Alberta had not camped in a mountain park.
 - The proportion of campers who had not camped in a mountain park was much higher for the visitors from other origins (Other Canadians 32%, Americans 42%, and visitors from Overseas 65%).
- The verbatim responses to this question appear In Appendix 6.

Reasons For Not Camping in the Mountain Parks

	Campers Who Haven't Camped in the Mountain Parks
Haven't Had the Opportunity	44%
Prefer Hotels in the Mountain Parks	17%
Transportation/Location	15%
Lack of Time	7%
New to camping	4%
Wildlife/Weather Concerns	3%
Prefer Day Trips to Mountains	2%
Too Crowded	2%
Children	2%
Need Equipment	1%
Price	1%
Total	100%

What Is Your Favourite Camping Spot?

- Panellists were asked to name their favourite campground, and we received a wide range of answers.
 - The wording of this question did not limit responses to frontcountry campgrounds and it was clear from the answers we received that some people were listing backcountry campgrounds as their favourite.
 - This holds some implications for the next question as even though we attempted to eliminate those respondents who named a backcountry campsite as their favourite, we could not identify each of the many different campgrounds that were listed
 - When we look at responses by the type of campground, we see that Canadian government (both provincial and federal) campgrounds were frequently named.
- The origin of the respondent had a definite impact on the location of their favourite camping spot.
- While over two-third of Albertans reported that their favourite camping spot was located in the Rocky Mountains, this also included campgrounds outside the National Parks.
- Other Canadians showed an affinity for campgrounds located in the Rocky Mountains, but they also made frequent mention of campgrounds located closer to their homes.
- In a similar fashion, Americans frequently listed campgrounds in the mountains as their favourite, but they made frequent mention of campgrounds located closer to home.
- While overseas visitors most frequently mentioned mountain park campgrounds (largely located within the National Parks), there was frequent mention of campgrounds located elsewhere in British Columbia.
- The verbatim responses are presented in Appendix 1, sorted by location.

Favorite Camping Spot By Camper's Origin

% within Origin

	Camper Origin			
	Alberta	Other Canada	USA	Overseas
Mountains	68%	42%	38%	40%
USA	2%	3%	53%	13%
British Columbia	7%	19%	3%	24%
Prairies	16%	14%	1%	0%
Other Canada	5%	21%	2%	6%
Other Country	0%	1%	3%	18%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Why is it Your Favourite Camping Spot?

- Panellists were asked to identify what is was about their favourite camping spot that made it their favourite.
 - As mentioned in the pervious section, many respondents identified a backcountry campground as their favourite, and although we tried to eliminate these responses from further analysis, we could not identify every campground listed.
 - We can't expect frontcountry campgrounds to offer the same experience as a backcountry campsite
- While it is not surprising that there were a wide variety of responses, we can identify specific themes that are consistent in the answers.
- Scenery was the most frequently named attribute that made a camping spot a person's favourite.
 - There were a number of different types of responses that made up the scenery category.
 - The natural beauty or setting of the location was an important element of the scenery category. Often people talked about the natural beauty of the location, without specifying specific items that made it beautiful to them
 - Sometimes people made specific references to one aspect of the scenery (beautiful mountains, lakes, or oceans) that made the location so appealing.
 - One consistent element of the scenery category was to highlight that the setting was very beautiful and somewhat different from what was encountered in everyday life.
- The isolation and quiet of camping sports was also a frequently named reason for their appeal.
- Overseas visitors (70%) made the most frequent mention of the importance of scenery in making a site appealing. This was also the items that was most frequently mentioned by Americans (55%).
- While scenery was also the most frequent response from Canadians (38%), the importance of available activities (15%) was noticeably higher than for non-Canadians (3%).
- It is important to note that the things that make particular locations so appealing are always the same things that are the “best things” about a camping trip.

Why Is This Location So Appealing?

	Reason Location is Appealing
Scenery	44%
Isolation/Quiet	21%
Location	13%
Facilities Available	11%
Activities Available	10%
Family/Friends	1%
Price	1%
Total	100%

The Mountain Parks Camping Experience – The Good

- Panellists who had camped in the mountain parks were asked to identify the best part of their camping experience.
- We have divided the list into the same items that were used to describe the attributes that made a person’s favourite camping spot so appealing.
- Scenery is the most frequently cited positive about the mountain park camping experience.
 - This was also the most frequently cited feature that made a camping spot appealing.
- While isolation and quiet was a relatively frequently mentioned element in what makes a camping spot appealing, it is far less frequently cited as the best part of the mountain park camping experience.
- One-quarter (24%) of the mountain park campers identified the activities available as the best part of their camping experience.
 - While this may prove to be an important element of the memorable camping experience in the mountain parks, it should be noted that this is not one of the things that campers identified as making their favourite sites appealing.
- Consistent with the pattern found in what makes a camping spot appealing, overseas visitors (80%) and Americans (65%) identified the scenery as the best part of their mountain park camping experience. While still the most frequent response, Canadians (50%) less frequently identified this as the best part of their camping experience.
- One-quarter of Canadians cited available activities (26%) as the best part of their experience, compared to just 15% of non-Canadians.
- The full list of responses appears in Appendix 3.

What Was the Best Part of Your Mountain Park Camping Experience?

	Best Part of Experience
Scenery	53%
Activities Available	24%
Family/Friends	8%
Isolation/Quiet	6%
Location	4%
Facilities Available	4%
Price	1%
Total	100%

The Mountain Parks Camping Experience – The Bad

- Panellists who had camped in the mountain parks were asked to identify the worst part of their camping experience.
 - Forty percent of those who had camped did not identify a “worst” part of their experience. This is consistent with what we would expect when asking people to focus on the negatives.
 - Often respondents have trouble coming up with an answer or are not interested in focusing on the negative.
- What we see is a far more precise list of issues when we ask people to rate the bad elements of their experience.
- Poor weather conditions, unsatisfactory facilities or services, regulations, and having to deal with other campers or the sense of crowding become the key features of the “worst” list.
- One-fifth (21%) of campers identify isolation and quiet as the most appealing element of a good camping sport.
 - Only 6% of mountain park campers identify this as the best part of their mountain park camping experience, but 12% identify it as the “worst” part of the mountain park camping experience.
- To assess campers’ satisfaction with their experience, monitoring these items would appear to be more important than focusing on the “best” [parts of the experience].
- The full response list appears in Appendix 4.

What Was the Worst Part of Your Mountain Park Camping Experience?

	Worst Part of Experience
Nothing	40%
Weather	19%
Facilities/Services/Regulations	16%
Other Campers/Crowded	12%
Bears & Wildlife	6%
Price	4%
Personal Problems	3%
Total	100%

The Mountain Parks Camping Experience – The Future

- Panellists who had camped in the mountain parks were also asked to provide their advice on how to improve the service offer to future campers.
- While over one-third (34%) were unable to offer any advice to managers on how to improve the service for future campers, one-fifth (20% of respondents identified improvements to facilities and services.
 - Americans (25%) were more likely to suggest improvements to facilities and services than were campers from other origins (18%).
- Lowering the cost was mentioned more frequently by Canadians (10%) than by Americans (0%) or visitors from Overseas (4%).
- There were some differences in advice depending on in which park the visitor had last camped.
- Over three-quarters of visitors who last camped in Yoho (80%) and Kootenay (77%) offered some advice to managers, compared to less than two-thirds (62%) in other parks.
 - Those who had last camped in Yoho (22%) or Kootenay (23%) more frequently advised managers to lower the price than did campers in other parks (7%).
 - Campers from Yoho and Kootenay were also slightly more likely (20%) to suggest improvements to facilities and services than were campers from the other parks (15%).
- The full responses appear in Appendix 5.

What Advice Would You Offer to Campground Managers to Improve the Service for Future Campers

	Advice To Managers
None/Don't Know	34%
Improve Services and/or Facilities	20%
Increase Enforcement and Security	9%
Lower the Cost	8%
Improve Communication/Education	7%
Increase Privacy/Limit Numbers	5%
Improve Cleanliness	5%
Keep it Natural	4%
Reservations/Check-in	4%
Increase Availability	4%
Total	100%