

Risk Recreation Poses New Management Problems

By Alan Ewert

A development in the leisure field is the deliberate seeking of risk and danger, often translated into specific recreational activities such as mountaineering, spelunking or white-water rafting. Millions of North Americans have participated in some form of risk recreation, with a number of studies suggesting that this form of leisure activity continues to grow (Darst and Armstrong, 1980; McLellan, 1986; PCAO, 1987).

A variety of terms has been used to categorize and define these types of activities, including natural challenge activities, risk recreation, and high adventure outdoor pursuits. For the purpose of this discussion, these terms are subsumed under the heading of adventure-based recreation, which is defined as the following:

A broad spectrum of outdoor recreational activities, usually non-consumptive and involving an interaction with the natural environment; containing elements of risk and danger in which the outcome, while uncertain, is influenced by the participant and circumstance.

This paper will compare and contrast adventure-based recreation with the broader field of outdoor recreation in the context of the participants, characteristics of the activities and implications for management and program design.

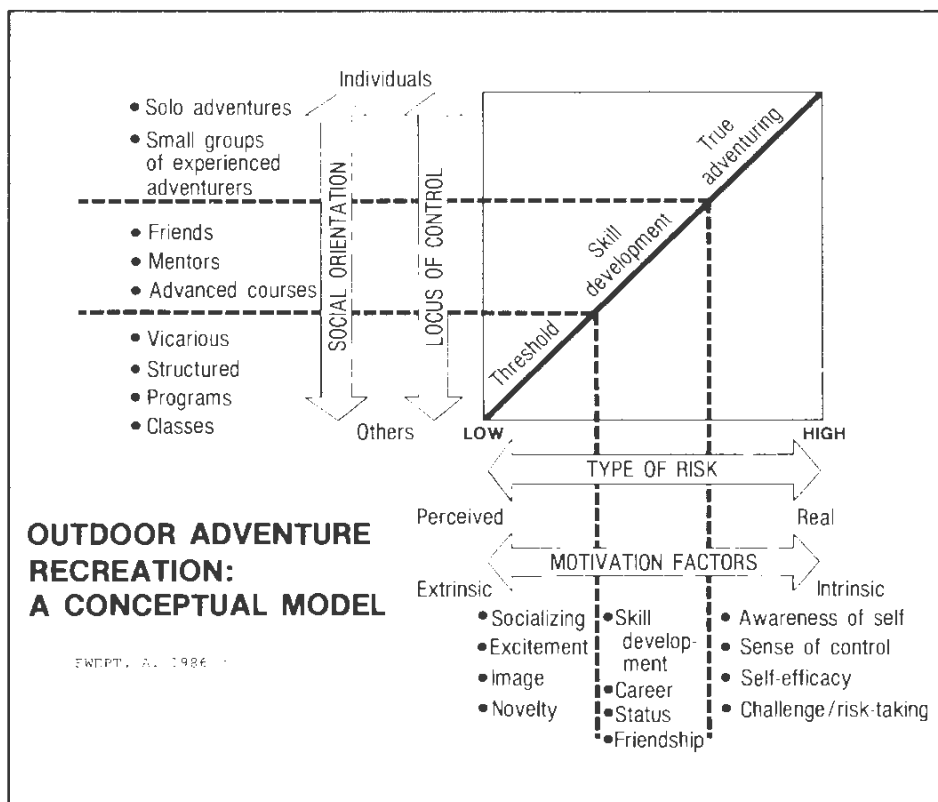
Comparison and Contrast

Outdoor recreation and adventure-based recreation are similar in several respects. They both fall under the general rubric of recreational activities usually done in an outdoor setting. Moreover, both types of activities are sensitive to management techniques and actions (Hendee, Stankey and Lucas, 1978). While the more traditional activities of outdoor recreation such as fishing, hunting and boating are well-known, more than 20 distinctly different recreational endeavors fall under the adventure-based recreation classification. These activities include:

backpacking	SCUBA
white-water canoeing	spelunking
hot-air ballooning	sky diving
rafting	hang-gliding
ropes courses	mountaineering
backcountry snowshoeing	kayaking
wilderness trekking	rock climbing
bicycle touring	sailing
cross-country skiing	wilderness camping
rappelling	sea kayaking
orienteering	

What distinguishes these activities from those more commonly associated with outdoor recreation is a deliberate seeking of risk and uncertainty of outcome often referred to as adventure. Both forms of recreation involve elements of skill in specific settings, but only in adventure-based recreation is there a deliberate inclusion of activities that contain threats to an individual's health or life. The following model illustrates how a participant in adventure-based recreation moves along a continuum based on developing skill and experience (See Figure 1).

While often similar, outdoor recreation and adventure-based recreation are not synonymous; these activities often serve different participants with different needs, expectations and motivations. Knopf (1983: 208-209) reports that motives for participation may be activity-related. Following this line of reasoning, re-



ported motives for participation in outdoor recreation generally consist of a desire for achievement, affiliation, control, escape and self-awareness (Manning, 1986). In a more conceptual fashion, Iso-Ahola (1980) theorizes that the reasons people engage in outdoor recreation are based on two dimensions: attempts to achieve something and attempts to avoid something. Findings from Davis (1973) and Bowley (1979) support this contention.

In the case of adventure-based recreation, we would extend this conceptualization to include a third dimension, risk-taking. Moreover, this concept of risk-taking is central to the adventure-based recreation concept with an absence of risk resulting in a decrease in satisfaction and desire to participate. In addition, this risk-taking appears to increase in importance as the participant gains experience and skill in the adventure activities (Schreyer and Roggenbuck, 1978; Ewert, 1985). (See Figure 1)

Management Implications

The above suggestions and findings have implications for both the management of outdoor recreation resources and the provision of outdoor leisure programs. In part, the type of experiences engaged in depends on the opportunities provided. Manning (1986) suggests that when choosing management objectives, the expectations and desires of potential users should be considered. While both classifications involve outdoor activities and settings, the risk-seeking recreationalist will also require opportunities for risk-taking and adventure seeking. Although these factors can be present in the outdoor recreation context, they are usually peripheral to the primary motives for participation.

As suggested by Driver and Brown (1984), people with different motives and expectations for recreation

participation will prefer different environmental settings. It follows that managing resources along strictly outdoor recreational lines invites a displacement and inequity of resource allocation for the adventure recreationalist (Knopf and Schreyer, 1985). Any attempt to reduce or interfere with the challenge and risk-taking potential of an area may severely inhibit the potential for satisfaction for the adventure-based recreation user. Sax (1980) posits that there will be an "erosion" of risk and spontaneity in the outdoor resources that ultimately will attract only users seeking a risk-free environment.

With respect to programming, these differences in the classification of activities also can lead to a bias in the opportunities provided to the user. Assuming that one goal of programming is to provide a sense of satisfaction, the following questions are presented in an effort to create an atmosphere conducive to a wide range of recreational opportunities.

- Identify the essence of the activity: is it a search for adventure and risk-taking or are these factors peripheral to the experience?
- What is the skill and experience level of the participants? Individuals with more skill and experience will usually demand a more self-determined, less leader-led program.
- Will the recreation experience be facilitated or diminished through development on the resource? While site modification and development may facilitate and enhance outdoor recreation use, it may detract from opportunities for adventure recreation. For example, boardwalks and fences can provide a sense of security for the sight-seer but effectively reduce the sense of wilderness and adventure.

Continued next page

In summary, outdoor recreation and adventure-based recreational experiences will often require a different approach, both in programming and in the management of resources. Toward this end, effectively meeting the needs of the outdoor recreation seeker will be enhanced by understanding whether the participant is seeking an outdoor recreation or an adventure-based experience. With the increasing popularity of adventure-based recreational activities, merely assuming that most people are interested in traditional activities such as walking, swimming or bicycling might be to overlook the needs of a changing clientele.

Ewert is an assistant professor of forest recreation at Ohio State University.

References

- Bowley, C. (1979). *Motives, management, preferences, and crowding of backcountry hiking trail users in the Allegheny National Forest of Pennsylvania*. Unpublished master's thesis. Pennsylvania State University.
- Darst, P. and Armstrong, G. (1980). *Outdoor adventure activities for school and recreation programs*. Minneapolis, MN: Burgess Publishing.
- Davis, R. (1973). *Selected motivational determinants of recreational use of Bell Isle in Detroit*. Unpublished master's thesis. University of Michigan.
- Driver, B. and Brown, P. (1984). *Contributions of behavioral scientists to recreation resource management*. In: I. Altman and R. Wohlwill (Eds.), *Behavior and the National Environment*, pp. 307-339. New York: Plenum Press.
- Ewert, A. 1985. *Why people climb: the relationship of participant motives and experience level to mountaineering*. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 17(3): 241-250.
- Hendee, J., Stankey, G. and Lucas, R. 1978. *Wilderness management*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Miscellaneous Publication No. 1365.
- Iso-Ahola, S. (1980). *The social psychology of leisure and recreation*. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
- Knopf, R. (1983). *Recreational needs and behavior in natural settings*. In: I. Altman and J. Wohlwill (Eds.), *Behavior and the Natural Environment*, pp. 205-240.
- Knopf, R. and Schreyer, R. (1985). *The problem of bias in recreation resource decision-making*. In: D. Dustin (Ed.), *The Management of Human Behavior in Outdoor Recreation Settings*, pp. 23-37. San Diego, CA: San Diego State University's Institute for Leisure Behavior.
- Manning, R. (1986). *Studies in outdoor recreation*. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press.
- McLellan, G. (1986). *The future of outdoor recreation: what the trends tell us*. *Parks and Recreation*, 21(5): 44-48, 63.
- President's Commission on Americans Outdoors (PCAO). (1987). *Americans and the Outdoors*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Sax, J. (1980). *Mountains without handrails: reflections on the National Parks*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Schreyer, R. and Roggenbuck, J. (1978). *The influence of experience expectations on crowding perceptions and social-psychological carrying capacities*. *Leisure Sciences*, (4): 373-394.