

VISITOR USE AND SATISFACTION IN BARRINGTON TOPS NATIONAL PARK



By David Archer and Tony Griffin

SUSTAINABLE
TOURISM



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National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication Data

Archer, David, 1969- .
Visitor use and satisfaction in Barrington Tops National Park.

Bibliography.
ISBN 1 920704 14 0.

1. Tourists - Queensland - Barrington Tops National Park - Attitudes. 2. Market surveys - Queensland - Barrington Tops National Park. 3. Tourism - Queensland - Barrington Tops National Park. I. Griffin, Tony, 1954- . II. Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism. III. Title.

338.47919442

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Acknowledgements

The Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, an Australian Government Initiative, funded this research.

The successful administration and completion of this study required the cooperation of many individuals. We acknowledge the contributions of Terry Evans, NSW Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Area Manager, and his staff for their assistance and support of this study. A special thank you also to the field assistants, Shawn Buchan, Tim Gray, Joanne Macphee, Jess Ponting, Popi Sotiriadou, Megan Vacaflores and Rhona Wood, who gave of their time to assist. Finally, thanks goes to the many park visitors who willingly gave their time to participate in the study.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	V
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	1
STUDY AIMS & OBJECTIVES	1
CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY	2
SURVEY DESIGN	2
SURVEY ADMINISTRATION	2
SAMPLE SIZE	2
DATA ANALYSIS	3
SURVEY LIMITATIONS	3
CHAPTER 3 RESPONDENT PROFILE	4
CHAPTER 4 VISITOR BEHAVIOUR AND MOTIVATIONS	7
SOURCES OF PARK INFORMATION	7
AWARENESS OF WORLD HERITAGE STATUS	7
REASONS FOR VISIT	7
LENGTH OF STAY	12
LENGTH OF OVERNIGHT STAY	12
LOCATION OF OVERNIGHT STAY	12
GROUP COMPOSITION	13
GROUP SIZE	13
ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION	13
PATTERNS OF WALKING TRACK USE	14
CHAPTER 5 IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS INFLUENCING VISITOR ENJOYMENT	16
CHAPTER 6 VISITOR SATISFACTION	19
SATISFACTION WITH SPECIFIC PARK FACILITIES & FEATURES	20
GENERAL COMMENTS	22
CHAPTER 7 PRIORITISING MANAGEMENT ACTIONS	24
INTERPRETATION AND INFORMATION	25
ENVIRONMENT AND EXPERIENCE	26
FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE	26
PERFORMANCE TARGETS	27
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION	29
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENT	30
BARRINGTON TOPS NATIONAL PARK VISITOR SURVEY	30
APPENDIX B: GENERAL COMMENTS	36
REFERENCES	42
AUTHORS	43

List of Tables

Table 1: Sample size by site	3
Table 2: Age of respondents	4
Table 3: Education level of respondents	4
Table 4: Employment status of respondents	4
Table 5: Occupation of respondents	5
Table 6: Place of residence of respondents	5
Table 7: Birthplace of respondents	5
Table 8: Main language spoken by respondents	6
Table 9: Previous visits to BTNP	6
Table 10: Sources of information used by respondents	7
Table 11: Awareness of World Heritage status	7
Table 12: Importance of reasons for visit	8
Table 13: Length of stay	12
Table 14: Length of overnight stay of campers	12
Table 15: Location of overnight stay	13
Table 16: Group composition	13
Table 17: Group size	13
Table 18: Activities by length of visit	14
Table 19: Activities by previous experience	14
Table 20: Use of walking tracks	15
Table 21: Importance of factors with potential to spoil visitor enjoyment	17
Table 22: Average importance of factors, by length of visit	17
Table 23: Average importance of factors, by prior park experience	18
Table 24: Satisfaction with specific park facilities / features	21
Table 25: Average satisfaction with specific park facilities / features, by length of visit	21
Table 26: Average satisfaction with specific park facilities / features, by prior experience	22
Table 27: Park attributes not meeting the 80% satisfaction target	28

List of Figures

Figure 1. Importance of enjoyment of nature and the outdoors	8
Figure 2. Importance of being close to nature	9
Figure 3. Importance of seeing the sights	9
Figure 4. Importance of spending time with family or friends	9
Figure 5. Importance of resting and relaxing	10
Figure 6. Importance of engaging in recreational activities	10
Figure 7. Importance of getting some exercise	10
Figure 8. Importance of experiencing solitude	11
Figure 9. Importance of learning about native animals and plants	11
Figure 10. Importance of learning about area's cultural history	11
Figure 11. Importance of developing personal skills and abilities	12
Figure 12: Overall satisfaction with visit	19
Figure 13: Willingness to recommend	19
Figure 14: Choice confirmation or disconfirmation	20
Figure 15: Importance-performance analysis grid	24
Figure 16: Indicators for interpretation & information	25
Figure 17: Indicators for environment & experience	26
Figure 18: Indicators for facilities & maintenance	27

Summary

Study Method

This report presents the findings from a visitor survey carried out over a three-day period from Saturday 29 September to Monday 1 October 2001. Visitors aged 15 years and over were contacted at one of five sites within Barrington Tops National Park and invited to participate in the study. Those who agreed were given a questionnaire to complete themselves and mail back in a reply-paid envelope. A total of 556 questionnaires were given out with 256 returned, resulting in a more than acceptable final response rate of 46%.

Respondent Profile

Study respondents were mostly older adults (44.0% were 35-54 years old), highly educated (81.8% had some level of post-secondary education), employed on a full-time or part-time/casual basis (66.3%), and hold middle- to high-level white collar occupations (67.8%). A slight majority (56.8%) of respondents were female.

More than 23% of respondents who are Australian residents were born in an overseas country, while most (94.3%) speak only English at home. Half (50.8%) of the respondents were Sydney residents. For more than half (54.4%), this was their first visit to the park.

Sources of Information

The three most frequently used sources of information for planning the trip to Barrington Tops National Park were regional Tourist Information Centres (12.5%), family or friends (10.5%), and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) website (10.2%). Notably however, a substantial proportion (60.9%) of all respondents did not seek or use any sources of information in planning their visit to the park.

Visitor Motivations

When asked about their reasons for visiting the park, respondents consistently ranked opportunities to enjoy nature and the outdoors, to see the sights, and to be close to nature as being most important. In contrast, respondents consistently placed relatively little importance on developing their personal skills and abilities, learning about the cultural history of the area, learning about native plants and wildlife, and experiencing solitude.

Visitor Behaviour

Fifty-three percent of the respondents either camped overnight in the park or stayed at the Barrington Guest House (BGH). Among day visitors (47.0%) to the park, most stayed a half day or less. During the survey period, campers stayed in the park an average of 2.1 nights, although the length of stay varied from site to site. The average length of stay among guests of Barrington Guest House was 4.6 nights. The great majority (91.4%) were independent travellers who were visiting with family and/or friends. The average group size was 5.4 persons.

The most popular activities undertaken while visiting the park were resting and relaxing (74.6%), taking a short walk (65.2%), sightseeing (64.5%), and picnicking (53.9%).

When asked to identify the walking tracks they used during their visit the most frequently cited was Blue Gum Walk (24.6%), followed by Williams River Walk (18.8%), Carey's Peak Trail (14.5%), Polblue Swamp Trail (13.3%) and Falls Walk (12.5%).

Perceived Importance of National Park Attributes

From the visitors' perspective, anti-social behaviour was rated as the most significant factor likely to negatively affect their enjoyment of a national park experience. More than 80% of all respondents reported that the unruly behaviour of others, presence of rubbish/litter, and noisy people and activities would either "ruin my visit" or "affect my enjoyment quite a lot".

Other important factors, though to a lesser extent, were dirty toilets and crowding issues such as close proximity of other campers, and large numbers of people in picnic areas and on walking tracks. The absence of park rangers, absence of on-site visitor centres, and rough dirt roads were rated by respondents as being of least importance.

Visitor Satisfaction

Respondents expressed very positive feelings overall about their visit to the park, with the vast majority (87.1%) indicating that they would 'definitely' or 'probably' recommend the park to their friends, family and acquaintances.

Particular attributes of the park on which respondents were generally satisfied included: the amount of rubbish/litter, level of peace and quiet, firewood supply, spacing of campsites, range of easy walking tracks, condition of walking tracks, numbers of people on walking tracks, cleanliness of toilets, range of challenging walking tracks, behaviour of other visitors, numbers of people in picnic areas, and sightings of native wildlife.

The survey did identify a number of park attributes that proved less than satisfactory according to most respondents. Most notable among these was the inadequate provision of preparatory (e.g. pre-visit information), advisory (e.g. on-park directional signs and maps) and interpretive (e.g. on-park information on plants, animals and cultural history) information. The provision of drinking water, condition of access roads and presence of park rangers also fell considerably short of the expectations of most respondents.

Prioritising Management Needs

The data on the importance of and satisfaction with the various park attributes were combined in an Importance-Performance analysis (IPA), where visitor satisfaction was the performance indicator. This analysis indicated where there was an apparent need for improvement if enhancing visitor satisfaction is to be pursued as a management objective. Three visitor needs, namely, provision of maps and directional signage, availability of pre-visit information on the park, and sightings of native wildlife, stood out in particular as requiring immediate management attention.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

The Barrington Tops National Park Visitor Study was conducted as part of a collaborative research partnership between the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). This report presents findings from a survey of visitors to Barrington Tops National Park (BTNP) during the period of 29 September to 1 October 2001. More than 250 visitors across five sites completed a self-administered mail-back questionnaire. This report is the third in a series of three reports detailing results of recent visitor survey work carried out at various national parks throughout New South Wales. The reader is referred to Griffin and Archer (2001), and Archer and Griffin (2002) for the first two reports in this series.

National parks are major attractions for international and domestic visitors in Australia. Land management agencies recognise the increasing significance of tourism and recreation as a land use, and must manage the increasing volume and changing requirements of visitors strategically, and on a day-to-day basis. The continued growth of visitation depends on sustainable management of parks, such that the quality of visitor experiences is at least maintained, and the quality and integrity of the environment is protected. Understanding park visitor characteristics, behaviour, motivations and expectations is central to effective management planning and policy making.

Barrington Tops National Park conserves approximately 74,000ha of varying landscapes ranging from World Heritage listed rainforests to wilderness, swamps, and sub-alpine woodlands. A number of rivers in the Barrington Wilderness contain important wild and scenic river values. The diverse vegetation provides habitat for more than 40 threatened species of fauna and flora. The park is located about 100km north of Newcastle and a wide range of recreational opportunities is provided, such as camping, bushwalking, picnicking, swimming and nature study. Car-based camping is provided at Gloucester River Camping Area, Little Murray and Polblue. In addition, walk-in camping is allowed at Big Hole, Wombat Creek, Junction Pools and Black Swamp. Day use picnic areas are found at Gloucester Tops, Williams River, Polblue, Honeysuckle and Devils Hole. A range of walks of varying lengths and degrees of difficulty commence from these areas.

Management at BTNP are presently preparing a Plan of Management (POM) that will stipulate guidelines for the future management of the park. Aspects related to visitor use of parks are of central concern in the POM process, however little is presently known about the characteristics of BTNP visitors or their behaviour. As a consequence, the study aims to generate information that can contribute to more informed management decision making.

Study Aims & Objectives

Specifically, the objectives set for this study were to:

- develop profiles of BTNP visitors and visitation patterns;
- develop an understanding of visitor needs by measuring the importance of various potential factors in national parks, and their impact on the quality of experience;
- determine levels of satisfaction both with overall experience at BTNP as well as specific features, attributes and facilities;
- provide guidance as to how the information could be analysed and used to aid management decisions at a range of levels; and
- establish baseline data for comparison with future, ongoing monitoring of BTNP visitor profiles, needs and satisfaction.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Survey Design

Data reported for this study were collected using a mail-back questionnaire (see Appendix A for the complete instrument). The design of the survey instrument and methods for conducting this study closely followed techniques used recently by the authors in other visitor studies conducted elsewhere in New South Wales (Griffin & Archer 2001; Archer & Griffin 2002). Hence, no pre-testing of the questionnaire design was conducted for this study. However some minor refinements were made along with the inclusion of additional questions at the request of park management. A more detailed description of these modifications is provided in the relevant section of the report.

The questionnaire collected information on the following:

- number of previous visits to BTNP
- sources of information on BTNP used prior to visit
- awareness of World Heritage status of BTNP
- length of stay
- location of overnight stay
- group composition and size
- mode and number of vehicles used to travel to BTNP
- reasons for visiting BTNP
- activities undertaken during visit
- walking trails used and length of time spent on those trails
- importance of a range of national park factors to visitor enjoyment
- satisfaction with a range of BTNP facilities and features
- overall satisfaction with visit
- place of residence
- country of birth
- language normally spoken at home
- age, gender, employment status, occupation and education
- general comments on visit (See Appendix B).

Survey Administration

Six field research assistants were employed for the survey. Working in pairs, each team was allocated to a pre-determined location within the park to intercept visitors and distribute the questionnaires. The survey was administered during spring and coincided with the September/October NSW school holidays. Given time and financial constraints, the sampling period was chosen to maximise the number of responses that could be achieved within a short time. Questionnaire distribution was carried out over a three-day survey period from Saturday, 29 September to Monday, 1 October 2001 inclusive. All visitors encountered at a site, 15 years and over, were invited to participate in the study, after a brief introduction and explanation of the purpose of the research. All members of a group were able to participate if they met the age requirement.

In addition, with permission from NPWS and operator management, a quantity of questionnaires was left at the reception counter of the Barrington Guest House (BGH), a privately operated lodging situated just outside the park boundary and a short walking distance from the Williams River Day Use Area.

Sample Size

Five sites were sampled as part of the study. These were Polblue Camp and Day Use Area, Gloucester River Camp Area, Gloucester Tops Day Use Area, Williams River Day Use Area, and the Barrington Guest House located adjacent to the park boundary. A total of 577 visitors were contacted at all sites during the sampling period and invited to participate in the study. Twenty-one individuals refused this request. A total of 256 usable questionnaires were collected from all sites, resulting in a final response rate of 46%. No reminder letters were sent to respondents as no personal contact details were recorded. Table 1 gives a breakdown of numbers of

completed questionnaires by survey site. The largest number of questionnaires was collected from the Williams River Day Use Area.

Table 1: Sample size by site

Survey Site	Frequency	Percent
Polblue	43	16.8
Gloucester Tops/River	53	20.6
Williams River	111	43.4
Barrington Guest House	45	17.6
Not known	4	1.6
Total	256	100

Data Analysis

Data collected in the survey were coded for entry and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software database program. Methods of analysis used to interpret the data included frequencies, cross-tabulations and univariate analyses, which provided descriptive information including measures of central tendency (mean, median). The analysis also includes examination of some bivariate relationships between variables and certain visitor and visit characteristics. Chi-square, analysis of variance, and t-tests were used to test for significant bivariate relationships, depending on whether visitor characteristics were assessed as nominal, ordinal or interval data. Any significant statistical differences referred to between sub-groups are measured at the $p < 0.05$ or 95% confidence level.

Survey Limitations

All survey designs have limitations that influence the representativeness of the sample and subsequent extrapolation of findings to the wider visitor population. This study of visitors to BTNP has the following limitations:

1. The data reported reflect the responses of only those visitors who participated in the study. The sample may not necessarily reflect the responses of other users not included in the study.
2. The data represent only those people who visited the sites sampled during the 3-day period from 29 September to 1 October 2001.
3. Individuals with non-English speaking backgrounds may be under-represented.

Chapter 3

Respondent Profile

This section describes eight socio-demographic characteristics of survey respondents: gender, age, level of education, employment status, occupation, place of residence, birthplace, and main language spoken. In addition, data on number of previous visits to BTNP by respondents is also detailed. These data are intended to provide insights into the range of visitors using the park.

The sample in this study consisted of 256 visitors, of which 55.5% were females, 42.2% were males and the remainder did not complete this item on the questionnaire. Age of respondents varied, with almost two-thirds (65.8%) between 25 and 54 years (Table 2). The minimum age for participation was 15. One in four (24.6%) respondents were over 55 years, while 9.5% were between 15 and 24 years.

Table 2: Age of respondents

Age Group	Percent
15-24	9.5
25-34	21.8
35-44	23.4
45-54	20.6
55-64	15.5
65-74	7.9
75+	1.2

Though there was variation in the highest level of education attained, as a whole, respondents were highly educated, with the majority of respondents having completed some form of tertiary qualification (Table 3).

Table 3: Education level of respondents

Level of Education	Percent
Bachelors Degree/Diploma	33.6
TAFE Certificate/Diploma	20.9
Postgraduate Degree/Diploma	19.8
Secondary School	18.2
Trade/Technical Certificate	7.5
Primary School	--

Almost two-thirds (66.3%) of respondents were in paid (includes full-time, part-time and casual) employment (Table 4). Individuals who were retired or not looking for work accounted for 15.3% of respondents, while 7.5% were on home duties.

Table 4: Employment status of respondents

Employment Status	Percent
Full-time paid work	50.2
Part-time/casual paid work	16.1
Retired, not looking for work	15.3
Home/family duties	7.5
Student	4.7
Other	4.7
Unemployed, looking for work	0.8
Volunteer work	0.8

Among those respondents in paid employment, the majority occupied middle- to high-level white collar positions, with 42.0% employed as ‘professionals’, 15.5% in ‘managerial and administration’ positions, and 10.3% employed as ‘associate professionals’ (Table 5). Clerical, sales and service workers also accounted for a significant number of respondents at 18.3%. Compared to 2001 Census data for NSW, study respondents were significantly over-represented in professional and managerial occupations, and were under-represented in clerical, sales and service, production and transport, and labouring occupations.

Table 5: Occupation of respondents

Occupation	Study Sample (%)	Census 2001-NSW
Managers and administrators	15.5	9.4
Professional	42.0	19.1
Associate professional	10.3	11.6
Tradesperson and related workers	10.3	11.9
Production and transport workers	2.3	7.9
Clerical, sales and service workers	18.3	30.0
Labourers and related workers	1.1	8.0

Sydney residents comprised half of all respondents (50.8%) (Table 6). On a site-by-site basis, Sydney residents represented the single largest proportion of visitors at each survey location without exception. Residents of Newcastle, Maitland, Singleton, Gloucester, Muswellbrook and Dungog, loosely referred to here as 'locals', comprised a combined 20.0% of respondents, followed by Rest of NSW (12.0%). Visitors from interstate were few in numbers while international tourists accounted for 2.8% of respondents. 'Local' residents accounted for a significantly greater proportion of day visitors than overnight visitors. Likewise, local residents were much more prevalent among repeat visitors than first-time visitors.

Table 6: Place of residence of respondents

Place of Residence	Percent
Sydney ^a	50.8
Newcastle ^b	7.2
NSW Central Coast	6.0
Maitland	3.6
Singleton/Gloucester/Muswellbrook/Dungog	9.2
Rest of NSW	12.0
Victoria	1.2
Western Australia	<1
ACT	1.6
Queensland	5.2
International	2.8

a Sydney and metropolitan suburbs only

b Newcastle suburbs and Lake Macquarie

Among respondents identifying as Australian residents (n=246), the vast majority were born in Australia (76.4%), with almost one-quarter (23.6%) born overseas (Table 7). The most notable birthplace regions of respondents were North-West Europe (13.0%), followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (3.7%) and Southern and Eastern Europe (1.6%).

Table 7: Birthplace of respondents

Birthplace	Study Sample (%)	Census 2001-NSW
Australia	76.4	70.5
Oceania and Antarctica (excluding Australia)	1.2	2.4
North-West Europe	13.0	5.8
Southern and Eastern Europe	1.6	4.1
North-East Asia	1.2	2.7
Southern and Central Asia	0.8	1.2
Americas	1.2	1.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.7	0.7
North Africa and Middle East	--	2.0
South-East Asia	0.8	3.1
Other	--	0.1

Among respondents identifying as Australian residents (n=246), the vast majority (94.3%) speak only English at home (Table 8). Of those who speak another language, the range included French, Dutch, Russian, German, Maltese, Yugoslavian, Japanese, Hindi and Danish.

Table 8: Main language spoken by respondents

Main Language Spoken	Percent
English only	94.3
French	1.2
Russian	0.9
Dutch	0.9
German	0.4
Maltese	0.4
Yugoslavian	0.4
Hindi	0.4
Japanese	0.4
Danish	0.4

Respondents were asked about their previous experience of BTNP. Slightly more than half (54.4%) reported that this was their first visit to the park (Table 9). Among those with previous experience, most reported being on their first visit in the last 12 months.

Table 9: Previous visits to BTNP

Previous Visits	Percent
Never visited before	54.4
Once in last 12 months	25.0
2-3 times in last 12 months	16.0
4-5 times in last 12 months	1.7
6+ times in last 12 months	2.8

Chapter 4

Visitor Behaviour and Motivations

Sources of Park Information

Identifying the information sources used most often by visitors in finding out about a park can help managers meet the pre-visit information needs of particular target groups and more confidently allocate scarce human and financial resources to where they are most effective. It is also important for managers to have knowledge of the experience level of visitors, as it will influence their information and communication behaviours and needs. First time visitors, for example, are more likely than repeat visitors to seek information about a particular setting. Hence, they may exhibit a greater inclination to read information provided by park management and the tourism industry.

Slightly more than one-third (39.1%) of respondents sought and used some form of park information prior to their visit. In view of the relatively high proportion of first time visitors among respondents (see Table 9); this finding provides evidence of an under-utilisation of information about BTNP in the trip planning stages, particularly among first time visitors. Nevertheless, the findings indicated that first time visitors were significantly more likely to have sought and used information about the park than repeat visitors.

Respondents were asked to identify those sources of information used to plan their visit to BTNP from a list of nine items (Table 10). The most commonly used source was regional Tourist Information Centres (12.5%). The next most frequently used source of information was family and friends (10.5%), followed by the NPWS website (10.2%), and general national park/tourist guidebooks (9.0%). The least used information sources included state motoring organisations (2.3%), the popular media (3.1%), and NPWS visitor centres/offices (3.5%).

Table 10: Sources of information used by respondents

Sources of Information	First Time Visitors (%)	Repeat Visitors (%)	All Respondents (%)
Tourist Information Centres	17.3	6.8	12.5
Family and/or friends	15.1	5.1	10.5
NPWS website	13.7	6.0	10.2
National park/tourist guidebooks	8.6	9.4	9.0
NPWS brochure/guidebook	8.6	5.1	7.0
Other source	6.5	2.6	4.7
NPWS visitor centre/office	5.0	1.7	3.5
Popular media	5.0	0.9	3.1
State motoring organisations	2.9	1.7	2.3
<i>Did not use any information prior to visit</i>	<i>48.9</i>	<i>75.2</i>	<i>60.1</i>

Awareness of World Heritage Status

Respondents were asked the question “before this visit, were you aware that BTNP was within a World Heritage Area?” Fewer than half (45.5%) the respondents expressed awareness of its World Heritage status (Table 11). At first glance, this may be partly explained by the predominance of respondents who were first time visitors to BTNP (see Table 9). An analysis of awareness levels among first time and repeat visitors reveals that 58.6% of repeat visitors and 34.5% of first time visitors were aware of the park’s World Heritage status. The relatively low overall level of World Heritage awareness suggests two possible causes.

1. particular sources of pre-visit information are failing to sufficiently impart awareness, which is compounded by the low utilisation of this information; and
2. at present, on-site information and signage is insufficient or ineffective.

Table 11: Awareness of World Heritage status

WHA Aware	Percent
First time visitors	34.5
Repeat visitors	58.6
All respondents	45.5

Reasons for Visit

A key objective of the study was to identify what motivates people to visit BTNP. Respondents were asked to indicate, using a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = extremely important), how important each of

eleven reasons were for visiting the park. Mean scores for each reason, ranked in order from highest to lowest importance, are provided in Table 12. According to respondents, the three most important reasons for visiting BTNP were:

1. a desire to enjoy nature and the outdoors,
2. a desire to be close to nature, and
3. a desire to see the sights (see also Figure 1 to Figure 11).

The high importance ratings ascribed to those three motivations suggests that visitors regard the opportunity to simply experience nature as a key aspect of their need fulfilment, without a concomitant need to use the setting for any instrumental purpose. In contrast, a desire to develop personal skills and abilities, and to learn about the natural environment and cultural history of the area, were rated the least important reasons for visiting.

The study found that day visitors place significantly greater importance than overnight visitors on seeing the sights. No significant differences in importance were found in relation to the motivations of first time and repeat visitors. In general, these findings suggest that for most visitors the attraction of BTNP as a place to visit can be attributed more to the characteristics of the setting, as opposed to more intrinsic motivations, such as learning and self-development.

Table 12: Importance of reasons for visit

Reason for visit	Mean Importance* -All respondents	Mean Importance- Day visitors	Mean Importance- Overnight visitors	Significant Difference (p<.05)
To enjoy nature and the outdoors	4.14	4.08	4.20	No
To be close to nature	3.91	3.88	3.94	No
To see the sights	3.90	4.03	3.79	Yes
To spend time with family and/or friends	3.72	3.65	3.78	No
To rest and relax	3.71	3.59	3.82	No
To engage in recreational activities	3.62	3.53	3.69	No
To get some exercise	3.26	3.15	3.35	No
To experience solitude	2.91	2.84	2.98	No
To learn about native animals and plants	2.75	2.66	2.80	No
To learn about the cultural history of the area	2.43	2.54	2.34	No
To develop my personal skills and abilities	1.83	1.78	1.87	No

* 5-point scale where 1=not important at all, 5=extremely important.

Figure 1. Importance of enjoyment of nature and the outdoors

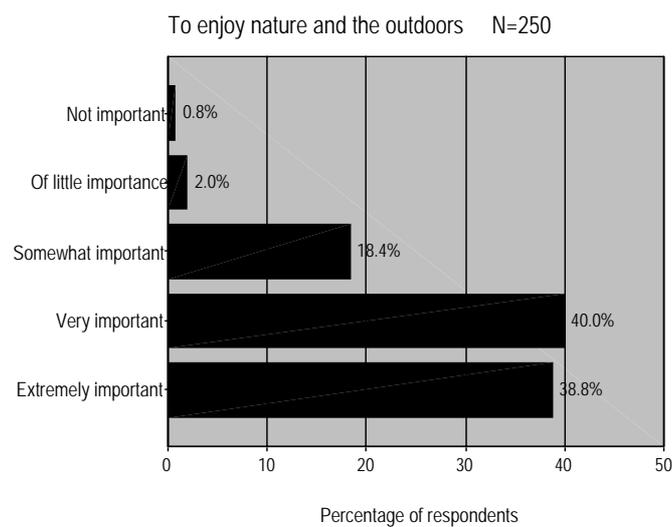


Figure 2. Importance of being close to nature

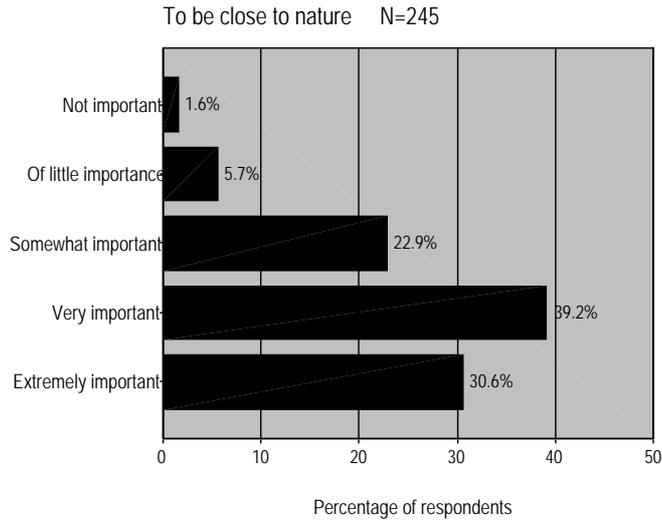


Figure 3. Importance of seeing the sights

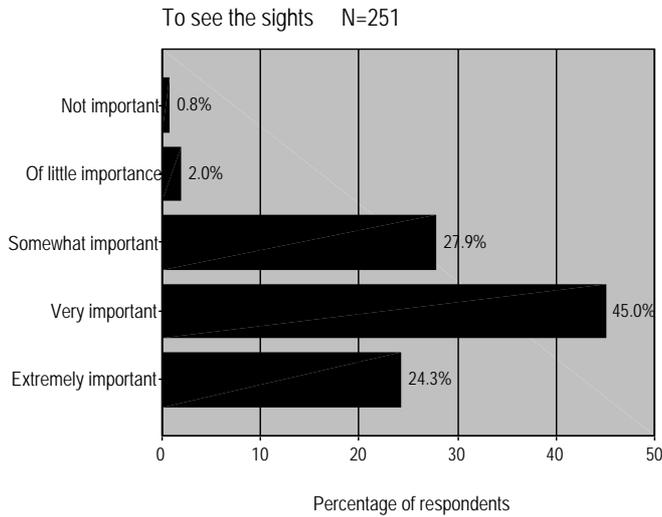


Figure 4. Importance of spending time with family or friends

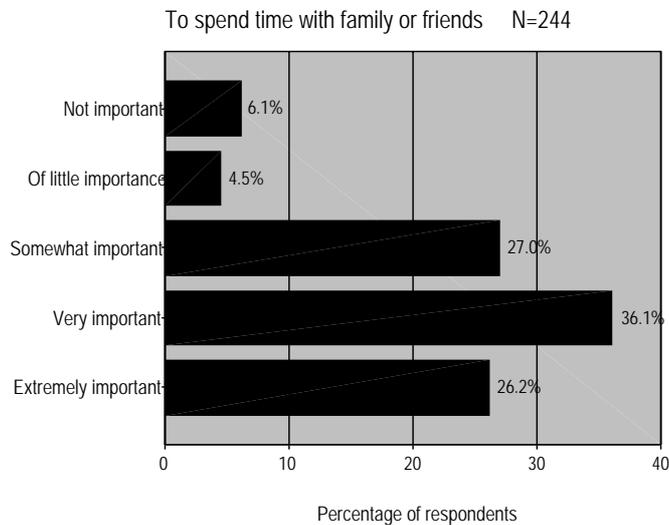


Figure 5. Importance of resting and relaxing

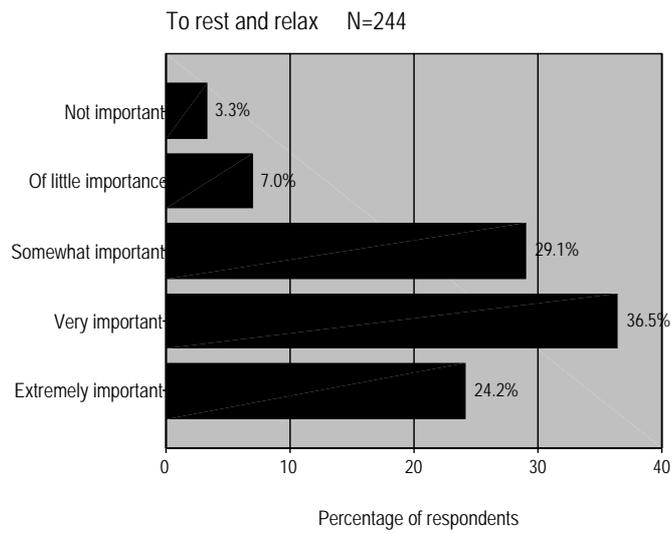


Figure 6. Importance of engaging in recreational activities

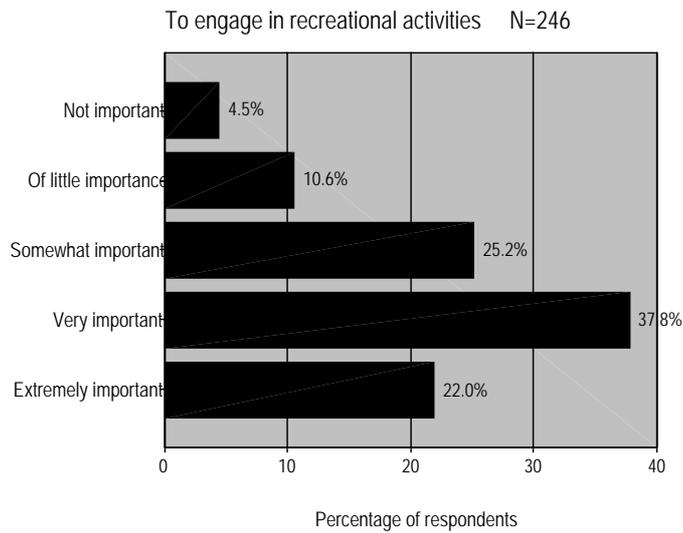


Figure 7. Importance of getting some exercise

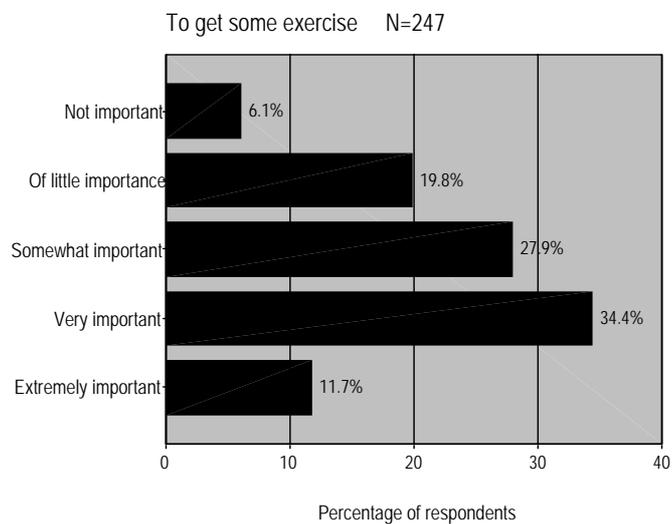


Figure 8. Importance of experiencing solitude

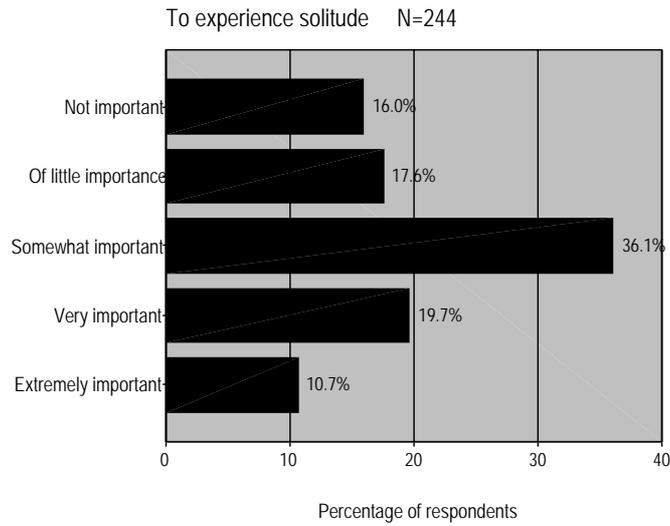


Figure 9. Importance of learning about native animals and plants

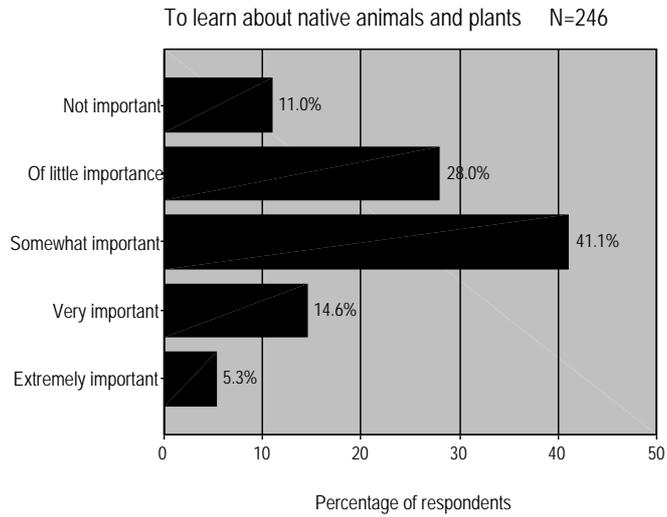


Figure 10. Importance of learning about area's cultural history

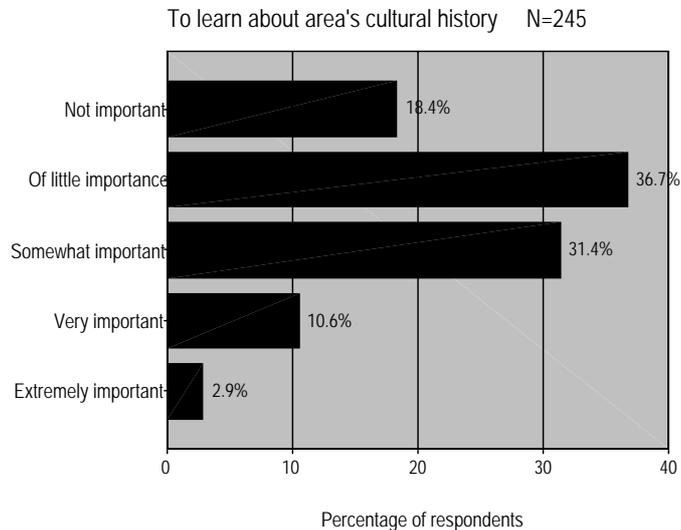
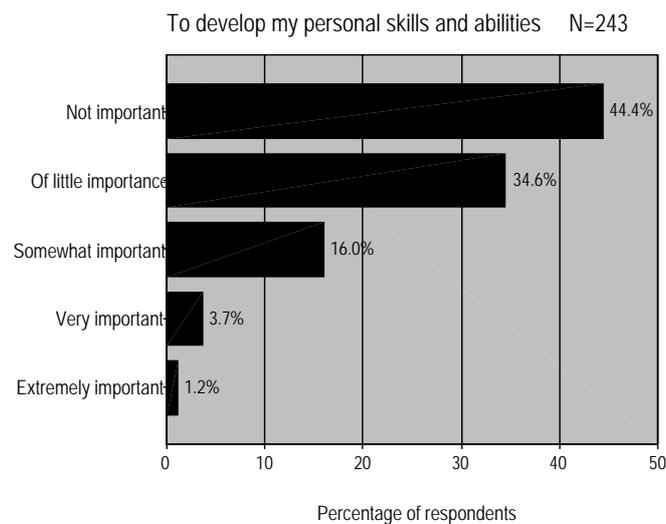


Figure 11. Importance of developing personal skills and abilities



Length of Stay

Slightly more than half (53.0%) the respondents were overnight visitors (Table 13). This includes those respondents who were staying overnight at the nearby Barrington Guest House as well as those who camped within the park. Almost one-quarter (24.1%) stayed for half a day (2-4 hours) while 17.7% stayed all day (4-8 hours). These findings provide evidence that a majority of BTNP visitors are prepared to invest a considerable amount of time pursuing their interests and exploring the attractions found throughout the park.

Table 13: Length of stay

Length of Stay	All Respondents (%)	Polblue Camp / Day Use Area	Gloucester Tops / River	Williams River	Barrington Guest House
Overnight	53.0	61.9	45.3	38.9	88.1
Half day (2-4 hours)	24.1	9.5	35.8	31.5	4.8
All day (4-8 hours)	17.7	16.7	18.9	22.2	7.1
Less than 2 hours	5.2	11.9	--	7.4	--

Length of Overnight Stay

For campers, the average length of stay during their visit to BTNP was 2.1 nights (Table 14). The vast majority (91.8%) of campers stayed for three nights or less, with the maximum number of nights spent camping being seven nights. The study found that visitors camped on average 2.6 nights at Gloucester River Camp Area and 1.6 nights at Polblue Camp Area. Those staying at Barrington Guest House stayed the longest with the average length of stay being 4.6 nights.

Table 14: Length of overnight stay of campers

Number of Nights	Percent
1 night	30.1
2 nights	38.4
3 nights	23.3
4-7 nights	8.2
Average	2.1 nights

Location of Overnight Stay

Among respondents who stayed overnight, 43.2% were staying at the privately operated Barrington Guest House located near the Williams River Day Use Area (Table 15). Almost one-fifth (18.9%) of respondents camped at Polblue Camp Area, while 11.4% camped at Gloucester River Camp Area. Prominent within the 'other' category were 'nearby private accommodation', Allyn River Camp Area, and unspecified bush camping.

Table 15: Location of overnight stay

Location of Overnight Stay	Percent*
Gloucester River Camp Area	11.4
Polblue Camp Area	18.9
Little Murray Camp Area	1.5
Junction Pools Camp Area	2.3
Big Hole Camp Area	3.8
Wombat Creek Camp Area	6.8
Devils Hole Camp Area	1.5
Barrington Guest House	43.2
Other	22.7

* Respondents could provide more than one response. Thus the number of responses exceeds 100%.

Group Composition

The vast majority (91.4%) of respondents were visiting BTNP with family and/or friends, while 5.5% were part of a club/organisation (Table 16).

Table 16: Group composition

Group Composition	Percent
Alone	2.0
With family and/or friends	91.4
Part of commercial tour	0.4
Part of club/organisation	5.5
Part of school group	0.4
With work colleagues	0.4

Group Size

On average, groups of visitors comprised 5.4 persons (Table 17). Group size varied from one person to 35 people with the median being 4.0 persons. The study found that repeat visitors tended to travel in significantly larger groups (average of 6.2 persons) than first time visitors (average of 4.6 persons). The majority of respondents travelled to BTNP in 1 or 2 vehicles (average of 1.7 vehicles), while the maximum number of vehicles used by any one group was 10.

Table 17: Group size

Group Size	Percent
1 person	2.0
2 people	32.3
3 people	9.4
4 people	18.5
5 people	5.9
6 or more people	31.9
Average	5.4 persons

Activity Participation

Respondents were asked to report the types of activities participated in during their visit to BTNP. The most common activities included resting and relaxing, short walk, sightseeing, picnicking, socialising, wildlife/plant viewing, medium walk, and photography/painting/drawing. The activities participated in by fewest respondents included commercial/group tours, cycling, and fishing.

The study found that, generally speaking, both day and overnight visitors do the same sorts of things while visiting BTNP, although differences did emerge between these two groups in terms of level of participation (Table 18). For the majority of activities, greater proportions of overnight visitors than day visitors participated. This is not surprising as day visitors have only a fraction of the time available that overnight visitors have. In contrast, the only activity in which the rate of participation was significantly higher among day visitors than overnight visitors was picnicking.

With respect to first time and repeat visitors, the study found minimal variation in activity participation (Table 19). The only exceptions were picnicking and swimming, which were participated in by greater proportions of repeat visitors than first time visitors.

Table 18: Activities by length of visit

Activity	All Respondents	Day Visitors	Overnight Visitors
	-----percent-----		
Resting and relaxing	74.6	62.4	84.8
Taking a short walk	65.2	65.0	63.6
Sightseeing	64.5	64.1	65.2
Picnic/BBQ	53.9	61.5	47.7
Socialising	47.3	26.5	64.4
Wildlife/plant viewing	46.9	35.0	56.1
Taking a medium walk	44.5	30.8	55.3
Photography/painting/drawing	40.2	37.6	40.9
Camping	25.4	<1	48.5
Swimming	20.3	11.1	29.5
Four wheel driving	18.0	17.9	18.9
Taking a long walk	16.0	9.4	22.0
Taking an overnight walk	6.3	-	12.1
Fishing	2.3	<1	3.8
Cycling	2.3	1.7	3.0
Commercial/group tour	2.0	-	3.8

*Respondents could provide more than one activity. Thus the total number of responses exceeds 100%.

Table 19: Activities by previous experience

Activity	All Respondents	First-Time Visitors	Repeat Visitors
	-----percent-----		
Resting and relaxing	74.6	73.4	76.1
Taking a short walk	65.2	61.2	70.1
Sightseeing	64.5	63.3	65.8
Picnic/BBQ	53.9	46.0	63.2
Socialising	47.3	43.2	52.1
Wildlife/plant viewing	46.9	46.8	47.0
Taking a medium walk	44.5	48.2	40.2
Photography/painting/drawing	40.2	41.7	38.5
Camping	25.4	25.2	25.6
Swimming	20.3	13.0	29.1
Four wheel driving	18.0	15.1	21.4
Taking a long walk	16.0	13.7	18.8
Taking an overnight walk	6.3	4.3	8.5
Fishing	2.3	2.9	1.7
Cycling	2.3	1.4	3.4
Commercial/group tour	2.0	1.4	2.6

*Respondents could provide more than one activity. Thus the total number of responses exceeds 100%.

Patterns of Walking Track Use

The Blue Gum Walk (24.6%) attracted the greatest proportion of respondents (Table 20). The next most popular walking track within BTNP was Williams River Walk (18.8%), followed by Carey's Peak Trail (14.5%), and Polblue Swamp Trail (13.3%).

The study found that day visitors used fewer walking tracks than overnight visitors. This is not surprising as they have only a fraction of the time available that overnight visitors have. Significantly greater proportions of overnight visitors than day visitors used Williams River Walk, Carey's Peak Trail, Burruga Swamp Walk and The Big Hole Walk. In contrast, greater proportions of day visitors than overnight visitors used Falls Walk, River Walk (Gloucester Tops section) and Honeysuckles Trail.

Table 20: Use of walking tracks

Walking Track	Day Visitors	Overnight Visitors	All Respondents	Median Time Spent
	-----percent-----			minutes
Blue Gum Walk	22.2	25.8	24.6	90
Williams River Walk	10.3	24.2	18.8	150
Carey's Peak Trail	7.7	20.5	14.5	263
Polblue Swamp Trail	12.0	13.6	13.3	60
Falls Walk	16.2	9.8	12.5	45
River Walk (GT)	15.4	8.3	11.7	60
Antarctic Beech Walk	9.4	11.4	10.9	30
Burruga Swamp Walk	5.1	13.6	10.2	60
Devils Hole Walk	6.8	6.1	6.6	17
Barrington Tops Plateau Trail	5.1	7.6	6.3	150
Carey's Peak to Big Hole	3.4	7.6	5.5	120
Rocky Crossing Walk	1.7	9.1	5.5	150
Link Trail	2.6	6.8	5.1	150
River Walk (GR)	4.3	6.1	5.1	30
Gloucester Tops Circuit	2.6	6.8	4.7	150
The Big Hole Walk	-	9.1	4.7	240
Jerusalem Creek Walk	1.7	6.1	3.9	60
Honeysuckles Trail	6.0	1.5	3.9	18
Allyn River Walk	<1	6.1	3.5	60
Sharpe's Creek Walk	-	3.8	2.0	60
Aeroplane Hill Walk	-	3.0	1.6	75
Fir Forest Walk	3.4	-	1.6	60
Edwards Swamp Walk	-	1.5	<1	60
Ridge Walk	-	<1	<1	270
Heritage Trail	<1	<1	<1	150
Mountaineer Trail	-	<1	<1	480
Salisbury Gap Walk	-	<1	<1	360
Glowang Walk	-	-	-	N/A

Chapter 5

Importance of Factors Influencing Visitor Enjoyment

This study investigated the importance of a range of factors in national parks relating to facility provision and maintenance, information provision, social behaviour and crowding, and their effect on visitor enjoyment. There are a variety of ways in which importance of park attributes can be measured. A common method is to simply ask visitors to respond on a scale indicating the level of perceived importance, e.g. from 'very important' to 'not important'. A disadvantage of this method is that it involves a level of abstraction rather than focussing directly on the effects on visitor enjoyment (quality of experience). A previous study by the authors in a set of seven northern NSW national parks trialled both methods and found that the response scale relating directly to effects on visitor enjoyment tended to produce a wider range of responses (Griffin & Archer 2001). It was concluded that this method was more successful in drawing distinctions between various park attributes and was less likely to lead to the importance of these being overstated. Consequently, this method was used for the present study.

Respondents in the present study were asked to indicate, using a scale from 1 to 4 (1 = would not worry me at all, 4 = would ruin my visit), the extent to which each of twenty factors would negatively impact on their enjoyment of a national park setting. This question was an attempt to assess what factors (for example noisy people, litter, large numbers of people or presence of rangers) are most important in influencing the quality of a national park experience. Mean scores were calculated to reflect the average importance ascribed to each factor. A mean score of 1 for example would indicate that a factor does not worry respondents at all and therefore is of little importance in terms of visitor enjoyment. Alternatively a mean score of 4 for a factor would suggest it is highly important to visitor enjoyment. A mean score of 3 would indicate that a factor would affect enjoyment quite a lot, while a mean score of 2 would indicate a factor that would affect enjoyment slightly. The question was intended to relate to national park settings in general rather than BTNP specifically.

Study findings indicated that anti-social behaviour by other visitors has the greatest influence on visitor enjoyment, and hence importance, in a national park experience (Table 21). To illustrate, the unruly behaviour of other visitors, presence of rubbish/litter, and noisy people or activities received the three highest average importance ratings. Other important factors, though to a lesser extent, were dirty toilets and crowding issues such as close proximity of other campers and large numbers of people in picnic areas and on walking tracks. As a point of note, visitors surveyed at Gloucester River Camping Area attached significantly greater importance than visitors elsewhere in BTNP on the negative impact of close proximity of other campers.

Such findings should be of considerable interest to park managers as they indicate that, broadly speaking, anti-social behaviour by other visitors is perceived by a majority of visitors to have greater negative impact on their enjoyment of a national park setting than factors relating to crowding and numbers.

Clear differences were also revealed in the importance placed by visitors on different types of information provision. For example, the inadequate provision of on-site directional signage/maps and pre-visit information were rated by respondents as being reasonably important, whereas in contrast respondents rated the inadequate provision of visitor centres and on-site interpretive information about the natural environment and cultural history of the area as being relatively unimportant to their enjoyment of a national park setting.

Overall, the least important factors were presence of park rangers, presence of on-site visitor centres and condition of the access roads. In general, these findings are broadly similar to the results of research recently conducted by the authors in other NSW national parks.

The study found significant differences in perceived importance between different types of visitors were evident for only six of the factors. For example, on average, day visitors perceived dirty toilets and rough dirt roads would have greater negative impact on their enjoyment of a national park setting than did overnight visitors (Table 22). With respect to first time and repeat visitors, the study found that the perceived negative impact of noisy people or activities, and inadequate provisions of on-site directional signage/maps, pre-visit information, and visitor centres, was significantly greater among first time visitors than repeat visitors (Table 23). This is not surprising given that first time visitors are often likely to seek information about sites they have not visited previously.

Table 21: Importance of factors with potential to spoil visitor enjoyment

Factor	Average Importance*
Unruly behaviour of other visitors	3.72
Rubbish/litter	3.39
Noisy people or activities	3.33
Dirty toilets	3.00
Close proximity of other campers	2.71
Inadequate on-site maps and directional signage	2.70
Large numbers of people in picnic areas	2.55
Inadequate pre-visit information on park	2.55
Large numbers of people on walking tracks	2.54
Poorly maintained walking tracks	2.53
Very few sightings of native wildlife	2.46
No drinking water provided	2.28
Too few easy walking tracks	2.12
Inadequate on-site information – plants and animals	2.07
Little or no firewood available	2.03
No challenging walking tracks	1.98
Inadequate on-site information – cultural history of area	1.96
Rough dirt roads	1.93
No visitor centre in park	1.68
No rangers present or available in park	1.65

*4-point scale where 1 = would not worry me at all, 4 = would ruin my visit.

Table 22: Average importance of factors, by length of visit

Factor	Day Visitors*	Overnight Visitors	Sig. Difference (p<.05)
Unruly behaviour of other visitors	3.74	3.73	No
Rubbish/litter	3.32	3.44	No
Noisy people or activities	3.29	3.38	No
Dirty toilets	3.16	2.89	Yes
Close proximity of other campers	2.67	2.78	No
Inadequate on-site maps and directional signage	2.71	2.71	No
Large numbers of people in picnic areas	2.52	2.59	No
Inadequate pre-visit information on park	2.54	2.59	No
Large numbers of people on walking tracks	2.52	2.56	No
Poorly maintained walking tracks	2.57	2.54	No
Very few sightings of native wildlife	2.37	2.54	No
No drinking water provided	2.38	2.23	No
Too few easy walking tracks	2.18	2.07	No
Inadequate on-site information – plants and animals	2.05	2.10	No
Little or no firewood available	2.13	1.97	No
No challenging walking tracks	1.90	2.07	No
Inadequate on-site information – cultural history of area	1.92	1.99	No
Rough dirt roads	2.15	1.75	Yes
No visitor centre in park	1.75	1.60	No
No rangers present or available in park	1.68	1.64	No

*4-point scale where 1 = would not worry me at all, 4 = would ruin my visit.

Table 23: Average importance of factors, by prior park experience

Factor	First Time Visitors*	Repeat Visitors	Sig. Difference (p<.05)
Unruly behaviour of other visitors	3.76	3.68	No
Rubbish/litter	3.44	3.32	No
Noisy people or activities	3.42	3.22	Yes
Dirty toilets	3.04	2.96	No
Close proximity of other campers	2.82	2.59	No
Inadequate on-site maps and directional signage	2.85	2.53	Yes
Large numbers of people in picnic areas	2.59	2.50	No
Inadequate pre-visit information on park	2.68	2.39	Yes
Large numbers of people on walking tracks	2.55	2.52	No
Poorly maintained walking tracks	2.63	2.42	No
Very few sightings of native wildlife	2.45	2.46	No
No drinking water provided	2.36	2.19	No
Too few easy walking tracks	2.21	2.02	No
Inadequate on-site information – plants and animals	2.12	2.01	No
Little or no firewood available	2.02	2.05	No
No challenging walking tracks	1.96	2.00	No
Inadequate on-site information – cultural history of area	2.04	1.86	No
Rough dirt roads	2.01	1.84	No
No visitor centre in park	1.82	1.50	Yes
No rangers present or available in park	1.70	1.59	No

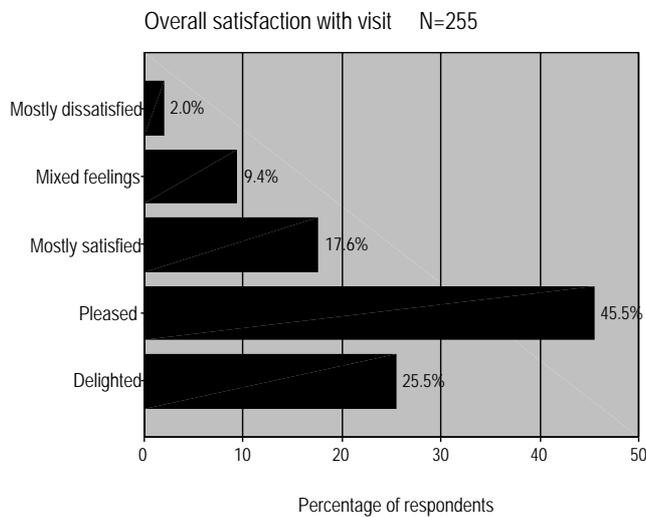
* 4-point scale where 1 = would not worry me at all, 4 = would ruin my visit.

Chapter 6

Visitor Satisfaction

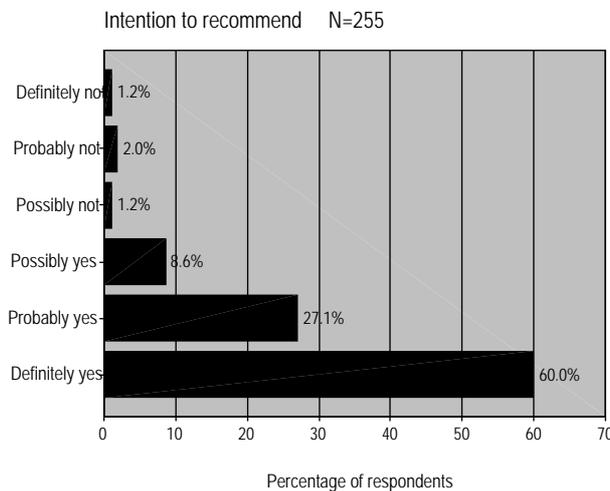
Respondents were asked a series of questions to determine levels of satisfaction with their visit to BTNP. Firstly, respondents were asked to describe their overall feelings about their visit using a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = terrible, 7 = delighted). Overall, visitors expressed very positive feelings about their BTNP visit. Seventy-one percent of respondents gave an overall score of 6 or 7 with a mean score of 5.83 (Table 12). Eleven percent of respondents gave an overall score of 4 or below, reflecting some degree of dissatisfaction or at best ‘mixed feelings’. Those who reported being dissatisfied overall were mostly day visitors and were on their first visit to the park. The study found that, on average, overnight visitors (mean = 6.08) were more satisfied than day visitors (mean = 5.52). Similarly, the study also found that, on average, repeat visitors (mean = 6.03) were more satisfied than first time visitors (mean = 5.66).

Figure 12: Overall satisfaction with visit



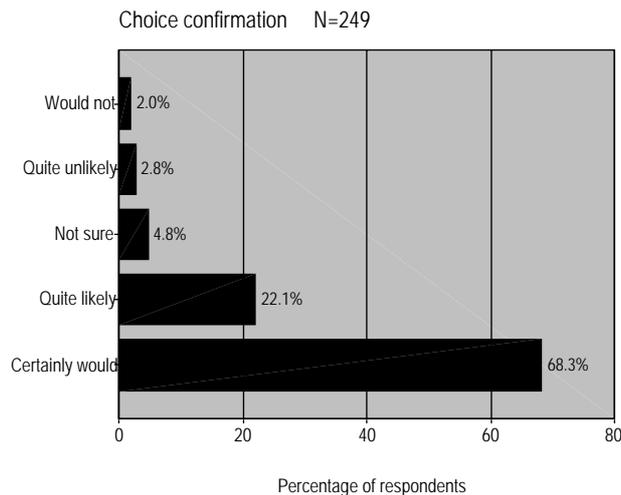
Two additional indicators of overall satisfaction were utilised. Firstly, respondents were asked to indicate how likely they were to recommend a trip to BTNP to others, using a scale from 1 to 6 (1 = definitely not, 6 = definitely yes). Eighty-seven percent of respondents said they would ‘definitely’ or ‘probably’ recommend a trip to BTNP to their family, friends and acquaintances, with a mean score of 5.38 (Figure 13). Only 1.2% of respondents said they would ‘definitely not’ recommend the park to others. The study found that, on average, overnight visitors (mean = 5.57) were more likely to recommend BTNP than day visitors (mean = 5.15). Similarly, the study also found that, on average, repeat visitors (mean = 5.65) were more likely to recommend BTNP than first time visitors (mean = 5.17).

Figure 13: Willingness to recommend



Secondly, respondents were asked the question, “based on this visit, if you were back at the time where you made the choice to come to BTNP, would you say...”, with responses measured using a five-point scale (1 = I would not have come to this park, 5 = I certainly would have come to this park). The vast majority (90.4%) of respondents said they ‘certainly would’ or ‘were quite likely’ to have still come to BTNP (Figure 14). However, a small proportion (4.8%) of visitors indicated that they ‘would not’ or it was ‘quite unlikely’ that they would have come to BTNP. Among the reasons given by those respondents who disconfirmed their original choice was that the access roads were in poor condition, provision of directional signs and maps was poor and hence they did not know where to go, there was a perceived lack of long walking tracks and four wheel driving tracks, and that no animals were sighted.

Figure 14: Choice confirmation or disconfirmation



Satisfaction with Specific Park Facilities & Features

In addition to the questions about their overall satisfaction, the survey also sought to determine levels of satisfaction with a range of specific park facilities and features. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = much worse than expected, 5 = much better than expected), respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with a set of 19 specific facilities and features found in BTNP. To be satisfied respondents had to have rated an attribute as being at least the same as they expected prior to their visit (3 on the scale). This measure of satisfaction was chosen from a range of alternatives, including simply asking respondents to indicate their level of satisfaction on a scale ranging from ‘very dissatisfied’ to ‘very satisfied’. There is no absolute consensus on the best method; however relating satisfaction to the meeting of expectations is one of the most commonly used. It seemed particularly appropriate in the context of national parks where other management objectives, notably those relating to conservation, will often override the pursuit of visitor satisfaction. Incorporating expectations into the measurement of satisfaction is also a way of emphasising to park managers that an alternative to improving a facility which receives a low satisfaction score is to change visitors’ expectations in relation to that facility. The management of visitor expectations should be regarded as a viable option, particularly where there are constraints, either financial or environmental, on facility or service improvements. A shortcoming of using a comparison with expectations as a basis for measuring satisfaction arises in relation to repeat visitors. Given their prior experiences with a park they are more likely to respond that what they have experienced is the same as expected rather than either better or worse. However the accuracy of expectations depends on how recent their last trip was and what it involved compared to their current visit, e.g. in terms of length of stay, places in the park visited, activities undertaken, etc.

The study found that, on average, expectations were met or exceeded on 12 of the 19 park attributes rated by respondents (Table 24). The amount (minimal) of rubbish/litter and level of peace and quiet were the attributes for which average satisfaction was highest. Other attributes of BTNP in which respondents were satisfied included firewood supply, spacing of campsites, range of easy walking tracks, condition of walking tracks, numbers of people on walking tracks, cleanliness of toilets, range of challenging walking tracks, behaviour of other visitors, numbers of people in picnic areas, and sightings of native wildlife. One notable aspect of these findings is the reassurance they give to park management when viewed in the context of earlier discussion (see Chapter 5) showing the high importance given to factors such as anti-social behaviour and crowding.

The remaining seven attributes all, on average, fell below visitors’ expectations (averaged less than 3.0) thus suggesting a level of dissatisfaction. Of particular note here are the relatively low satisfaction ratings given to those attributes related to information and interpretation provision. It would appear that, based on these findings, current provisions of information and interpretation services are not meeting the expectations of a majority of

visitors. Such a finding, when viewed together with the high importance placed by visitors on having adequate provision of on-site directional signs and maps for instance (see Chapter 5), should be of some concern to park managers. In contrast, interpretive information was considered to be of lesser importance.

Statistically significant differences in satisfaction levels were found between day and overnight visitors in relation to specific park attributes. The study found that on nine items overnight visitors reported significantly higher average levels of satisfaction than day visitors (Table 26). Although, on average, both day and overnight visitors reported being satisfied with the cleanliness of toilets and numbers of people on walking tracks, satisfaction levels were significantly higher among overnight visitor groups. Overnight visitors were satisfied with sightings of native wildlife, availability of pre-visit information and drinking water supply whereas day visitors were not. Day visitors were significantly less satisfied than overnight visitors with the condition of roads, presence of park rangers, and the provision of on-park information on plants and animals and the cultural history of the area. There were no items in which day visitors were significantly more satisfied than overnight visitors.

The study also found statistically significant differences in satisfaction between first time and repeat visitors on 6 park attributes (Table 26). Although, on average, both first time and repeat visitors were generally satisfied with the amount of rubbish/litter, firewood supply and numbers of people on walking tracks, satisfaction levels were significantly higher among first time visitors. Repeat visitors were satisfied with the provision of on-park maps and directional signage whereas first time visitors were not. First time visitors were significantly less satisfied than repeat visitors with the provision of on-park information on plants and animals and the cultural history of the area.

Table 24: Satisfaction with specific park facilities / features

Facility / Feature	N/A	Below Expectations (1-2)	Met Expectations (3)	Above Expectations (4-5)	Average Score*
Amount of rubbish/litter	5.6%	4.4%	37.7%	52.3%	3.66
Peace and quiet	0.4	5.6	58.1	35.9	3.41
Firewood supply	53.8	6.5	20.5	19.2	3.37
Spacing of sites in camping area	43.4	5.8	32.6	18.2	3.28
Range of easy walking tracks	10.2	8.2	55.1	26.5	3.25
Condition of walking tracks	6.9	8.5	59.5	25.1	3.25
Numbers of people on walking tracks	6.5	6.4	62.1	25.0	3.25
Cleanliness of toilets	25.8	10.5	41.1	22.6	3.24
Range of challenging walking tracks	32.9	3.7	45.7	17.7	3.24
Behaviour of other visitors	1.7	4.8	68.4	25.1	3.23
Numbers of people in picnic areas	7.2	11.7	56.5	24.6	3.17
Sightings of native wildlife	3.2	24.0	45.6	27.2	3.04
Presence and availability of rangers	32.5	16.3	41.5	9.7	2.86
Availability of pre-visit information	26.5	19.5	44.3	9.7	2.84
On-site maps and directional signs	6.0	24.0	57.6	12.4	2.83
Condition of roads	2.0	29.6	51.4	17.0	2.81
Drinking water supply	32.3	21.1	38.1	8.5	2.75
Information on plants and animals	21.4	28.6	44.0	6.0	2.66
Information on cultural history of area	30.1	26.3	39.1	4.5	2.64

5-point scale where 1 = much worse than expected, 5 = much better than expected.

Table 25: Average satisfaction with specific park facilities / features, by length of visit

Facility/Feature	Day Visitors*	Overnight Visitors	Sig. Difference (p<.05)
------------------	---------------	--------------------	-------------------------

Amount of rubbish/litter	3.53	3.75	No
Peace and quiet	3.31	3.50	No
Firewood supply	3.14	3.48	No
Spacing of sites in camping area	3.24	3.30	No
Range of easy walking tracks	3.16	3.31	No
Condition of walking tracks	3.16	3.34	No
Numbers of people on walking tracks	3.11	3.37	Yes
Cleanliness of toilets	3.04	3.31	Yes
Range of challenging walking tracks	3.30	3.20	No
Behaviour of other visitors	3.22	3.24	No
Numbers of people in picnic areas	3.08	3.26	No
Sightings of native wildlife	2.76	3.28	Yes
Presence and availability of rangers	2.73	2.98	Yes
Availability of pre-visit information	2.64	2.99	Yes
On-site maps and directional signs	2.73	2.91	No
Condition of roads	2.61	2.93	Yes
Drinking water supply	2.39	3.00	Yes
Information on plants and animals	2.46	2.84	Yes
Information on cultural history of area	2.43	2.81	Yes

* 5-point scale where 1 = much worse than expected, 5 = much better than expected.

Table 26: Average satisfaction with specific park facilities / features, by prior experience

Facility / Feature	First Time Visitors*	Repeat Visitors	Sig. Difference (p<.05)
Amount of rubbish/litter	3.81	3.48	Yes
Peace and quiet	3.49	3.32	No
Firewood supply	3.54	3.16	Yes
Spacing of sites in camping area	3.36	3.18	No
Range of easy walking tracks	3.26	3.24	No
Condition of walking tracks	3.26	3.25	No
Numbers of people on walking tracks	3.35	3.13	Yes
Cleanliness of toilets	3.25	3.24	No
Range of challenging walking tracks	3.31	3.17	No
Behaviour of other visitors	3.28	3.16	No
Numbers of people in picnic areas	3.25	3.08	No
Sightings of native wildlife	3.11	2.96	No
Presence and availability of rangers	2.79	2.93	No
Availability of pre-visit information	2.79	2.91	No
On-site maps and directional signs	2.69	3.01	Yes
Condition of roads	2.84	2.77	No
Drinking water supply	2.69	2.81	No
Information on plants and animals	2.54	2.80	Yes
Information on cultural history of area	2.49	2.79	Yes

* 5-point scale where 1 = much worse than expected, 5 = much better than expected.

General Comments

Respondents were invited to expand on their experience at BTNP by providing general comments on any particularly good or bad aspects of their visit. In response, a wide range of issues relating to the management of the park and its visitors were mentioned. Appendix B details the full responses given by visitors. A few key themes were cited regularly by respondents and (in no particular order of frequency or importance) related to:

- The outstanding natural and scenic qualities of the park as perceived by visitors.
- The poor condition of access roads into and within the park.
- The lack of detailed on-park maps and directional signs informing visitors as to what walking tracks are available, the length of and time needed to complete walking tracks, and points of interest along walking tracks.
- The effect on visitor enjoyment of inappropriate and unruly behaviour of some park visitors (most notably campers).

- Lack of detailed interpretive information on the parks' flora and fauna.
- The need to restrict or ban four wheel drive vehicles from all areas of the park.
- Conversely, the need to open up more areas in the park for four wheel driving activities.
- The poor and often contradictory quality of information on the park obtained from tourist information centres.

Chapter 7

Prioritising Management Actions

In seeking to provide guidance for park management in prioritising their actions and making appropriate and informed planning decisions, this section presents the results of a data analysis method known as Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA). This method allows for the statistical linking of satisfaction ratings with importance ratings on selected park attributes. The method has been applied to indicate where actions to improve the current level of performance might be required. However, it is important to understand that IPA does not indicate precisely what form of action is needed to improve levels of visitor satisfaction, and it is up to park management to determine what is most appropriate in the circumstances.

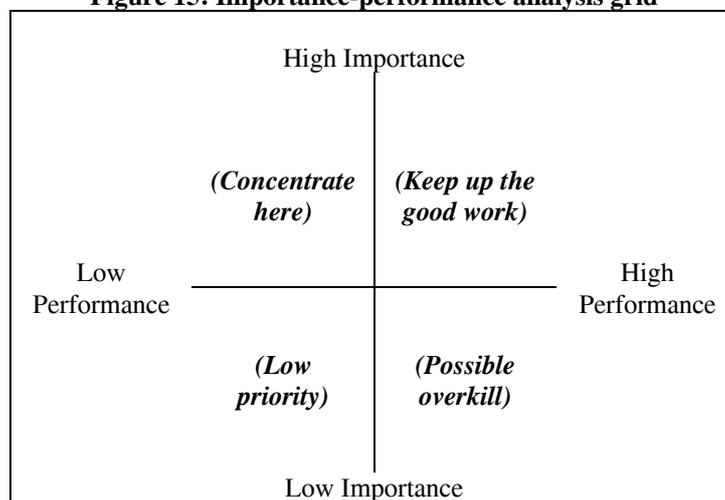
IPA is a technique that has been used widely in leisure and recreation, service quality, and hospitality and tourism research (Oh 2001). IPA combines measures of attribute importance and performance in a two-dimensional grid. It can be used to guide management decisions towards more optimal resource allocation. Presentation of results on an importance-performance grid (Figure 15) enables relatively easy management interpretation of the data and increases their usefulness in optimising management and planning decisions at the strategic and site (destination) levels.

In this study, the satisfaction scale was used as the performance indicator. IPA results can be displayed on a grid divided into four quadrants, with the importance variable forming the vertical axis and performance (satisfaction) variable forming the horizontal axis. The perceived importance and performance of each park attribute is measured through the calculation of average scores which are then plotted on the grid.

Interpretation of the grid is relatively straightforward. In the upper right quadrant (I) are variables that are considered by visitors to be of high importance and are currently achieving a high level of performance (satisfaction). This quadrant signifies a need to “keep up the good work”, and items can be considered as major strengths of the particular site (destination). An attribute located in this quadrant, however, needs to be monitored by management regularly to ensure performance (satisfaction) is maintained (Figure 15). In the upper left quadrant (II) are variables considered to be of high importance but rated low in terms of current performance (satisfaction). This signifies a need to “concentrate here” in relation to improvements to facilities, services and attributes. These variables can be considered major weaknesses requiring high management priority so that satisfaction levels are improved. The lower left quadrant (III), referred to as “low priority”, contains variables that are of low importance and low performance (satisfaction). These attributes are considered minor weaknesses, and while management should be aware, they do not need to invest considerable amounts of resources to improving satisfaction given their low importance. Finally, in the lower right quadrant (IV), referred to as “possible overkill”, are variables that are performing well, and hence can be considered minor strengths, but they are not considered important by visitors. It may indicate that management has directed too many resources to these attributes in the past.

The position within a quadrant is also significant in interpreting the results of this analysis. The closer an attribute is to an outer corner of the grid the clearer are the implications for action. This is particularly so in relation to the upper left quadrant. A position close to the upper left corner would mean that the attribute is of very high importance but is performing very poorly. This would signal an urgent need for substantial improvement. Conversely, the closer an attribute is to the centre of the grid the more ambiguous is its position.

Figure 15: Importance-performance analysis grid



The use of importance-performance grids does, however, require careful consideration in relation to the construction of the grid. The positioning of the axes representing the boundaries between the quadrants is not necessarily straightforward and requires a subjective judgment on the part of the researcher or manager as to where to locate them. Different methods will result in different outcomes in terms of the final positioning of attributes in one of the four quadrants. This in turn has implications for the reliability of information provided to users.

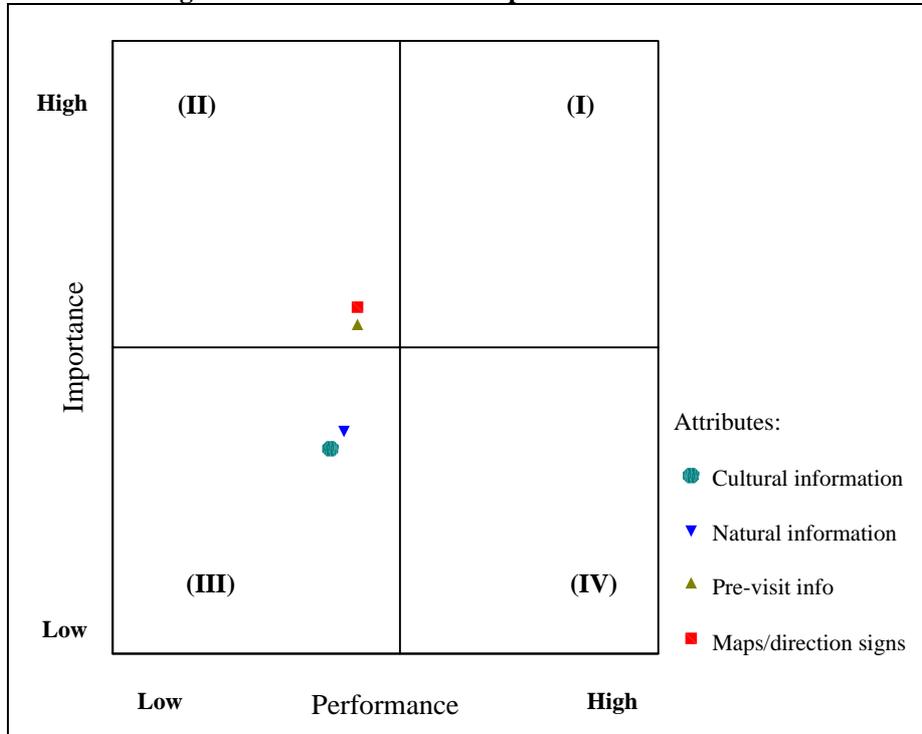
The approach most commonly used is to divide both the importance and performance (satisfaction) dimensions of the grid at the average score for all attributes. Using this method, managers and planners are more assured that the attributes are relatively equally divided into more and less important attributes and that items do not cluster into one half or quadrant of the importance-performance grid.

For this study, three importance-performance grids were developed, with each grid highlighting management strengths and areas of concern based on three distinct managerial foci. The three foci relate to interpretation and information, environment/experience, and facilities and maintenance. Four park attributes were measured by the survey relating to interpretation and information, along with seven environment/experience attributes, and eight facility and maintenance attributes. Average scores for all attributes were calculated and each grid was divided on the y-axis using the overall mean attribute importance score (2.5) and the x-axis using the overall mean attribute performance (satisfaction) score (3.1). The grids provide an informed basis for prioritising management actions and guiding planning decisions.

Interpretation and Information

Figure 16 illustrates that two of the four interpretation and information attributes fell into the “concentrate here” quadrant. The provision of on-park maps and directional signs, and pre-visit park information were both identified as attributes requiring immediate management attention in order to increase visitor satisfaction. Their importance infers the need to better match visitors’ expectations with performance in relation to these attributes. Items that fell into the “low priority” quadrant were on-park interpretive information on both the natural environment and cultural history of the park. On average, neither the importance nor performance ratings for these two attributes were particularly high. No items fell into the “keep up the good work” and “possible overkill” quadrants of the grid.

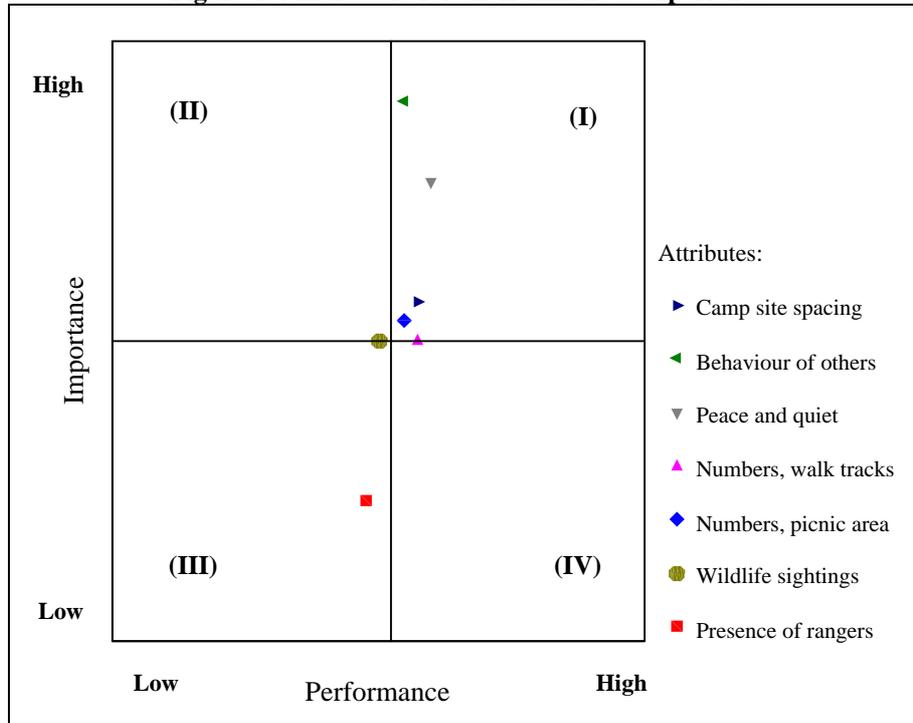
Figure 16: Indicators for interpretation & information



Environment and Experience

The importance-performance grid for environment and experience attributes (Figure 17) shows that only one (sightings of wildlife) of the seven items fell into the “concentrate here” quadrant, and its position was marginal at best. Five items which fell into the “keep up the good work” quadrant were: behaviour of others, peace and quiet, spacing of camp sites, numbers of people in picnic areas, and numbers of people on walking tracks. However, on-going monitoring of satisfaction levels with some of these attributes, especially behaviour of others and the closely related attribute of peace and quiet is appropriate given their perceived importance. No attributes were in the “possible overkill” quadrant and one item (presence of rangers) fell into the “low priority” quadrant.

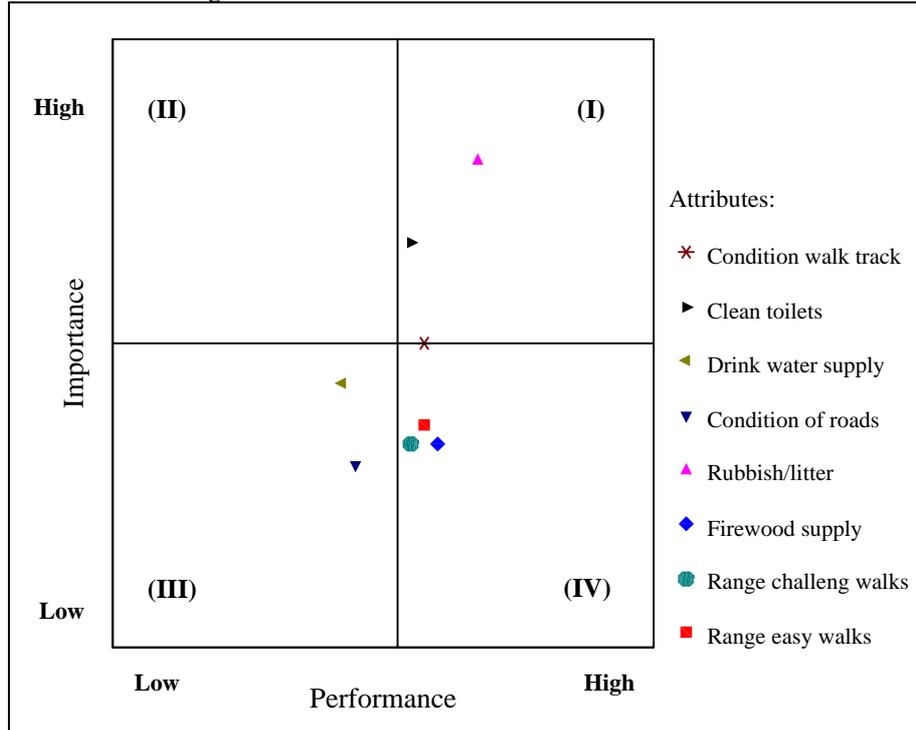
Figure 17: Indicators for environment & experience



Facilities and Maintenance

Figure 18 shows that although none of the eight facilities and maintenance attributes fell into the “concentrate here” quadrant, cleanliness of toilets is located only marginally in the “keep up the good work” quadrant, and it is recommended that close attention be given by management to at least maintaining current standards. Two attributes, namely, amount of rubbish/litter and condition of walking tracks, fell into the “keep up the good work” quadrant. On-going monitoring of these attributes is appropriate given their perceived importance. Items in the “possible overkill” quadrant include range of both easy and challenging walking tracks, and firewood supply. Attributes within the “low priority” quadrant were condition of roads and drinking water supply.

Figure 18: Indicators for facilities & maintenance



Performance Targets

An alternative method to the use of average scores in importance-performance analysis is the determination and use of performance targets or ‘thresholds’ of visitor satisfaction. Satisfaction targets are utilised in measuring corporate and management performance in many protected area agencies in Australia and overseas. For example, satisfaction performance targets are determined for overall visit satisfaction in some park agencies, while in others, targets are set based on satisfaction with specific park attributes and facilities. Performance targets are generally determined as a percentage figure and range from 70% to 95% of visitors satisfied at those park agencies currently using them. It is important that the setting of percentage targets is decided by the park agency so as to reflect a performance level that matches organisational and management goals.

An advantage of using this method is that it takes into account the range of feelings visitors might have about a certain attribute. A mean score, where people on average are satisfied, hides the possible fact that a significant proportion could be dissatisfied. To achieve a satisfactory performance level on the grids used earlier in this section, for example, required a score of 3.1. This could have been achieved by 50% of respondents indicating that they were satisfied or very satisfied with an attribute, and 50% saying that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the attribute. The question for park management agencies is whether having 50% of visitors dissatisfied with a particular facility represents an adequate level of performance.

Table 27 presents the results of an alternative importance-performance analysis, using a performance target of 80% of visitors being satisfied with a particular facility or attribute. In terms of the way satisfaction was measured in this study this means that, to achieve the target, at least 80% of respondents would have had to indicate that a park attribute was either much better, better or about what they expected before their visit. An 80% satisfaction level, of course, is equivalent to a 20% dissatisfaction level. Table 27 thus lists all those attributes for BTNP with which more than 20% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction (much worse than expected or worse than expected). Also included is an importance rating similar to the grid analysis. A rating of ‘would ruin my visit’ means the attribute recorded a score of above 2.5 (the mean score across all attributes and the point where the horizontal axis was positioned on the grids); ‘would affect my enjoyment somewhat’ means a score of between 2.5 and 2.0 (the score at which it was rated on average as being of some importance); and ‘would not worry me’ means a score of below 2.0.

Table 27: Park attributes not meeting the 80% satisfaction target

Attribute	% Dissatisfied	Perceived Importance
Condition of access roads	30	Would not worry me at all
Interpretive information on plants and animals	29	Would affect my enjoyment somewhat
Interpretive information on cultural history	26	Would affect my enjoyment somewhat
On-park maps and directional signage	24	Would ruin my visit
Sightings of native wildlife	24	Would affect my enjoyment somewhat
Drinking water supply	21	Would affect my enjoyment somewhat

The ‘performance target’ approach suggests that management action is clearly needed in relation to the provision of on-park maps and directional signage. Almost 1 in 4 visitors to BTNP reported being dissatisfied with this feature while at the same time its perceived importance was rated quite highly. In contrast, the conditions of roads, the attribute which recorded the highest level of dissatisfaction, was not perceived to be of much importance, suggesting a very low priority for action. The implications of this analysis are fairly clear. High levels of dissatisfaction with highly important attributes suggest the need for improvements, or the tempering of expectations with regard to those attributes.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This report has presented results on a wide range of matters relating to visitation at BTNP. It has described the characteristics of visitors, their places of origin, what has motivated them to visit and what they do once there, how long they stay, the importance of, and satisfaction with various park attributes. In addition, it provides direct feedback to park managers on such matters as the use and perceived quality of their park information. Taken together, this information allows a composite profile of BTNP to be developed from the visitors' perspectives, along with an understanding of how well the park is currently meeting the needs of its visitors.

BTNP can be characterised as an outdoor recreation setting that is popular with families and where the primary attraction is the natural environment itself. Opportunities to enjoy more passive kinds of experiences, for example, resting and relaxing and socialising, are clearly sought by visitors to BTNP. This is further reinforced when viewed in relation to the finding demonstrating that anti-social behaviour by other visitors has the greatest potential to negatively impact on the quality of visitor experiences.

BTNP is quite popular with Sydney residents with 50% of visitors sampled having travelled from this location. The study found that many visitors to BTNP enjoy bushwalking on the park's extensive walking track system. An important finding, as illustrated by respondents rating the provision of on-site maps and directional signs as the most important category of information, relates to the need for on-site information that details the location of walking tracks and related aspects such as length of walk, time taken to complete and points of interest to be more adequately provided by management.

Overall, most visitors were satisfied with their park experience, however there is room for improvement with 11% of respondents saying they had either mixed feelings or were mostly dissatisfied with their visit. Those who reported being dissatisfied overall were mostly day visitors and were on their first visit to the park.

Results of the Importance-Performance Analysis revealed that relatively few (only three items) of the 19 park attributes fell into the "concentrate here" quadrant on the grids (see Chapter 7). On the one hand this suggests that, for the most part, visitors' expectations for their BTNP experience were generally met or exceeded. However, in terms of providing satisfying experiences, the study has identified some areas which may require attention. Provision of on-site maps and directional signage, sightings of native wildlife, and availability of pre-visit information on the park were all located in the "concentrate here" quadrant, suggesting that these attributes warrant some corrective action by management. Notwithstanding, it is recognised that 'sightings of native wildlife' is perhaps an attribute that needs to be treated differently as arguably, it is not a 'manageable' issue as such.

VISITOR USE AND SATISFACTION - BARRINGTON TOPS NATIONAL PARK

6. Some factors have the potential to upset or disappoint park visitors. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has the responsibility to control some aspects of use, but it's sometimes difficult to maintain a balance. The views of visitors can help management to achieve the right balance.

Thinking of national parks in **general**, for each of the following things you might experience please circle the number that best describes how it would affect your enjoyment.

Factor	Would not worry me at all	Would affect my enjoyment slightly	Would affect my enjoyment quite a lot	Would ruin my visit to the park	No opinion
Inadequate maps and directional signs in park	1	2	3	4	0
Not having enough information to plan visit to park properly	1	2	3	4	0
Inadequate information in park on plants and animals	1	2	3	4	0
Inadequate information in park on cultural history of area	1	2	3	4	0
No visitor centre in park	1	2	3	4	0
No rangers present or available in park	1	2	3	4	0
Very few sightings of native wildlife	1	2	3	4	0
Large numbers of people in picnic areas	1	2	3	4	0
Large numbers of people on walking tracks	1	2	3	4	0
Noisy people or activities	1	2	3	4	0
Unruly behaviour of other visitors	1	2	3	4	0
Close proximity of other campers	1	2	3	4	0
Too few easy walking tracks	1	2	3	4	0
No challenging walking tracks	1	2	3	4	0
Little or no firewood available	1	2	3	4	0
Rubbish/litter	1	2	3	4	0
Rough dirt roads	1	2	3	4	0
No drinking water provided	1	2	3	4	0
Dirty toilets	1	2	3	4	0
Poorly maintained walking tracks	1	2	3	4	0

7. How long did you stay in Barrington Tops NP on this occasion? Please tick one box
- o1 Less than 2 hours (Go to Question 9) o3 All day (4 to 8 hours) (Go to Question 9)
- o2 Half day (2 to 4 hours) (Go to Question 9) o4 Overnight (please specify number of nights)
- _____

8. At which location/s did you stay overnight? Please tick all that apply
- o1 Gloucester River Camp Area
- o2 Polblue Camp Area
- o3 Little Murray Camp Area
- o4 Junction Pools Camp Area
- o5 Big Hole Camp Area
- o6 Wombat Creek Camp Area
- o7 Devils Hole Camp Area
- o8 Barrington Guest House
- o9 Other (please specify): _____

VISITOR USE AND SATISFACTION - BARRINGTON TOPS NATIONAL PARK

9. Which of the following best describes the type of group you visited with? Please tick one box
- | | | | |
|----|------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| o1 | I was alone | o4 | As part of a club or organisation |
| o2 | With family and/or friends | o5 | As part of a school group |
| o3 | As part of a commercial tour | o6 | Other _____ |

10. Including yourself, how many people were in your group? _____

11. In how many vehicles did your group travel here? _____

12. In what type of vehicle did YOU travel here? Please tick one box
- | | | | |
|----|------------------|----|------------------|
| o1 | Car | o6 | Bicycle |
| o2 | Car with trailer | o7 | 4WD |
| o3 | Bus | o8 | 4WD with trailer |
| o4 | Mini Bus | o9 | Other _____ |
| o5 | Motorbike | | |

13. People visit national parks for many reasons. On this visit, how important to YOU were the following reasons for visiting Barrington Tops National Park? Please circle one number for each reason

Reason for Visit	Not Important	Of little Importance	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
To rest and relax	1	2	3	4	5
To see the sights	1	2	3	4	5
To spend time with family or friends	1	2	3	4	5
To be get some exercise	1	2	3	4	5
To experience solitude	1	2	3	4	5
To engage in recreational activities egg walking	1	2	3	4	5
To develop my personal skills and abilities	1	2	3	4	5
To enjoy nature and the outdoors	1	2	3	4	5
To be close to nature	1	2	3	4	5
To learn about native animals and plants	1	2	3	4	5
To learn about the cultural history of the area	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify): _____	1	2	3	4	5

14. What activities did YOU participate in during this visit to Barrington Tops NP? Please tick all activities participated in

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------|-----|----------------------------------|
| o1 | Camping | o11 | Wildlife/plant viewing |
| o2 | Relaxing and resting | o12 | Sightseeing |
| o3 | Short walk (up to 1 hour) | o13 | Cycling |
| o4 | Medium walk (1 to 4 hours) | o14 | Four wheel driving |
| o5 | Long walk (more than 4 hours) | o15 | Socialising |
| o6 | Overnight walk | o16 | Fishing |
| o7 | Swimming | o17 | Canyoning |
| o8 | Picnic/BBQ | o18 | Commercial/group tour |
| o9 | Photography/painting/drawing | o19 | Other (please specify):
_____ |
| o10 | NPWS 'Discovery Tour' | | |

Of the activities you ticked above, which would you regard as the *main* activity you participated in?
 Please specify: _____

15. Which of the following walking trails did YOU use and how much time did you spend on these walking trails? Please tick all that apply and indicate how long you spent on those trails (be sure to specify whether minutes or hours)

		Minutes / Hours			Minutes / Hours
Gloucester Tops Area:					
o1	Link Trail		o12	Burruga Swamp Walk	
o2	Glowang Trail		o13	Carey's Peak Trail	
o3	Mountaineer Trail		o14	Jerusalem Creek Trail	
o4	Sharpe's Creek Trail		Barrington Tops Area:		
o5	River Walk (Gloucester Tops)		o15	Barrington Tops Plateau Trail	
o6	Antarctic Beech Walk		o16	Devils Hole Walk	
o7	Falls Walk		o17	The Big Hole Walk	
o8	River Walk (Gloucester River)		o18	Honeysuckles Trail	
o9	Gloucester Tops Circuit		o19	Polblue Swamp Trail	
Williams River Area:			o20	Aeroplane Hill Walk	
o10	Williams River Walk		o21	Edwards Swamp Walk	
o11	Blue Gum Walk		o22	Carey's Peak to Big Hole Walk	
			Other (please specify):		

16. Please think about your expectations prior to arriving at Barrington Tops NP for this visit, and consider whether each of the following aspects of the park was better than expected, about the same as expected, or worse than expected. Please circle one number for each attribute

Attribute	Much worse than expected	Worse than expected	About what I expected	Better than expected	Much better than expected	Not applicable/ Didn't use
Maps and directional signs in park	1	2	3	4	5	0
Availability of pre-visit information on park	1	2	3	4	5	0
Information on plants and animals	1	2	3	4	5	0
Information on cultural history of area	1	2	3	4	5	0
Rangers present or available in park	1	2	3	4	5	0

VISITOR USE AND SATISFACTION - BARRINGTON TOPS NATIONAL PARK

Attribute	Much worse than expected	Worse than expected	About what I expected	Better than expected	Much better than expected	Not applicable/ Didn't use
Sightings of native wildlife	1	2	3	4	5	0
Numbers of other people in picnic areas	1	2	3	4	5	0
Numbers of other people on walking tracks	1	2	3	4	5	0
Peace and quiet	1	2	3	4	5	0
Behaviour of other visitors	1	2	3	4	5	0
Spacing of sites in camping area	1	2	3	4	5	0
Range of easy walking tracks	1	2	3	4	5	0
Range of challenging walking tracks	1	2	3	4	5	0
Firewood supply	1	2	3	4	5	0
Amount of rubbish/litter	1	2	3	4	5	0
Condition of roads	1	2	3	4	5	0
Drinking water supply	1	2	3	4	5	0
Cleanliness of toilets	1	2	3	4	5	0
Condition of walking tracks	1	2	3	4	5	0

17. Overall, how would you describe your feelings about this visit to Barrington Tops NP? Please circle one number

Terrible	Unhappy	Mostly dissatisfied	Mixed feelings	Mostly satisfied	Pleased	Delighted
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

18. Would you recommend to any of your friends, family or acquaintances that they visit Barrington Tops NP? Please circle one number

Definitely not	Probably not	Possibly not	Possibly yes	Probably yes	Definitely yes
1	2	3	4	5	6

19. Based on this visit, if you were back at the time where you made the choice to come to Barrington Tops NP, would you say...

- o1 I WOULD NOT have come to this park (Go to Question 20)
- o2 It is QUITE UNLIKELY that I would have come to this park (Go to Question 20)
- o3 I am NOT SURE if I would have come to this park (Go to Question 21)
- o4 It is QUITE LIKELY that I would have come to this park (Go to Question 21)
- o5 I CERTAINLY WOULD have come to this park (Go to Question 21)

20. If in question 19 you were generally UNLIKELY to return to Barrington Tops NP again, please list your main reasons for this.

Appendix B: General Comments

Appendix B presents all visitor responses to an open-ended question contained in the questionnaire, which was simply a request for any additional comments on good and/or bad aspects of the visit to BTNP.

1. Although I didn't like it at all, the nature is beautiful!
2. Great that Barrington Guest House is outside the park. Better that horse riding is outside the park. Good that BAH is charged for taking people into the park. Full compliments to BGH for care, concern, interpretation and education of guests.
3. Open more areas up. We like to walk 5-6 hours per day.
4. There was a sign for toilets on the map and on the road sign for Gloucester Falls car park but there are no toilets. Unfortunately there is a lot of evidence of people using the bush. It would worry me if there were no visitor centre or ranger somewhere outside the national park or even in a nearby town.
5. Where do we get walking maps of this area?
6. Roads could be better maintained.
7. Wonderful, interesting place – no bad aspects.
8. Would like much more information about the flora and fauna in specific areas. Bought a guidebook to walks in Barrington Tops beforehand because there was insufficient information at NPWS office. Would like more information about state of roads into the park. Would like more information about best places to visit during half day visits.
9. A wonderful place which enables me to renew my strength!
10. Not enough signs on Blue Gum Loop Walk especially where trail branched – a guide map implied only two bridges, whereas I crossed at least 8. Although we had a guide on the Allyn River Rainforest Trail, there didn't seem to be any written information to which one could refer at the various 'stations' numbered 1 to however many, which themselves were in a bad state of repair – if one wasn't in a guided group.
11. Peace and quiet is great. Distance of walks on all signs would be good rather than just expected duration to walk the track/route.
12. Resources to help plan a 2 or 3 day weekend in the area (i.e. example itinerary) as one has to take into account travel times between areas.
13. Have been to Barrington House yearly, sometimes twice yearly for 31 years. Suggest the shorter walks around the Guest House need improving and additions. Two years ago the loop trail around those study bridges at Slippery Slide and the lower picnic area was dangerous due to mud – this trail needs upgrading even though not very old. About 0.5km up Ferntree Creek is a "double waterfall" which can be reached via the bottom of the old Mt. Agony trail opposite the take-off of the Lion Rock trail. There used to be a track of sorts? NPWS? Timber-getting but this is now overgrown. A track into this area for a picnic ground above and west of falls would only be a short exercise for NPWS and a welcome addition to the short walks around the Guest House and the public car park/picnic area. To avoid the many fallen large trees, the new track could be run across further up the west slope. The Lion Rock loop is at present out of commission but is a welcome loop walk (always better than returning the same way) even if it requires a stepping-stone crossing. Needs reopening ASAP. Whispering Gully over the Mountaineer is of great beauty and of historical significance (gold mining). Paterson Gorge is most spectacular but needs the old timber trail down from Burruga Swamp parking area opened up and, of course, sign posting and safety precautions. A feature should be made of the two spectacular falls downstream of Selby Allen Hut.
14. Interpretive signage next to non-existent – left much to be desired. The quality of the map available from Barrington Guest House so poor as to be dangerous. Sad to see extensive evidence of foxes on the tops near Carey's Peak. Evidence in their scats that their depredation of wildlife is extensive. Wanted to know more about trees and plants but nothing available in either book or pamphlet form.
15. Barrington Guest House is a fantastic warm, hospitable, involved place to stay. The atmosphere is like a family and it is so much fun to be in the national park with these people. Brad Lewis has so much knowledge about the flora and fauna.
16. Some of the easier walking tracks need maintenance/upgrading (especially after rainy weather). Directional signs need improvement.
17. It's wonderful.
18. Easier walking tracks need maintenance.
19. Excellent guided walks arranged by Barrington Guest House.

20. Barrington Guest House would be the best place for a first time (or subsequent time) visitor to come. It supplies you with the history information on fauna and flora, night and day walks, short or long walks. Accommodation is excellent and the hosts are totally dedicated to their guests and the environment. Let's hope this remains part of the history of Barrington for all of us to enjoy in the future.
21. Barrington Guest House is an excellent base from which to access the park. This has been my experience for many years.
22. We like to do some light four wheel driving. Some tracks linking to our camp were closed e.g. Quarry road.
23. The organisation at Barrington Guest House has been very good and the staff very pleasant. The area is delightful.
24. (Barrington Guest House) Relaxing, clean, comfortable, average food, nice employees, quiet.
25. Provides most of the advantages of the NSW/QLD border parks – but is much easier of access for Sydney residents.
26. I was disappointed by the extent to which weeds of various kinds were flourishing unhindered. Is there no NPWS policy on weed control?
27. I am always pleased to get out of the city and feel that having this area so close to places like Newcastle is a real gem. I am concerned that pressure on our national resources will one day put pressure on this area i.e. damming the Williams River.
28. We stayed at the Barrington Guest House where a large group of Sydney-siders arrived for an obviously boisterous weekend and their noise and self-interest somewhat dulled our efforts to relax. Management could have made more effort to tone this down.
29. Generally very well looked after – clean and tidy. We had a very pleasant day.
30. Hope it doesn't become loved to death. Keep trapping/eradicating feral animals. Enforce campers camping in designated areas.
31. Beautiful place. Lovely accommodation (Barrington Guest House).
32. This is another example of why Australia is the best country in the world. I still have a lot to see and a return visit will depend on circumstances.
33. Road in could be better. Better maps and information available at Barrington Guest House.
34. Barrington Guest House is a real asset to the entire park. The staff creates a happy, healthy, outdoor range of activities which are perfect for any parent(s) with children from 3 to 18 years of age. Great fun in a safe and natural environment.
35. Trees need signs. Also there could be a map showing the names of peaks (at lookout points). Couldn't find taps to fill water bottles at Gloucester Tops. Also no toilets at Gloucester Tops yet they were indicated on the map.
36. Some walking trails need more information.
37. We enjoyed ourselves on 4WD tracks.
38. Open up closed 4WD tracks. 4WDs do not destroy – the amount of damage by one storm was more devastating. 4WD keep trails open in case of emergency.
39. Would like to see maps (or info board) at first approach to the national park to plan camping/stopping points en route – plus some idea of topography.
40. Road terrible, views magnificent, shelter shed with fireplace timber and cooking tripod definitely plus. I enjoyed the visit.
41. Too many trails closed to 4WD, limiting access to older and younger people to appreciate the joys of outdoor living. We can't all walk for 50km.
42. The material used on the road is too large and is bad on tyres.
43. A map at each area outlining where we were in the park.
44. Expected more wildlife. Could not find water except for creeks. Could not stop for view due to lack of indication of viewpoints. Got a chip on the windscreen.
45. Road to get there is quite bad. Not enough activities, that is, where we were there weren't enough bush walks.
46. We would like to see more 4WD trails of interest open.
47. Just wish there was better map available. Also wish there were descriptions of all the hiking trails in (and around) the park. We just "stumbled" upon some of our best walking trails. I was pleased by the number of wildlife sightings and by the cleanliness of the park.
48. Keep up the good work!

49. Roads could be better otherwise excellent.
50. The information for both the national parks and the adjoining forest areas should be integrated into a single map. Updating of information on distances and unavailability of access to some areas would be very useful for visitors.
51. Not much information on tracks etc. Some tracks were badly kept and overgrown. Some tracks were not well signposted (also lookouts). More information on birds and animals.
52. No water for washing ones hands in toilet or for washing cups and plates.
53. Needs more info on maps etc.
54. NPWS closing off roads. There was a waterfall we wanted to see but you can no longer drive to it because the tracks have been cut deliberately by putting trees across the road.
55. Please make a bigger sign to Barrington Tops in Gloucester – the sign saying “Scone” is not good enough. Also the map in Gloucester is confusing. Please put a trail map up in main camping area at Polblue.
56. More toilets needed on the plateau – improved visitor facilities at Cobark Park.
57. All was good.
58. The only issue really is the road (i.e. unsealed), its good fun but certainly limits the number of people that can access the park. I would more than likely only recommend the park to friends with 4WDs which is a shame because we had such a great time.
59. We came to the park as part of the Heritage Trail which we have walked from Hawks Nest as amateur bushwalkers. The Walkers guidebook was used to plan the walk. The impression we obtained was the NPWS has little or no interest in encouraging people to access the region. The view from Carey’s Peak is being allowed to be overgrown which seemed to typify the departments attitude. Motorists who drive to the Gloucester Tops are also being denied outstanding views due to undergrowth in old lookouts. A copy of the NPWS info sheet on the Link Trail is attached. Apart from being almost unreadable it contains very little information and contains errors. The “magnificent view from Carey’s Peak” is becoming overgrown. The distance from the car park at Munro Hut to Carey’s Peak is approximately 15km (not 22kms). The road signs on Gloucester Tops road are also wrong and misleading.
60. 4WD tracks well maintained. Plenty of camping sites to visit.
61. There is a huge need for more information on the walking tracks in the national park. We stopped at Dungog Information Centre, but they only had a badly photocopied version of a long walk. We were looking to do a number of short ones. So we presumed that there would be more information in the park – how wrong we were! More info on flora and fauna of the area. We’re still wondering why the Antarctic Beech tree is growing in the middle of Australia. Finally, the paths were quite overgrown. For someone with a fear of snakes this is not good – and yes, I did nearly step on one, a very large brown snake.
62. Barrington Tops is a brilliant place. I love the walks/rivers/4WD tracks. I would like to continue exploring the area in future.
63. Not enough trails to drive down. Too many dead ends.
64. The signage/maps at Gloucester Tops waterfall was very poor and confusing. The lack of toilet here was also a problem as many people had defecated beside the tracks, bringing flies. The lack of parking area and picnic spots made the area feel bleak and uninviting.
65. Walking tracks could be a little wider and some tracks could be developed more for the older person and/or disabled person as has been done at other parks. The road on Scone side to Barrington is in bad condition compared to Gloucester side. In general was pleased with the park area.
66. No bad aspects. All positive points. Very pleasant people at point of entry. Very fair charge.
67. Wonderful area, drinking water would have made stay easier.
68. Not enough signs. Roads very rough. Scenery was pretty.
69. It would be great for parents with young children (2 and 4 year olds) to grade walks i.e. child friendly etc. Both my kids love going camping, watching the wildlife and bush walking. Overall a great experience especially since we had possums visit our campfire on the 1st night.
70. I would like information of all the camping areas in the Barrington Tops NP.
71. Not enough signage. Information on duration and length of walks almost non-existent. It would be helpful to mark walks as easy, medium, and hard (not everyone has the same endurance levels). In particular, Buckett’s Scenic Walk should be renamed as a “Heavy Climb”. It is definitely not a walk. Signs at Barrington Tops should be put in a prominent place. Also road map marking trails would be very helpful if placed at the beginning of a drive e.g. at base of “Gloucester Tops” sign.

72. The tourist information differed to the park map – the brochure was misleading regarding distance to be travelled. Some parts of the road in and out were dangerous.
73. Lack of water tanks that collect rain water.
74. Should be toilets. Better marked tracks.
75. No toilets. More picnic tables.
76. Love it or wouldn't have been coming here so many times over the last 50 years.
77. Please clear paths of fallen trees and branches.
78. Magnificent. Was impressed by variation and size of flora.
79. I was with a bushwalking group but I was not the group leader. Hence being a follower, I was not responsible for gathering information and maps. All I can say is that I enjoyed the walking and loved the look of the accommodation around the Barrington Guest House area. I would love to come back and do some luxury accommodation as opposed to the camping which I did.
80. Rubbish bins at Wombat Creek camping area would be good.
81. Road accessibility should be improved for 2WD vehicles. Walking track signs should include distances to better aid decisions as to whether to proceed. Walking tracks were very easy to follow and were well kept.
82. There needs to be more rubbish bins put near picnic and BBQ areas.
83. It is a very beautiful part of the country and should be maintained, as it is, with a view to minimising commercial impact.
84. I would have liked if the two guys (field assistants) did not give them to me as I was trying to do other things. Only joking, I think it is good that you are out doing this stuff. Thanks.
85. Appreciate the gas bib and new toilets. Garbage collection was good. Also nice new picnic tables with shelter tops.
86. I like the self registration system for camping, as the decision to stay the night is frequently not made until after we arrive. On this occasion we did not stay but in future may elect to stay overnight. New toilets are good.
87. Damaged fiords on approach road need replacing. New BBQs and toilets are very good.
88. More notices/signs identifying trees/plants needed badly. Low flying helicopters very loud and annoying. If they are joy-riding flights they should be stopped. Keep accommodation outside of the park!
89. I wish to return because the weather was poor this time and I would like to drive to Gloucester Tops and do the short walks there. We came at short notice and did not have time to have NP send us material so we needed a clearer and larger map of drives and walks in the park. We would have enjoyed some naming of trees.
90. I have so many memories of really good times at Barrington Tops over 16 years that now my knees are a problem, I still enjoy coming. However, I think there ought to be more NP involvement. This is a unique place with lots more potential for eco-tourism. So please more talks and information on the specifics of this area plus history.
91. Would love better roads! Need better information on walking tracks.
92. It was a very good place to come.
93. I love this place but I detest studying so my visit was ruined by needing to study.
94. More toilets required in camping areas during peak periods e.g. weekends. Unruly/disturbing behaviour by some campers needs to be controlled by rangers being on-site at main camp grounds, particularly in evenings. Campers were letting off fireworks, playing loud music, yelling etc, thereby severely disturbing other campers and wildlife.
95. Perhaps maps for walks more widely available/more detail e.g. at Dungog.
96. Road leading in to Barrington House was in atrocious condition – potholes everywhere. I haven't seen a road in that bad a condition for years.
97. Picnic areas are mostly used during public holidays etc, in which case the BBQ facilities are inadequate. If fires are to be banned then authorities must be prepared to supply more gas BBQs and more tables and chairs.
98. The roads from Maitland were full of potholes. Approach to such an important wilderness should be well maintained and better signage posted.
99. Would like to have had more information. Also would like to camp in a ground with hot showers, site specific areas with fire (and firewood) facilities.

100. It would be great to survey people's responses to the adjacent State Forests. Camping next to the Williams River, for example, is quite limited, and therefore we camped in the Chichester State Forest, Allyn River at White Rock. It is the facilities there that really define how good our stay is – we only enter the national park itself for walking and swimming.
101. Improved roads (i.e. better sealed) will improve accessibility of park.
102. A very enjoyable day out and a very pleasant surprise to find that it wasn't too busy or didn't seem too busy on a holiday weekend. The only slightly disappointing aspect for me was the slight lack of obvious information about the local flora and fauna. But thanks for an enjoyable visit!!
103. Need more info on cultural/heritage, logging sites, stories about the place and significance. Also need better maps, names of trees, distance markers on walking trails, and rangers to guide. Saw a lyrebird which was very surprising. Very clean and natural (untouched) surroundings.
104. Top pram track to river. Made life in bush easy for a change.
105. Have visited the Barrington Guest House here for the last 14 years and hope to continue. Great time/walks/people/wildlife/peace and quiet.
106. Improve roads coming into Barrington Tops NP.
107. Hard to get hold of a decent tourist map to go along with the topographical map we had. We would have needed more information about water supply and camping sites.
108. A lot of the maps we looked at were inconsistent with each other. A good 4WD map which gives accurate descriptions of how hard the tracks are would be useful.
109. More BBQs in the park.
110. It is a large national park which you cannot drive into the centre of, which has its advantages and disadvantages. My experience with other national parks you don't have to research much prior to arrival. This park, prior planning would have been beneficial. I expected to see views and drive right into the park which to have experienced I would need to do hikes.
111. Only that it would be good to have a sheet at the office on info such as what plant to rub on you if you rub against stinging nettle. Maybe small plastic bags of salt could be given out to walkers because of the many leeches.
112. I have noticed that picnic tables disappeared from White Rock camping area making camping uncomfortable.
113. Heated rivers would be nice!
114. Animal life terrific. Surprising number of weeds around resort. Excellent for children. Great range of walks for all fitness levels.
115. More/better info needed regarding walks and sightseeing needed in Tourist Info Centres.
116. I needed more information. I believe camping area have no hot water, this would stop me from camping for more than 1 night.
117. Very poor food in the guest house for casual visitors. It big turn-off, would never eat there again.
118. Access to good maps and descriptions of interesting areas and walks is very important. Our trip was made much better by being with somebody who knew the area very well. Clean toilets were a pleasant surprise. Noisy campers with dogs and stereos – in the State Forest detracted from our visit.
119. More toilets and BBQs. More control of the Lantana that is taking control of many other native plants.
120. A pool in the grounds (BGH) would be an added asset.
121. I enjoyed the park greatly – great walks – great country. I really hope that NPWS lets people go canyoning in the park. They should be encouraging canyoning, not trying to ban it. The access trails are already there in place. Canyoning does no more harm to the environment than bush walking. NPWS seems to be worried about litigation when it comes to canyoning.
122. Impressed with standard and maintenance of tracks – signs were clear, would have liked some labelling of flora (identification of trees, age etc).
123. Tank water next to toilets for washing hands needed. There was no firewood at picnic areas prior to a long weekend. Bitumen and dirt roads need a lot of improvement for tourists.
124. Better signs to toilets.
125. The comments I wish to make are that I'm a working class man and it is too expensive for accommodation so how could the lower class people afford to bring their family out for a weekend stay in all weather conditions. The price doesn't justify the running costs at the resort, electricity, food and water is not that expensive or cleaning costs. This resort is like all other resorts as far as pricing goes.

126. Road conditions need improvement. Need water for washing hands where there are toilets. Noted there was no firewood supplied for BBQs.
127. Bitumen road between Paterson to Barrington NP are in great need of maintenance and repair.
128. The road between Dungog and Barrington Tops NP is in need of repair.
129. Keep cars as much as possible out of the park i.e. 4WDs!
130. Ban all 4WDs from the national park. Stop motorbike access to walking tracks.
131. Keep 4WDs out of national park. Trails well marked, tracks good.
132. We needed solitude and almost had to go back to a busy camping area. While there were no large wooden signs saying no camping at Lagoon Pinch there were signs that some of the smaller signs were stolen so we don't know whether we were legal or not.
133. I like wilderness most of all and come to the NP for a true wilderness experience as much as possible.
134. Need more 4WD tracks that are open and much better maps including 4WD tracks. Beautiful landscape.
135. I relied on a friend to obtain information. I was not aware that there were such poor facilities. For day trips OK. For overnight camping I was not well prepared. My mistake. Signage was very poor. Distance of tracks and walking time – not very specific e.g. Williams River walks to Fern Tree Picnic Area stops (for rehabilitation –ok), no signage to say 'follow loop walk that hooks up again'. Began one walk and other walkers advised us that the first 3.5 hours were the worst – we had no idea how long the walk was – no signage to this effect. We walked one hour and turned back. Went on one walk that was quite beautiful – could have been Blue Gum and it was not even on our walking map. Information from web site sent to my friend. My friend and I have travelled almost everywhere, NT, SA, WA, and Qld. We have visited many national parks and make a point of staying/camping over. We do a lot of bush walking and camping. I think that NPWS has a lot to learn from other states on how a national park attracts the public and services them. I hope that your survey is fruitful. I do not feel I have been negative in this survey. I have had enough experiences to make comparisons. Thank you.
136. The park is of course a place of great natural beauty. My main concern is that 4WDs have access. I find this unacceptable for a place such as Barrington Tops. Cars affect every day of our normal lives and national parks should be totally free of them.
137. The park is unspoilt and natural. I would like to see it kept the way it is.
138. The signs to Carey's Peak – did not indicate distance.
139. It would be better for all if there were signs along the way to Carey's Peak indicating how many kilometres and/or time to get there.
140. The camping sites were crowded (long weekend but we were lucky to have a quiet spot). The walks were great and we especially appreciated the old 4WD tracks being closed – a much nicer and quieter walk.
141. Good that gates have been closed off to vehicles to allow more peaceful walking and a more considerate environment for the plants and animals. Bigger camp sites are required, however we did come on a long weekend, no busier than usual.
142. Signs on the long walks. Distance travelled. How far to go etc. May make the distance travelled easier as we could have better gauged how we were travelling along walk. NPWS put up info signs telling the public what they are doing in the park this month/year e.g. pilot survey on Yellow Bellied Glider, revegetation program etc. Most people have no idea what NPWS actually do. An education program to inform the public might be helpful that informs us of the day to day issues of focus.
143. Travel to/from took longer than expected. Despite the advice of Maitland locals to the contrary, we would advise the extra time which thus enables better planning. However, by asking descending walkers from Carey's Peak we aimed for a known viewing point to admire this wonderful place. That viewing point should be marked on maps! Many new visitors just did not know where they were heading (me included).
144. The access roads to the park from Dungog and Paterson make getting to Barrington Tops quite slow. We didn't have as much time to enjoy the park because of the drive from Maitland and back. Everybody we saw on the Williams River Road had their maps out because they weren't sure they were going the right way – so lots of starting and stopping because of lack of meaningful signage.

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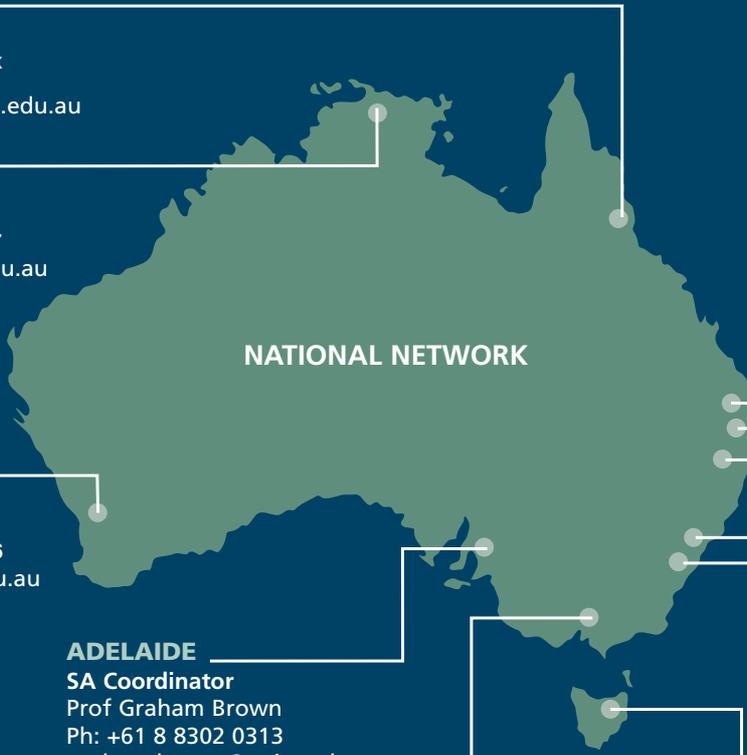
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