

Environmental Significance of Historical Parks:

A Study of Evolving Park Values

It has been traditional to think about national parks and equivalent reserves in terms of basic "types" or "categories" of parks. Classically we tend to label parks as "natural," "historical" or "cultural," and "recreational." These labels are based on what are viewed as the park's most significant resource or value. But is this the way visitors view parks? Do park values evolve in the minds of visitors? Can parks serve multiple values? We explored these questions in a study of visitors to Roosevelt Campobello International Park.

The Study

Roosevelt Campobello International Park is located on Campobello Island, New Brunswick, Canada. The park was created to commemorate U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The original and traditional focus of the park is the historic Roosevelt family cottage. Created in 1964 by international treaty, the park was initially comprised of the Roosevelt Cottage and the surrounding 10 acres of grounds. However, over the years the park has acquired nearly 3,000 acres of surrounding lands, which include a variety of fine inland and coastal ecosystems.

Under terms of the treaty creating the park, the Roosevelt Campobello International Park Commission requested technical assistance in park planning and management from the U.S. National Park Service. Accordingly, a survey of park visitors was conducted under the auspices of the North Atlantic Region in the summer and fall of 1989. Park visitors were sampled on 10 randomly selected days.

Sampling consisted of contacting 1,000 randomly selected visitors and soliciting their participation in the study. Names and addresses of visitors were collected and participants were mailed a mail-back questionnaire upon their return home. Using two follow-up mailings, we attained a response rate of

90.2 percent – 902 completed questionnaires. Questions concerned visitor characteristics and their opinions and attitudes about selected park management issues.

Findings

Several findings relate to the ways in which visitors value the park. First, respondents were asked directly whether they preferred that park management emphasis be placed (1) primarily on historical resources with natural resources of secondary importance, (2) primarily on natural resources with historical resources of secondary importance, or (3) equally on historical and natural resources. The vast majority (76.7%) preferred the third alternative, indicating that in the minds of most visitors the park clearly has evolved from a primarily historical site (as it was established initially to be) to a park with at least equal importance as a natural area.

Second, the activities in which visitors participate and that they rate as important indicate that park values in their eyes may be changing. The participatory activities now tend to be somewhat passive and oriented toward the park's historical values – the four most popular activities were touring the historic cottages, driving scenic roads, photography, and visiting the flower gardens. However, respondents also were asked to indicate which activities they considered most important for the park; that is, which should the park be sure to plan for. Considered in this context, the answers tended to place more active and environmentally-oriented activities higher on the priority list. While touring the historic cottages remained the most important activity, driving scenic roads and photography declined in relative importance. Instead, walking or hiking trails, picnicking, and nature study increased in importance.

Third, the age distribution of park visitors, and its apparent influence on park values, indicates that

the public significance of the park may be evolving. The current visitor population is skewed heavily toward the older age categories. More than 60 percent of visitors are 50 years or older and nearly 40 percent are 60 or beyond. Most of these older visitors have direct knowledge and memories of Franklin Roosevelt and his importance in national and international affairs. Consequently, their attention tends to focus on the Roosevelt theme of the park – particularly the purely historical elements of this theme. However, younger visitors evidence a stronger orientation toward the park's natural and environmental resources. Also, they are interested in more active recreational pursuits which are focused on the environment.

For example, younger visitors hiked and beachcombed more often and toured flower gardens and viewed the orientation film less often than older visitors. Younger visitors also rated hiking, beachcombing, and bicycling as more important park activities than did older visitors, relegating historic cottage and flower garden tours to less important status. Younger visitors also visited the natural areas of the park more often and tended to favor more park management emphasis on natural resources. They were more strongly in favor of preserving the park's natural resources and less favorable about the management practice of vista clearing.

Greater interest in the natural aspects of the park on the part of younger visitors also may translate into somewhat less interest on their part in the traditional historic resources of the park. Younger visitors felt they learned less than older visitors about Franklin D. Roosevelt and his life on Campobello Island.

Conclusion

Roosevelt Campobello International Park originated as a traditional "historical" area. However, it appears to be evolving toward significant environmental and related recreational values as well. This is due to changes in the park itself, as it has expanded to surrounding natural areas, but it also is due to changes in the visitor population. The great majority of visitors recognize the significant natural resource base now contained within the park. Perhaps even more important as a management consideration is the evidence that a new generation of younger visitors is clearly more oriented toward this natural resource base than toward the traditional historical values of the park.

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