

AHURIRI AND RUATANIWHA CONSERVATION PARKS: VISITOR STUDY 2006-2007

Authors: Brent Lovelock, Anna Carr (Thompson), Gerald Sides

ABSTRACT

This report combines data sets from visitor surveys undertaken in Ahuriri Conservation Park in 2006 and Ruataniwha Conservation Park in 2007. Both parks, located within the Mackenzie Basin in the central South Island, are newly established, and the visitor studies will play an important role in profiling park users and informing park management, the Department of Conservation (DOC), regarding visitor use of the area. Self-completion questionnaires were distributed in each park for a period of 3-4 months from the main summer holiday period. A total of 524 survey questionnaires are included in this analysis (284 from Ahuriri Conservation Park (ACP) and 240 from Ruataniwha Conservation Park (RCP)). The questionnaires for each park: addressed the following: the nature of the visit, motivations for visiting, use of and satisfaction with the visit and facilities, and sociodemographic descriptors of visitors. Generally, the data sets for each visitor sample – ACP and RCP – show a remarkable level of similarity in terms of visitor profile, the motivations for visiting, the pattern and style of the visit, and the overall levels of satisfaction. Motivations for visiting the parks were virtually identical for respondents from both parks. To go tramping, to experience solitude, scenery, and easy access to nature were the most common motivations. To take children into the outdoors was another strong motivation. Overall visitor satisfaction was very high for both parks (97% were “satisfied” or “very satisfied”), although there were a higher percentage of “very satisfied” respondents in ACP than RCP. Perceptions of crowding were very low in both parks (83% reported the area to be “not crowded at all”).

In terms of visitor profile, New Zealanders predominated (about 80% of respondents), with a low proportion of international visitors. Most visitors were from the South Island and many from the local region. Most respondents were regular users of the outdoors, but were new to these particular Conservation Parks, being first time users of either park. Most visits to the parks were made in groups of two or in other small groups. While foot use dominated within the parks, there were a higher number of 4WD users in RCP (12% of respondents). Most visitors made day trips or short stays of 2-3 nights in both parks, however there were more longer stays in RCP. For overnight visitors to both parks, the use of huts (55%) was greater than the use of tents (45%), although tenting use was marginally greater in ACP than RCP.

An analysis of children versus non-children groups (for both parks combined) revealed very little difference between the groups. Groups with children made more use of unofficial word of mouth information sources about the park, and tended to camp more frequently, but for shorter stays. Motivations for visiting the parks were slightly different, with more emphasis on taking children into the outdoors, and other activities such as mountain biking and picnicking being marginally more common. Both groups with children and groups without children reported low levels of crowding and very high levels of satisfaction with their experience in the new Conservation Parks.