

RUATANIWHA CONSERVATION PARK: VISITOR STUDY 2007

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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of a visitor survey conducted at the Ruataniwha Conservation Park (RCP) from February to June 2007. Questionnaires were distributed to visitors in the area through strategically located collection and drop-off points, in huts and also by the researchers. A total of 240 questionnaires were returned.

The typical visitor to the RCP could be characterised as a 35-54 year old New Zealander, working in a professional position. They would very likely be a South Islander, with about one-third of domestic visitors coming from the local area (South Canterbury, North Otago, and Mackenzie regions). International visitors comprised only 11% of the sample, and were predominantly European in origin. Visitors are most likely to be in pairs (46% of parties), or to perhaps be found in a small group. In terms of actual visitor numbers, small groups are the largest contributor. The typical visitor will be quite experienced in using the New Zealand outdoors with 61% of visitors having over 20 years of such experience, and many (69%) belonging to a tramping or mountaineering club. The typical visitor may have already visited the RCP before, with regular or occasional users comprising 58% of the sample.

Visitors' main motivations for coming to the RCP are to go tramping, to experience solitude, for the scenery, or to obtain easy access to nature. Another major motivation for visitors is to take children or family into the outdoors: 16% of respondents indicated that they were accompanied by children while in the park. While tramping is clearly the main activity undertaken in the RCP, many other activities take place, including (in order of importance) camping, mountain biking, bird watching, hunting, climbing, fishing, 4WDing, picnicking and horse riding. The typical visitor accesses the RCP either by 2WD or 4WD (especially if from the local area). Within the park, access is mostly by foot; however, 15% of visitors use mountain bikes. Some visitors (20%) use 2WD and 4WD to access areas within the park. Visitors generally stay in the park for at least one night and will most likely be using a hut. Smaller numbers of visitors use tents or campervans. However, day trips are also common (37% of visitors). While visitor use is spread over the entire RCP, the most commonly utilised areas (in order of importance) are the Hopkins Valley, the Temple Valley, the Ben Ohau Range and the Huxley Valley.

Visitor satisfaction is very high, with 93% of visitors being "very satisfied" or "satisfied". This high level of satisfaction was expressed for huts and tracks in general. However, toilets in general and particularly the Temple Amenity Area received lower levels of satisfaction. Also, in terms of information sources, lower satisfaction was shown for the DOC RCP website and brochure. Levels of satisfaction were also lower for facilities at some of the smaller more remote huts. Most visitors are satisfied with the current numbers of visitors in the RCP, with 85% of visitors reporting feeling not crowded at all, and only 5% reporting feeling crowded. Overall, 92% of visitors said that they would return to the RCP. The main motivations to return are the range of recreational opportunities that exist within the park, the natural beauty of the park and its accessibility. The main recommendations to arise from this study are made with respect to improving toilet facilities at Temple Amenity Area, and addressing potential growth management issues around 4WD use.