Exploring Social Apsects of Aircraft use in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park.

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Abstract

National parks represent recreational opportunities for the public and are often significant tourist attractions. There is a widespread use of aircraft for scenic flights and transport of guided and recreational climbing parties in several national parks in the Southern Alps of New Zealand, and this use can impair ground based users' experiences and impede their recreational objectives. There has been a lack of understanding of the social aspects of aircraft use and how users of remote - and back-country areas relate to the use of aircraft, although social impact, such as noise annoyance, has been documented in previous research.

This thesis explores the complex issue of how professional mountain guides and recreational climbers relate to aircraft use in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park (AMCNP), and also the social effects of aircraft use. This is done through a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews with the said user groups.

This study demonstrates that the participants find aircraft use acceptable in the AMCNP due to multiple factors, many of which are site-specific. They also find benefits such as limiting severe approaches; time savings; safety aspects; and waste management to compensate for disadvantages such as noise pollution, loss of natural quiet and crowding. This study also indicates that guided and recreational climbing in the AMCNP is dependent on aircraft in order to sustain current levels of use. Aircraft use does affect user experiences by limiting the feeling of solitude and wilderness, but participants find that acceptable in the AMCNP since these attributes are accessible in other natural areas. Participants are found to prefer to have aircraft activity concentrated to certain areas so that other areas can still provide natural quiet, solitude and wilderness. This study also found aircraft not to be a significant source of recreational conflict in the AMCNP