

Family-orientated, Non-Competitive Outdoor Recreation Events and On-Going Participation: Report Summary

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Aims of the study

The main aim of this study was to investigate if family-orientated, non-competitive outdoor recreation events influence on-going participation in outdoor recreation. This study contributes to an emerging body of work exploring family participation in outdoor recreation. The main research questions in this study were:

1. Why children and parents participate in outdoor recreation events?
2. How an event fits in with other outdoor recreation activities, and general recreation activities children and parents are involved?
3. For children: what activities they do outside and why?
4. For parents: why they like their children participating in events and being involved in outdoor recreation?
5. What role do non-competitive events play, if any, in on-going participation?

Research methods

Three events were chosen for this study as they were explicitly non-competitive and family-orientated. These were:

- The Big Coast Ride (a two day bike ride from Upper Hutt, through to the Wairapara, finishing in Eastbourne). This was held on the weekend of 19-20 March 2011.
- The Kids Bike Jam (a half day mountain biking event for children from 5 – 13 years of age). This event was held in seven locations in 2011. The Auckland event on 22nd of May was chosen for this study.
- Take a Kid Fishing (a half day event where children have a high chance of catching a fish). This event is also held in numerous locations throughout the country. The Dunedin event on 25th of September, 2011 was chosen for this study.

Families that participated in these events in 2010 and in 2011 were interviewed for this study. In total 34 families (57 children and 45 adults) were interviewed. All but two of the families were two parent families and all of the biking families had at least one parent with tertiary level education and in a professional role. The fishing families had a broader range of educational and occupational levels.

A postal survey was also sent to the families that participated in the 2010 Take a Kid Fishing event. The aim of the survey was to collect descriptive data from a wider cross-section of families than was possible through the interview process. The researcher observed at each of the events.

Findings

There is very little research that looks at family outdoor recreation. Of the studies located only two interviewed children about their perspectives on outdoor recreation. On-going outdoor recreation participation appears to result from a combination of personal interest in an activity and being in a wider social network that values outdoor recreation. There are very few studies that look at outdoor recreation events. The focus of existing research has been on the motivations for

participating in the events themselves. The studies did not extend to exploring if events encourage on-going participation in outdoor recreation.

The key findings from this study are:

- An event needs to cater for the activity needs and the social needs of both the children and the parents. Children's enjoyment of the event is related to the level of activity challenge and the opportunity to do things with other children. Parents enjoy a family day out and a chance to socialise with other families. The non-competitive aspect of the events was important for both the children and the parents in this study.
- The majority of the families in this study participated in a range of outdoor recreation and sporting activities. All but three of the families described themselves as either outdoor orientated, sporty or active in their recreation choices. Outdoor activities biking families were involved in included biking, walking, water activities and camping. Some of the fishing families also listed hunting.
- The majority of children in this study preferred to be outside. This choice became more complex as they got older due to increased demands on their time and the changing nature of activities.
- Nearly all of the boys in this study had a good friend who they spent time with in the outdoors. None of the girls had friends that shared their interest in the outdoors. Therefore, the girls were much more reliant on their families for outdoor experiences than the boys.
- Parents liked their children to be involved in outdoor recreation as it was something they had enjoyed when they were growing up. Parents also wanted their children to develop good habits around physical activity and good moral values through their involvement in recreation.
- The fishing families said they wanted their children to know where food comes from and to develop an appreciation for the environment. Fishing was also unique in that there was a strong intergenerational aspect to fishing, with grandparents participating in many of the family fishing experiences.
- The decision to participate in events was negotiated within the family. There were examples where the children's interests in outdoor recreation influenced the parents' decision to participate in an activity.
- Cost is an issue for families and for event organisers. All of the fishing families noted that fishing is the cheapest activity they can do as a family.
- Events contribute to on-going participation for these families in a range of ways. Events can galvanise parent to do an activity with their children; events give the family a focus to organise around; they help to keep activities interesting and re-ignite enthusiasm; through to events being a primary motivator for participation.
- Participating in outdoor recreation appears to be about more than just the enjoyment of the activity. Both parents and children defined themselves in various ways in relation to outdoor recreation, suggesting there are "cultures" that surround outdoor recreation. Along with providing an activity focus, events may play a role in creating a supportive social environment where outdoor recreation is valued.