

A Survey of Visitors
to the
Ft. Pickens Area
of the
Gulf Islands National Seashore
1988-89



Center for Social Science Research
University of West Florida

**A SURVEY OF VISITORS TO THE
FT. PICKENS AREA OF THE
GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE,
1988-89**

a summary report by

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Introduction

On the western end of Santa Rosa Island which stretches across the entrance to Pensacola Bay in Northwest Florida, is the Ft. Pickens area of the Gulf Islands National Seashore. This is a recreation area that was once a Florida state park but became part of the Gulf Islands National Seashore under the management of the National Park Service in 1972. The area is served by a paved road which extends approximately 8 miles down the center of Santa Rosa Island to a terminous at Ft. Pickens, a partially restored Civil War fort.

The National Park Service has created a significant set of tourist and visitor attractions in the Ft. Pickens area; there is a 200 campsite campground, an amphitheatre, several nature trails, a campground store, a museum near Ft. Pickens itself, several buildings which have marine and coastal exhibits housed inside them, a fishing pier and a snack bar. The natural attractions of the area include an expanse of white sandy beach along the Gulf side of the entire park area (facing south) and a smaller and calmer beach area on the sound side or bay side of the island. Visitors can fish, swim or enjoy the bay or beach and a wide range of outdoor activities.

This report is a result of a 2 year study of visitors to the Ft. Pickens area in 1988 and 1989. The study was undertaken by the Center for Social Science Research at the University of West Florida with the cooperation of the National Park Service. While the results of the survey housed within this report will provide some insight into tourism in the Ft. Pickens area, the Center for Social Science Research intends to continue to survey the Ft. Pickens area and to expand, if possible, the range of variables surveyed in future research.

Invaluable assistance in research design was provided by Dr. Dean Allmon, Director of the Center for Marketing and Business Research at the University of West Florida and by Dr. Charles M. (Mike) Bundrick, Director of the Institute for Statistical and Mathematical Modeling at UWf. In addition, Dr. Bundrick also provided support with statistical analysis and computer graphics.

If anyone would like more information on the project or the results given in this report, please contact Dr. Harry Stopp, Assistant Vice Provost for Research, University of West Florida, 11000 University Parkway, Pensacola, FL 32514, (904) 474-2824.

Survey Method

There is only one land route into and out of the Ft. Pickens area and that road leads from the commercial area of Pensacola Beach west into the park lands. There is a checkpoint and information station on this road near the entrance to the Ft. Pickens area and every vehicle is stopped at this point and checked for a park permit. Park permits can be purchased for daily, weekly or annual periods of time and everyone entering the park through this checkpoint must purchase a permit or show a permit to the Park Ranger in the Information Center. The Information Center is normally manned from 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. although these hours may be extended somewhat during peak usage periods.

It was at this Information Center that the questionnaire was administered. Everyone coming through the checkpoint has to slow down to show the Ranger their pass or stop to purchase a pass or ask for information and, as a result, there can be a traffic delay at this point when several cars back up behind the checkpoint. The questionnaire could be administered at this checkpoint with minimal interference in the flow of traffic and would, therefore, insure complete coverage of every car, or in some cases bicycle or motorcycle, coming to visit the Ft. Pickens area. The surveyor was allowed to stop to talk with cars as they slowed or stopped and, with the convenience of the visitors in mind, the questionnaire was kept purposely short. A copy of the questionnaire administered is included in Figure 1.

During the three days the survey was conducted, there were 1,055 observations made (questionnaires administered). Although there was no record kept of mode of transportation, the large majority of observations represent a car, truck or camper

vehicle. A few observations were made of bicyclers or motorcyclists. These observations recorded a total of 3,074 visitors to the Ft. Pickens area, the mean number of persons per observation (vehicle) was 2.91. Only a small minority of visitors (1%) were African American.

The survey was administered on three separate occasions during summer months over a two year period at the Ft. Pickens entrance. The questionnaire was administered from the time at which the Information Center opened in the morning until approximately 5:00 p.m., a time at which peak usage would be completed. With very few exceptions, every vehicle which passed through the checkpoint was surveyed so there is no problem associated with sampling within the daily regimen. The samples were taken on two days during the week and one day on the weekend with the assumption that weekend traffic to the beach may be quite different from weekday traffic. It is conventional wisdom that there are more visitors to the beach on the weekends than during the week and it is possible that there are two different sets of populations visiting the beach during these two types of periods. By surveying both during the week and on the weekend any unique patterns at either time would be identified.

Figure 1 - A sample survey data form used in the study of the Ft. Pickens area, 1988-89. The form was designed to minimize the amount of time taken for each respondent.

FORT PICKENS VISITORS SURVEY DATA FORM

DATE _____

WHERE ARE YOU FROM
CITY - STATE

HOW MANY
IN YOUR
PARTY

WHAT DO YOU
PLAN TO DO
AT THE PARK

HAVE YOU
BEEN TO THE
PARK BEFORE

HOW LONG DO YOU
PLAN TO STAY
IN THE PARK

[illegible]

Location Analysis

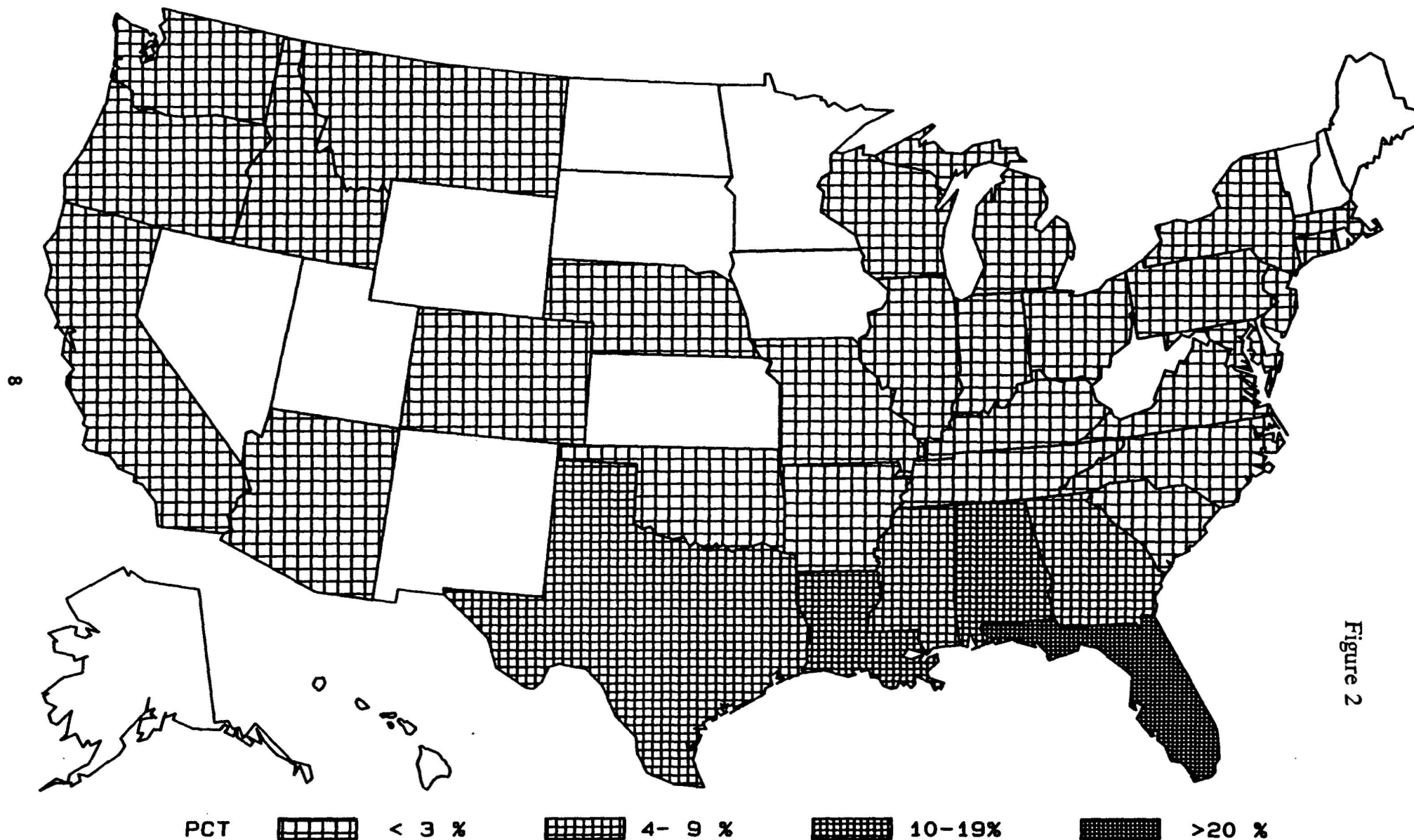
One of the primary interests of the survey was to identify the point of origin for visitors to the Ft. Pickens area. In order to fully understand the geography of the tourism characteristics of this location, it is necessary to know where visitors to the park originated. Gathering information on that topic would seem a simple matter on the surface, you simply ask where the people came from and the point of origin is established and, on the whole, this was a straightforward question. The large military population in the Gulf Coast area, however, could create some confusion because military personnel stationed in Pensacola may consider their home to be Connecticut or Alaska or wherever their "home" is. For this survey the point of origin was the information gathered and, wherever possible, the difference between point of origin and "home" for military personnel was made clear during the survey.

During the survey period visitors came from 34 of the 50 United States and from Canada, Ecuador, Germany, Ireland and Italy. As expected, the large majority of visitors were from Florida and nearby states. We found that 44.2% of visitors in the survey were from Florida; 37.3% of the visitors were from the local area of Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. Louisiana, three states to the west of Florida, had the second highest incidence of visitorship; 13% of the visitors to the Ft. Pickens area during the survey time were from the Bayou State. Alabama, a contiguous state to Florida on the north and west, followed closely behind Louisiana with 10% of the tourists at Ft. Pickens during the survey period. A group of five states, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee and Texas, formed a fourth set of visitors in the range of 3-9% of the total number of tourists surveyed. The 26 other states from which tourists came contributed

fewer than 3% of the tourists to Ft. Pickens (on a per state basis) and, in some cases, are represented by only a single visitor. A graphic representation of the origin of visitors to Ft. Pickens from the United States can be seen in Figure 2. Canada contributed the largest number of foreign visitors (4), Germany sent 3 and Ecuador, Ireland and Italy were represented in only one instance each.

VISITORS TO FT. PICKENS AREA / 1988 – 89

BY STATE OF ORIGIN



NO VISITORS WERE RECORDED FROM NON-CHECKED STATES

Figure 2

Usage Pattern

The Ft. Pickens area offers visitors a wide range of activities. There is a long stretch of beach on the Gulf side and on the sound side to which visitors throng for sunbathing, surfing, swimming and surf fishing. The road to the end of the point to Ft. Pickens is a popular bicycling area and the relatively low speed limits on the road through the Ft. Pickens area are conducive to safe biking and are thus an inducement for bicyclers to use this route. Near the end of the Ft. Pickens point are several areas in which skin divers and snorkelers predominate. It is possible to skin dive and snorkel along several miles of beach or sound shore also. There are several paths and boardwalks to old gun emplacements or natural areas that attract tourists as well as Ft. Pickens itself which has guided and unguided tour potential. Ft. Pickens was active in the Civil War and some other batteries were built on the island for World War I and World War II. There is a large campground complex in which people can pitch tents or park campers; this is located on the sound side of the island in a heavily treed area and is a favorite camping spot for tourists along the Gulf Coast. In addition, there are picnic opportunities on the beach or at several sites within the Ft. Pickens area.

The survey instrument recognized 8 categories of activity: beach/swim, biking, camping, dive/snorkel, fishing/pier, tour/visit, picnicking and other, a miscellaneous category that was seldom utilized. As would be expected, a large majority of visitors came to use the beach and to swim; 50.19% of those surveyed came for these activities. Almost half that many people came to tour the fort or simply to visit the Ft. Pickens area. Of those surveyed, 22.39% responded that they came to tour or visit. A third choice of visitors was camping and 15.37% of the respondents came for this activity.

Fishing, both from the pier and from the shore, was also a relatively popular activity; of the respondents 8.54% came to fish. Picnicking was a relatively low incidence activity; only 1.9% of the respondents came for that purpose. Less than 1% (0.57%) came to bike through the park area, and an equal number of people came to skin dive or snorkle. Only five respondents (0.47%) listed "other" as their activity choice.

Figure 3 graphs the activity pattern of visitors to the Ft. Pickens area from the six states which sent the most tourists to the Ft. Pickens area. Overall, the beach and swimming are the prime attractions with touring and visiting and camping in their respective positions mentioned above. The distribution of activities by state, however, is not so consistent and may provide some insight into a regional pattern of interests. Visitors from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas all selected the beach and swimming as their primary activity, but those from Mississippi came primarily to camp. The activity of second choice for Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana was touring and visiting; the second choice for Mississippi was swimming at the beach and for visitors from Texas it was camping. The very high percentage of Florida visitors who had come primarily for the beach-related activities is probably a reflection of the fact that many of the Florida visitors are local area residents who simply drive across the bay bridge to go to the beach and have no need to camp or inclination to tour. Florida visitors also had the highest incidence of fishing as their primary activity in the Ft. Pickens area and, according to Park Rangers, the fishing pier is a popular spot with local anglers not only because it is a relatively productive fishing location but because it is less expensive to utilize than are local commercial fishing piers located on other segments of Santa Rosa Island. For picnicking and other activities the profile of the six leading states approximates what was given above for the entire visitor population.

VISITORS TO FT. PICKENS AREA / 1988 – 89

PREFERRED ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY VISITORS FROM THE TOP SIX STATES

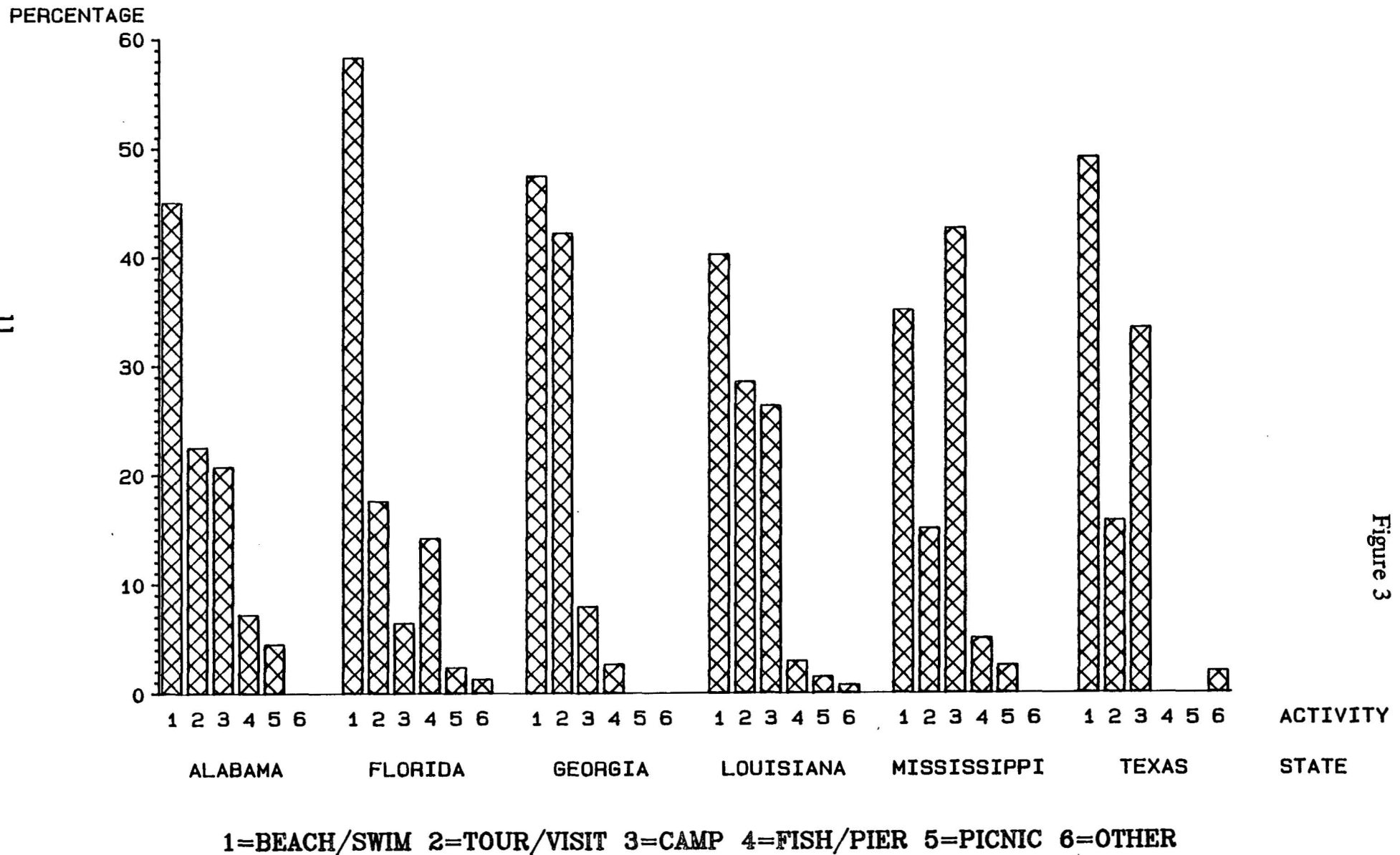


Figure 3