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User Characteristics and Response to William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre

by

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Abstract

Interest in park services and understanding leisure decision making has become increasingly important in the last fifty years. Canadians in particular have an affinity for spending time in natural areas and often in parks. Parks and protected areas provide a reasonable and approachable place for people to relax, learn and socialize. This research project consists of interviews and surveys of policy makers and park users at William A. Switzer Provincial Park in Alberta, following the renovation of its visitor centre. The research asks questions related to the visitor centre's goals, who visited, and what the renovation might reveal about changing leisure choices. People visited the centre particularly if they were new to the area and visitor centre clientele responded positively. This research shows how parks respond to the leisure public by providing access to educational and social opportunities at a park.

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1. Chapter ONE: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Around the world, leisure is playing an increasingly important role in people's lives (Butler 2004). Recent leisure research suggests that people in more developed nations are spending more time than before in the pursuit of leisure activities (Mowen, Payne, and Scott 2005). For Canadians in particular, visiting parks and natural areas is considered part of national identity and a key leisure activity (McNamee 2002 and 2003; Mels 2002). Visiting a park is more than a nice thing to do, it is something that *should* be done. As these elements lead to increased leisure time in natural areas, research considering who visits parks and what their expectations are is more relevant than before.

This research project seeks to contribute to understanding park visitors and the role park management can play in their leisure decision making. Specifically the research deals with those who choose to go to a park visitor centre. The research project was conducted at William A. Switzer Provincial Park in Alberta. Interviews and surveys were completed in summer 2007 with policy makers and park visitors to establish the goals of the centre, the profile of its visitors and the opportunities for learning. This chapter places the research project into context, considering its place within the areas of leisure, learning and parks and situating it geographically. The objectives of the project and an outline of the thesis conclude this introductory chapter.

1.2. Context

Choosing to spend leisure time in a park might be because of an interest in the outdoors, often described as a commitment to environmental conservation or it might be because of a traditional desire for ongoing cultural education (Gross and Brown 2006). Park visitor research connects the investigation of park environments and the visitors choosing to visit parks. This research area is

important because it makes connections at many levels between the people who visit parks and the protected wilderness. The research project at Switzer Park places the role of free choice learning within a management context as well as within the theoretical framework of leisure choices and protected areas.

1.2.1. Leisure

Canadians use their leisure time in a variety of pursuits, while spending money and dedicating attention to health, fitness and recreational travel (Green et al. 2006; Statistics Canada 2007). Focus on leisure activities has grown stronger in the last fifty years with both economic and social results (Nazareth 2007). In North America, people are spending more money on leisure activities, and coping with more time spent working for populations who live further from their work places (Everitt and Gill 1993; Nazareth 2007). This means leisure choices need to be smart choices, and many people want to play both smarter and harder. Smart leisure choices are also driven by an aging population, many of whom are retired with more leisure time and who are more educated than in the past. Some in this group are looking for educational opportunities along with their leisure time (Nazareth 2007; Sachatello-Sawyer et al. 2002).

Leisure choices continue to include nature as they did in the early part of the twentieth century, despite changes in time and demographics, or possibly because of them (McNamee 2002). Nature includes a spectrum of places usually with more plants and animals than built environments, including urban parks and remote wilderness. Wild places are becoming more accessible in terms of access roads and technology that allows people to reach further and further into natural areas with new gear. In North America, these natural places are both resources for industry and a playground or a place for backcountry recreation (Urquhart 2001; Whitson 2001).

Who chooses to visit parks as part of their leisure time? The answer to that question relates to the role of leisure time in people's lives, the importance of protected areas to the public and the changing face of local communities outside of park boundaries (Whitson 2006). Insight into demographic and motivational patterns improves both leisure offerings and services and points to the aspects of nature preservation that are valuable to citizens. This research into the question of who visits parks helps policy makers understand visitors. That understanding can result in relevant, interesting and effective programs (Shultis and Way 2006).

1.2.2. Learning

Leisure time is increasingly being used to support people's informal learning goals. Learning that takes place during a leisure activity is sometimes called free choice learning (Falk and Dierking 2002; Urry 1990). Parks are ideal free choice learning environments because they provide a variety of opportunities that are approachable by people of different ages and experiences. Learning in parks is often self directed and as part of a recreational activity. It sends a strong message about environmental citizenship when it is situated in a natural area. In these ways, free choice learning is important as it relates to quality of life (Falk and Dierking 2002).

Park managers often use visitor centres as a point of contact for learning and a way to support visitor curiosity (Butler and Hvenegaard 2002). Beyond supporting learning, the construction, renovation or closure of a visitor centre sends strong messages to communities and tourists about the importance of a park and its visitors. They can be both places to get a map and places to see evidence of the care and attention given to a park. Because of this, visitor centre renovation often happens to fulfill management goals and serve as the public face of park management, rather than to fulfill visitor needs or expectations specifically (Papageorgiou 2001).

1.2.3. Parks and Natural Areas

Public interest in protecting land in the form of parks has increased continually in Canada and internationally (McNamee 2002; 2003). Parks and natural areas serve as place holders in the public imagination for wilderness, recreation and restorative environments (Ballantyne, Packer, and Hughes 2008; Ellis and Rossman 2008; Ellis and Rossman 2008; Snepenger et al. 2004). Parks are important because of the natural habitat they provide for wildlife and the heritage role they play in understanding the places where we live. In these ways, parks create connections to community, place and recreation.

1.2.4. William A. Switzer Provincial Park

William A. Switzer Provincial Park is a Canadian park near Hinton, Alberta. The park's location, in the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rocky Mountains is a popular place for a summer camping vacation or on the way to the nearby Jasper National Park, or while taking the scenic route to Alaska (Hwy 40). People who visit the park can enjoy swimming, boating, fishing and hiking opportunities as well as camping and just beyond the park boundaries are popular all terrain vehicle and horseback riding areas. This park presents an interesting case because it involves a park in a landscape traditionally occupied by the forest, oil and gas industries (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2001). Switzer Park provides a case study for issues facing many parks: community and park connections, visitor services, serving as a hub to other sites in the region and balancing nature preservation with human use.

Part of the balancing process for this park was the introduction of a small visitor centre in a building that once held offices. The visitor centre underwent a renovation in 2007 to install new exhibits, enhance way-finding signage, add interactive learning stations, expand a gift shop and include an information kiosk. The renovation of the existing building encouraged learning in the park and

increased public access at the site through improved opening hours and the additional services.

William A. Switzer Provincial Park was chosen for this research project for three reasons. First, its visitor centre was undergoing a renovation with a short time scale. The scale of the renovation meant that other parks could also manage and repeat this style of renovation. Second, the renovation was minor and the budget did not include extensive advertising. This meant that visitation would likely remain stable throughout the research project period. Finally, the researcher worked as a summer interpreter in 2000 and 2001 and had a good relationship with management and familiarity with the park, thus enabling access to both the park and management. Further considerations about the researcher's connection with the park are in Appendix 11. This research was supported financially and through in-kind support by the Alberta Conservation Association, William A. Switzer Provincial Park and the Community, Health and Environment Research Centre at the University of Alberta.

1.3. Research Project

Understanding the role of parks and the role of visitor services is critical to understanding the success and challenges of the new visitor centre in William A. Switzer Provincial Park. This research project examines the purpose and effectiveness of the new centre, visitor centre clientele characteristics, and general response to the centre. The goal of the research project described here was to examine the purpose and effectiveness of a newly-installed visitor centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park located outside of Hinton, Alberta.

1.3.1. Objectives

This research project had three main research questions:
- Did the visitor centre meet its intended goals?

- Who did and did not visit the centre once it was installed, and why?
- What can the centre renovation reveal about the changing nature of leisure?

By answering these questions, this research sought to delineate the intended goals of the visitor centre renovation and whether or not those goals were met, identify any patterns or themes regarding who visited the newly renovated visitor centre and who did not, and to understand how the renovation sits within the context of the changing nature of leisure.

To answer whether the visitor centre met its intended goals, the researcher interviewed policy makers and analyzed policy documents to determine the goals of the renovation. In addition, visitor centre clientele were surveyed to determine their response to the centre. Both visitor centre clientele and campers at Switzer Park were counted and surveyed to determine who did and did not visit the centre. Finally, survey comments were collected and analyzed in the context of the renovation and literature in this area. The resulting observations are particularly related to leisure decision making and specifically learning, parks and visitors centres.

1.4. Thesis Outline

This thesis is organized traditionally with six chapters, including this introductory one. Chapter two reviews literature related to parks and protected areas in Canada. This includes general issues around land preservation, the Albertan context for parks and the specific situation of William A. Switzer Provincial Park. This research is further contextualized through a review of tourism and leisure literature looking at leisure choices people make, learning and visitor motivation. Chapter two continues with a consideration of literature related to affect and aesthetics in parks and visitor centres. A review of comparative studies in other parks and visitor experience contexts concludes chapter two.

The methods for this research project are outlined in chapter three. The three phases of data collection are described there. This chapter also includes a summary of the research sample. After the methods, chapter four begins with a presentation of the findings specifically related to each data set. This includes policy findings, visitor centre survey results and camper survey results. Following this presentation, comparisons are made between the expectations of policy makers and visitor centre clientele as well as between visitor centre clientele and campers.

The findings from this research project are discussed in chapter five where the visitor centre renovation is related to policy maker expectations. The discussion considers what policy maker expectations and the visitor experience contribute to our changing understanding of leisure. Park learning is specifically connected to visitor centre contexts, motivation and satisfaction. Finally the discussion considers parks as landscapes for leisure, as safe landscapes and within the Canadian experience. The final chapter, chapter six, concludes this thesis. The conclusion includes study contributions to the field and recommendations to policy makers. Areas of limitation and possible future research are also in the conclusion.

1.5. Chapter Conclusion

The natural world is under increasing pressure from development and (sub) urbanization (Suzuki and McConnell 1999). At the same time, people have time and money to spend on leisure and a desire to spend some of it in natural areas. In addition to the appeal of the natural world, life long learning and free choice learning are valued by adults in general and especially an ageing population (Sachatello-Sawyer et al. 2002). Parks bring these trends together as accessible natural areas with amenities for leisure and opportunities for learning. This research looks at how parks and park visitor centres can be a centre point for

developments in leisure and learning and together can improve offerings for the public and the public's understanding of nature.

2. Chapter TWO: Literature Review of Parks and the Development of a Parks Education Practice

2.1. Introduction

In the last hundred years, the consideration of nature in western developed countries has evolved along two comparative lines: *protected* nature and *productive* nature (Waitt, Lane, and Head 2003). Protected nature refers to parks and natural areas that have been set aside and preserved. This type of land is highly valued in political discourse (Mels 2002). By comparison, productive nature is equated with human use such as agriculture and forestry. Productive land is less valued in long term societal interests than protected nature but in the short term provides a direct economic input (Macnaghten and Urry 2001). These distinctions are important because they explain political and social interest in protecting land, and because leisure pursuits are more easily organized and condoned in protected land set aside for that purpose, than in productive land where the main goals are economic[1]. For example, activities like hiking and camping are particularly popular in landscapes not concurrently used by the mining and forest industries, suggesting that protected land has more leisure appeal than productive land.

In both Canada and abroad there has been a growing public interest in protecting land in the form of parks over the last 100 years (McNamee 2002). This growing interest has been alongside more people living in urban areas and biodiversity being better understood and prioritized (McNamee 2003). Protected land's attraction for tourism has allowed an international boom in "eco-tourism", place-based travel and wildlife travel (Hanna, Clark, and Slocombe 2008; Weaver 1997). Growth in this area internationally has meant improved tourism opportunities and local community pride (Proctor 1998; Weaver 1997).

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[1] This does not fully consider the economic benefits of leisure, like ski hill and golf developments.

Understanding the role of parks and the role of visitor services is critical to placing the success and challenges of the new visitor centre in William A. Switzer Provincial Park in context. This is an interesting case because it represents a protected piece of land within a large industrial (productive) landscape, situated in traditional forestry territory with increasing oil and gas exploration. Switzer Park provides a case study for issues facing many parks: community and park connections, visitor services, providing a hub to other sites in the region and balancing preservation with human use. In this chapter, current ideas about parks and protected areas in Canada and Alberta are followed by related research in tourism and leisure studies regarding demographics, visitor learning and informal education.

2.2. Parks and Protected Areas in Canada

> Canadians value nature, and attach special importance to parks and
> protected areas – places where nature is least altered by human structures
> or activity.
>
> (Rollins and Dearden 2002, p. 402)

Canada's first national park was established in 1885 as Banff National Park in what is now Alberta (see Alberta map in Appendix 1). The idea of a national park and government involvement was relatively new, and Canada's Dominion Parks Branch was the world's first national park service in 1911 (McNamee 2002). Since that time, protected land and the idea of wild places has continuously played a role in the Canadian identity. Natural places and protected areas evoke an ideal image of Canada (McNamee 2002; Mels 2002).

Parks in Canada have continually increased in size, scope and use since Banff was created in 1885. A recent large growth spurt began in 1989 (Dearden and Dempsey 2004; McNamee 2002). Changes in legislation (1988 amendments to the 1930 National Park Act and the Endangered Spaces Campaign of 1989) and new ecological integrity programs resulted in an accelerated focus and commitment to parks by the Canadian government. This focus and commitment

culminated in a new National Parks Act in October 2000 (Dearden and Dempsey 2004).

Essentially, the recent Canada National Parks Act (2000) provides a procedure for future expansion of parks in Canada, while adding new parks, new areas and enhanced protection for wildlife (Federation of Law Societies of Canada 2000). The act also fixes the boundaries of communities in parks (like the towns of Jasper and Banff in Jasper and Banff National Parks) and addresses the tension between providing services for tourists and protecting wildlife and land (Federation of Law Societies of Canada 2000). These changes are important because they emphasize key issues for parks in Canada, balancing preservation with human use and connecting tourists with communities.

Development propositions and suggestions for productive use of land can encroach and put pressure on protected areas. Protected areas receive additional attention after these challenges. This is seen both near urban areas (Hallman and Benbow 2006) and in rural protected areas (Roberts 1999). A scarcity of resources and changing priorities means that Canadian parks have experienced increasing pressure from significant resource industries, specifically forestry and oil exploration in the last two decades as well as from leisure industries like skiing, golf and motorized recreation (Mar 2000; Nelson et al. 2003; Reimer and Vaxvick 2003; Searle 2000). Creative and knowledgeable management of Canadian parks with an emphasis on visitor services and strong communication with both local communities and tourists are especially important in response to this increasing pressure.

2.2.1. Protected Land in Alberta

Protected areas are composed of land, freshwater and marine areas set aside through legislation to protect representative examples of Canada's ecosystems. They are created and managed by the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

Protected areas in Canada and Alberta particularly cover a wide range of landscape categories. These include national parks, provincial parks, wildlife management areas, conservation reserves, recreation areas and forest reserves (McNamee 2003). The range of landscape management runs from strict nature reserves where human disturbance is banned to urban areas or landscapes of extensive change where mining and extraction is a priority (Nelson et al. 2003).

Of all the protected land in Alberta, National Parks are the most well known. They include the mountain parks of Jasper, Banff and Waterton and the wildlife parks of Elk Island and Wood Buffalo (Parks Canada 2003). The National Parks in Alberta received nearly six million visitors in the 2007 season and have over the previous five years experienced a two percent growth in visitation annually (Parks Canada 2009).

Provincial protected areas in Alberta are less well known than the National Parks. The Alberta government defines provincial protected areas along a continuum of protected areas[2]. The legislation in Alberta covers eight categories of protected areas[3]: 1) eco reserves, 2) wilderness areas, 3) wildland provincial parks, 4) the Wilmore Wilderness Area, 5) provincial parks, 6) heritage rangelands, 7) natural areas and 8) recreation areas (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2007b). Different levels of activity and land use are allowed in each of these protected areas. At one extreme, eco reserves hold protection as the primary goal and allow only very low impact activities like photography. At the other extreme, the primary objective of recreation areas is outdoor recreation which often includes off-highway vehicle use and hunting. The protected areas that are classified as

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[2] The government department of Parks and Protected Areas has been in three ministries since the beginning of this research: Alberta Community Development; Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture; and Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

[3] In Alberta, the spectrum of protected areas are safeguarded under three pieces of legislation: the Provincial Parks Act; the Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas and Heritage Rangelands Act; and the Willmore Wilderness Park Act (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2007b).

provincial parks (category five) remain a moderate landscape management type. There, strong protection goals are combined with education programs and extensive facilities like campgrounds and access roads (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2007b). The spectrum of protection types in Alberta means parks represent one of many protected landscapes.

2.2.2. Parks in Alberta

The provincial system of parks includes recreational destinations like Kananaskis Country and Lesser Slave Lake that are close to the urban centres of Calgary and Edmonton respectively where visitors usually engage in outdoor activities like skiing, boating and hiking (Alberta Community Development 2005; Alberta Environmental Protection 1999). More remote parks in Alberta rely on paleontology, human history and unique landscapes to attract visitors. Examples of these parks are Dinosaur and Writing-on-Stone (Alberta Community Development 2003). Over eight million people visit provincial parks in Alberta each year (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2008b).

Alberta has maintained a strong focus on protecting land in comparison to other provinces in Canada. As of 1999, nearly nine percent of Alberta's land was protected compared to eleven percent in British Columbia, the province with the most protected land in Canada and three percent in New Brunswick, which had the least (Dearden and Dempsey 2004). In an effort to increase protected land in Alberta, the provincial park system benefited from an influx of land and money through the Special Places campaign that began in 1995 (Alberta Environmental Protection 1995; Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2000; Hryciuk and Struzik 1999). This campaign solicited candidate sites for expansion from multi-stakeholder consultations that were reviewed by local committees. The recommendations resulted in the program protecting 81 new sites and expanding

13 existing sites[4]. By 2001, two million hectares of additional land had been protected in Alberta (Alberta Community Development 2005; Alberta Environmental Protection 1995; Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2000; Hryciuk and Struzik 1999).

After the Special Places campaign, the provincial government allocated additional money (as part of the Centennial Legacies program) for amenities in parks (Alberta Centennial 2006). One example of these projects was the new visitor centre at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, planned to provide space for visitor reception, educational and interpretive programs, exhibits and sales (Alberta Centennial 2006). Another project in this program was the three million dollar construction of the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation in Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park (Bateman 2007). The centre includes laboratory space for scientists and interpretive displays for the public while hosting public programs and special events like bird banding demonstrations (Alberta Centennial 2006). The Centennial Legacies program gave special incentives for ecological design and sustainable practices in the new buildings and renovations (Bateman 2007). While not specifically part of the Centennial Legacies program, the visitor centre redevelopment at William A. Switzer Provincial Park sat within this broader set of development initiatives that took place across Alberta.

2.2.3. William A. Switzer Provincial Park

William A. Switzer Provincial Park is located just north of Hinton, Alberta (see map of Alberta in Appendix 1). The park receives approximately 30 000 campground visitors and 5 000 day use visitors per summer season (Alberta Community Development 2003). This is a relatively low visitation compared to other parks. By comparison, Aspen Beach Provincial Park sees the highest number of campground users for a provincial park in Alberta with 95 300

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[4] William A. Switzer Provincial Park was one of the expanded sites in 2000, with additional land added north and south of the park boundaries (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2000; Hryciuk and Struzik 1999).

campers each summer and Sylvan Lake Day Use Area has the most day users for a provincial park in Alberta outside of an urban area with nearly 459 000 each summer (Alberta Community Development 2003). Switzer Park's low visitation helps to define the character of the park. For the majority of users, camping at one of the five campgrounds is part of their Switzer Park experience. The day-users (those who do not stay overnight) have access to two public day use areas, each with beaches and picnic facilities in addition to some public access in the campgrounds (see Switzer Park map in Appendix 2).

William A. Switzer Provincial Park was established in 1958 and initially named Entrance Provincial Park. The land for the park was released from a forestry lease at the request of the Hinton Chamber of Commerce, who were looking for local recreation opportunities (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2001). William A. Switzer was the first mayor of Hinton and the park was renamed in his honour. In 1975 the main campground at Gregg Lake was constructed. In the late 1980s additional campgrounds were added, and the administration building at Kelley's Bathtub was constructed (see Switzer Park map in Appendix 2) (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2001).

The recent renovation (2005 to 2007) of the William A. Switzer Provincial Park visitor centre was essentially a re-purposing of the existing administration building and a formalization of services that had been periodically available at the park in the past. Rather than having its own renovation project plan and funding, the renovation fit within the local park's goals and the region's visitor services budget. This budget was augmented through small grants and local fundraising (Alberta Community Development 2006).

2.3. Tourism and Leisure

Parks not only have political and ecological imperatives, but park offerings also influence leisure decision making. The choice to camp at a park or visit a visitor

centre is influenced by other options people have for their leisure time. The reasons people choose to visit a park relate to demographics, tradition, convenience and educational background. Summarized here is research related to the motivation and demographics of people choosing to visit a park and specifically a visitor centre as part of their leisure time.

2.3.1. Parks as Leisure

As the Canadian population ages and personal incomes increase, people spend more money on health and fitness including recreational vehicles and recreational travel (Statistics Canada 2007). The composition of communities and of people choosing between leisure activities is changing to be more diverse in terms of age, interest and income (Green et al. 2006; Gross and Brown 2006). These two trends emphasize that there is no single, uniform explanation for how Canadians use their leisure time.

Canadians visit parks during their leisure time in search of outdoor recreation based on a commitment to environmental conservation and also as part of ongoing cultural education (Gross and Brown 2006). Park visits may be a way to combine these three motivations for a group of visitors or a family. Therefore, understanding patterns in demographics and motivation assists both planners and policy makers to focus on their specific audience and be successful with targeted resources (de Rojas and Camarero 2008). Demographic diversity also means that a variety of options need to be available for Canadians in the coming decades. As a field, research in one area of leisure activity such as parks can be applied to others seeking to understand leisure decision making in the future.

2.3.2. Learning in Parks

Though learning has long been associated with structured school time, learning outside of school is increasingly common (Urry 1990). Visitor centres in parks are one of many opportunities for life-long learning. They join the out of school

learning contexts in museums, parks, zoos, botanical gardens, art galleries, aquaria, science centres and in a growing number of social organizations. When taken together, these environments provide opportunities for unstructured learning, or "free choice learning" (Falk and Dierking 2002). Free choice learning happens when people direct their own learning in their own time and usually within a leisure context where learning is situated as one of many goals (Falk and Dierking 2002; Packer 2006). An example of this is when people take their grandmothers to an art exhibit on their way to a family dinner.

It is the context of the learning and the motivation of the learner that differentiates free choice learning from formally regulated learning (Falk and Dierking 2002). A meaningful visitor centre experience is about more than memorizing one new plant or one new animal name. Instead, the opportunity exists for people to continue learning their whole lives, on their own time, in their own way and eventually, "changing people's lives by opening the door to new ways of thinking, seeing, and ultimately, being" (Sachatello-Sawyer et al. 2002, p. 137).

Free choice learners and particularly adult learners provide an eager and approachable audience for managers and policy makers (Falk and Dierking 2002; Falk 2006). Visitor centres often model themselves to serve this eager group who is the first to receive and integrate messages about conservation and long term behvaviour, management goals and education about local flora, fauna or the region (Papageorgiou 2001). For some groups of free choice learners, these educational messages are easily communicated in a visitor centre. For people who do not stop at a visitor centre, other locations for the communication need to be found (Butler and Hvenegaard 2002).

2.3.3. Visitor Motivation

Understanding visitors involves investigating their motivation and their reason for acting. It also involves considering their satisfaction with a particular experience.

In the context of outdoor recreation and park visitation, motivation is often connected to a vacation or a longer trip (McKercher 1996; Rollins and Robinson 2002). Investigation can also be done in the context of free choice learning where motivation tends to have a shorter time horizon. Visiting a museum often takes one hour, whereas a camping trip might take a week (Dierking, Ellenbogen, and Falk 2004).

The quality of a social interaction is an important motivation for people choosing free choice learning (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999). Social aspects of leisure emerge when a person tells a story or shows a photo album. That social interaction could be with companions during an activity, or it could be achieved through a connection with personal interpretation, in the case of a visitor centre visit or an interpretive hike (Hwang, Lee, and Chen 2005).

The social orientation of free choice learners is not universal; rather it can be seen along a continuum (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999). At one end of the continuum is the altruistic orientation. The altruistic orientation is seen when a visitor accompanies a child on an outing, and the visitor's motivation is primarily linked to someone else. At the other end of the continuum is intrinsic motivation. This orientation is seen when something like personal relaxation dictates a destination choice (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999). Morgan and Hodgkinson also identified a person's primary motivation along a second intersecting continuum. This continuum runs between having an educational motivation, such as curiosity about something new and a recreational motivation often seen as physical activity or exercise (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999). Figure 2.1 shows these two continuums as they intersect and gives the examples of hiking alone, camping with friends and taking a child to a museum in accordance with the two motivational axis.
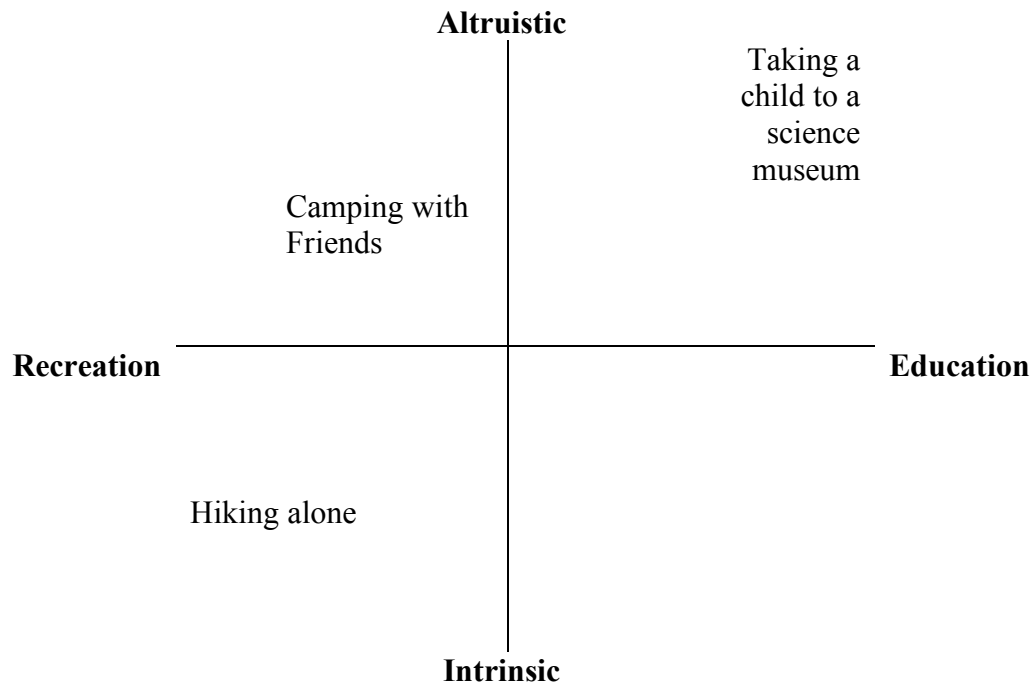
Figure 2.1 Visitor Motivation Continuums
Source: Adapted from Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999.

Reasons for choosing recreation options that include free choice learning are shared even by people who decide on different destinations (Packer and Ballantyne 2002). Another way to see motivation is through the aspects of a leisure activity people are looking for in making their choice. Free choice learners are looking for a sense of discovery, for all senses to be engaged, for the appearance of effortlessness and for the availability of choice (Packer 2006).

2.3.4. Successful Visitor Centres

Successful visitor centres meet visitor needs by giving information, being visually appealing and being easy to understand. They also provide a way to ask questions and have answers provided. Above all, successful visitor centres communicate effectively to the variety of people who visit (Allen 2004). Effective

communication requires an understanding of the audience, clarity about the main message and realization of the role a visitor centre can play in this communication (Butler and Hvenegaard 2002). Many techniques are available to park managers at visitor centres, drawing from experience in parallel free choice learning destinations, particularly museums (Dierking, Ellenbogen, and Falk, 2004; Pekarik 2007). Three common techniques are: expert communication, visitor participation and pure representation.

Expert communication is a technique that has been used traditionally in visitor centres where information is planned, packaged and presented to a visitor (Kelsey 2003). The information is most effectively received when it holds relevance and importance for the visitor (Moscardo 1999; Tilden 1977). One example of this is communicating a park management goal like conservation in a way it personally relates to the visitor such as conserving water for personal use (Papageorgiou and Kassioumis 2005). Another example is communicating safety messages for a particular audience such as: "bears are attracted to food, so store your food in the car."

Participation as a communication technique can be incorporated into exhibit design or through facilitating personal participation. An example of this is when a visitor can ask someone a question at a visitor centre (Ballantyne, Packer, and Hughes 2008; Moscardo 1999). Participatory visitor centres welcome the visitor and assume that the visitor is intellectually active and willing to engage with exhibits (Walter 2002). In addition, staging an experience or a participatory event for a person results in opportunities for involvement with the park in a new way (Ellis and Rossman 2008).

Representation in a visitor centre may take many forms. The surrounding area or a key area feature can be represented in a map or a model (Bell 2004). Beyond direct representation, designs that encourage a sense of discovery and appeal to many senses evoke positive emotional responses (Packer 2006). To that end,

representation can be the symbolic communication of a place in its entirety through simulacrums or virtual locations (Poster 1988; Shields 1999). A simulacrum is the simulation of an actual place, in this case a place a visitor may want to visit. Common examples of virtual locations are resorts and theme parks or creating dioramas of an area (Shields 1991; Shields 1996). This type of representation is common in visitor centres and museums.

2.3.5. Learning Environments

Beyond communication techniques, exhibit developers are increasingly using participatory educational techniques as standard practice for designing free choice learning environments. An active visitor has to engage with an exhibit or a person in order to learn (Walter 2002). This fits into a constructivist theory of education where the learner determines both the knowledge and the way it is obtained (Hein 1995). In this model, the public holds and even socially constructs knowledge (Russell 1994). A visitor centre employing this theory of learning would include hands-on exhibits, opportunities to see cause and effect in action or visitor involvement through a comment board, video or interactive maps. A benefit of this theoretical approach is that it encourages and supports many perspectives on the world outside.

Even outside of highly participatory learning environments, people build upon previous knowledge in learning situations. This is particularly the case for adults in free choice learning situations (Falk 2006; Sachatello-Sawyer et al. 2002). Exhibits and information panels need to be oriented to different layers of previous knowledge and learning styles. Diverse audience requirements can be met by extremely flexible design or by personal interpretation (Hwang, Lee, and Chen 2005). Flexible design allows diverse user groups to find relevance in a visitor centre, such as school groups and local adults who may visit at different times with unique expectations. Having an interpreter available to a visitor means the interpreter is able to focus and tailor information and information delivery to

personally suit the individual or group. Such flexibility is an asset in making a learning environment appropriate and appealing for visitors.

2.4. Affect and Aesthetics

People visit parks for recreation, to learn and to feel connected to nature (Louv 2005). Park visitors also have affective and aesthetic experiences in a park. The affective experience is an emotional one (Orams 1996). It is emphasized when a person visits a park for recreation, because of an interest in wildlife, to expose his or her children to nature or for a social experience. A person is feeding aesthetic needs when he or she visits a park for leisure, as part of travel or as exploration, to wonder at the landscape or even to meet needs for relaxation while on the way to somewhere else (Duncan and Duncan 2001). Usually affect and aesthetics are combined in a person's park experience.

2.4.1. Affect in Parks

Prosperity and the move away from being close to nature in daily life has resulted in a "profound schism created between human beings and nature" (Suzuki and McConnell 1999, p. 208). As more people live their whole lives in cities, access to nature is critical for physical health and mental health (Louv 2005; Nabhan and Trimble 1995). Visiting a park can be a powerful way for an individual to connect to nature, for recreation, for a social or wilderness experience and for relaxation (Rollins and Robinson 2002).

People return to parks because of their attachment to the place, or their "affective loyalty" (Petrick 2004). This attachment and this loyalty may be due to a formative experience in a park (Nabhan and Trimble 1995), the role a park plays in a person's life through visiting at significant times such as weddings and celebrations or with significant people like grandparents and children (Brooks, Wallace, and Williams 2006). For some people the affective connection to a park is because of social interactions at the park with family and friends or with park

personnel (Gross and Brown 2006; Hwang, Lee, and Chen 2005). For other people the affective connection is due to the type of natural area, the location or a familiar parallel resource dependency like forestry or fisheries (Larsen 2004).

Parks mean something to people and people can often pinpoint their attachment to a park more easily than to a bioregion because parks hold meaning (Snepenger et al. 2004). For example, childhood memories are more likely to be recalled from Switzer Park than from the North Eastern Slopes in Alberta because of this evocative nature of parks. Visitors who have that connection with a park are able to focus on park messages about biodiversity and resource use rather than orientation and logistics like way finding and campground fees while visiting the park. This further emphasizes strong connections with individual parks for these visitors (Dierking, Ellenbogen, and Falk, 2004).

No two people will experience an environment affectively in the same way (Nasar 1992). Understanding this variety in people's affective responses to parks is critical to understanding how to communicate about parks and within parks to the variety of visitors. Successful communication in a park recognizes and allows for the affective potential of a park (Tews, Busch, and Jorgens 2003; Ververka 1994). Visitor centres are logical places to start this meaningful communication process.

2.4.2. Aesthetics of the Visitor Centre

Though affect is important when considering the values of parks, parks are also beautiful. Aesthetically pleasing wilderness is perceived to have a higher ecological value than disjointed and disturbed land (Duncan and Duncan 2001). Beyond that, parks are regularly examples of beautiful places that have been protected and places where people feel positive emotions (Chhetri, Arrowsmith, and Jackson 2004). Protection from development and industry over long periods contributes to a traditionally aesthetically pleasing landscape to visit.

Park settings do not need substantial design elements to create aesthetic appeal. Still, well-designed visitor centres communicate messages easily and are seen to carry both authority and value for visitors (Allen 2004). The aesthetics of a visitor centre in terms of architecture and interior design influence a visitor's experience. A positive emotional experience and reduced fatigue because of wisely placed resting places can lead directly to visitor satisfaction (Jeong and Lee 2006). Another way design contributes to visitor satisfaction is by offering choices for a visitor while presenting challenges that match the visitor's skills (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1999). As visitor satisfaction plays a role in people's future leisure decisions, a pleasant visit is desirable for both visitors and park managers.

2.5. Doing Research in Parks

The diverse literatures of geography, environmental management, leisure, museum and visitor studies all contribute to the combination of ideas relevant for this research project. In addition there is a body of research particularly related to studies in parks and visitor centres. Studies about park visitation are diverse in their methods and their goals (Rollins and Robinson 2002). Surveys, interviews, and observational research have contributed to understanding parks, their visitors and management challenges (Brooks, Wallace, and Williams 2006; Floyd, Jang, and Noe 1997; Papageorgiou 2001; Pavlikakis and Tsihrintzis 2003; Rollins and Robinson 2002). Motivation, satisfaction and the demographics of park visitation are areas of particular research focus.

While a lot of the research into motivation is outside of the park context, park visitation research is particularly relevant for this research project. Open-ended questions and interviews have been used to examine visitor expectations and visitor mood during the visit (de Rojas and Camarero 2008). Motivation, expectation and mood all contribute to perceived quality of a visit and visitor

satisfaction (de Rojas and Camarero 2008). Studying motivation is interesting as it can be determined before a person makes a visit and may shift in time.

Satisfaction has been defined as the "positive match between the visitors' expectations and the experiences available" (Moscardo 1999, p.8). Researching visitor satisfaction with a survey is difficult because satisfaction might mean a visitor is happy or it might mean a visitor likes the park (Chhetri, Arrowsmith, and Jackson 2004). Despite this challenge, park visitor satisfaction is an important area of research. The area is particularly important for park managers because it influences repeat visitation, reputation and even future funding. The importance of understanding visitor satisfaction is often the managerial impetus for embarking on a research project (de Rojas and Camarero 2008).

Determining the demographic composition of visitor groups is another aspect of understanding visitors for parks and therefore serving visitors well. This data is collected to determine whether demographics align with patterns of action. For example, do some groups of people reliably visit a centre or are there segments of visitors who can be predicted to act in certain ways? Demographic categories that are usually surveyed in visitor studies include, home location, age and gender, party size, number of children in the party and level of schooling. These are standard categories for questions in both qualitative and quantitative research studies (Lewenstein 1993; Loomis 1987; Packer 2006; Rollins and Robinson 2002). In the United States, race and income are often included as well, and there has been broad following of the American National Survey on Recreation and the Environment Lifestyle Scale (Green et al. 2006). These features are not as common in park research in Canada as they are in the United States (Rollins and Robinson 2002).

2.6. Chapter Conclusion

Park visitor centres are nested within diverse and intersecting sets of demands and conditions. Understanding effective visitor centres requires the integration of concepts and theories from areas as diverse as leisure studies, environmental management, museum and visitor research. Within Canada there is a long and proud tradition of protecting land and of creating parks. People visit parks in their leisure time because of recreation, potential learning opportunities and strong social connections. Parks and their facilities have an audience in Canada and therefore an opportunity to communicate with them. That relationship supports affective and aesthetic experiences of the park. This research project follows on research in free choice learning and parks to consider the specific example of the William A. Switzer Provincial Park visitor centre renovation and its visitors.

3. Chapter THREE: Methods

3.1. Introduction

This research project examined the purpose and effectiveness of the newly renovated visitor centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park. This research project was completed with an accepted set of methods, relying on both quantitative and qualitative data. Interviews and surveys were completed with policy makers and park visitors to establish the goals of the centre, the profile of its visitors and recommendations for improving the visitor centre. Findings from this research will be relevant for this park, other parks in Alberta and similar leisure and educational facilities.

3.2. Data Collection in Three Phases

The data for this research project was collected in three phases at William A. Switzer Provincial Park. Three discreet but overlapping sets of data were collected so that when triangulated they could provide insight into the following questions:

- Did the visitor centre meet its intended goals?
- Who did and did not visit the centre once it was installed, and why?
- What can the centre renovation reveal about the changing nature of leisure?

All of the data was collected during the summer of 2007 over the course of three study weekends (Friday to Sunday) when the researcher visited the park. Interviews and document reviews were completed in person while the researcher was already in the park for a study weekend. Park staff and the campground operators completed tallies of clientele in both the visitor centre and the campground during each study weekend. Finally, the researcher completed the surveys at the visitor centre and the campground during each study weekend.

The study weekends were chosen to provide variety in season and visitation based on previous patterns of visitation at Switzer Park. The three weekends included one spring weekend (June 22 to 24, 2007), one summer weekend (July 27 to 29, 2007) and one long summer weekend (August 3 to 5, 2007 where August 6 was the holiday Monday). Table 3.1 provides a summary of data collection methods and the timeline.

Table 3.1 Summary of Methods

Data Set	Research Method	Data Collection
A	Interviews with Policymakers	Researcher
A	Document Review	Researcher's review of Interpretive Plan, Park Brochure, Government Websites (Alberta Community Development 2006; Alberta Community Development 2005; Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2008a; Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2008b)
B	Visitor Centre Tally	Visitor Centre Staff
B	Visitor Centre Survey (written)	Researcher
C	Campground Tally	ForestTech (campground operators)
C	Campground Survey (verbally transcribed)	Researcher

Prior to collecting data, ethical approval was obtained from the Arts, Science and Law Research Ethics Board (ASL-REB) at the University of Alberta. See Appendix 3 for the approval form.

3.2.1. Data Set A: Key Informant Interviews and Policy Document Review

Information about the institutional history of the park and plans for the visitor centre renovation were gathered by conducting interviews with two key decision makers coupled with an interpretive document analysis of the visitor centre design concept from August 30, 2006 (Alberta Community Development 2006). The

goal of data set A was to reconstruct the policy space and policy decision making that went into the development of the visitor centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park. The two interviewees were the front line staff person and the program and regional visitor services manager who were chosen in collaboration with the individual who oversaw the renovation project (Black 2005; Graham 1997).

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted by the researcher. The questions were about the purpose of the renovation and the expectations for visitors (see interview guide in Appendix 4). Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes and were conducted in the park visitor centre on June 22 and August 5. Interviews were not recorded[5], however the researcher took extensive notes using shorthand.

Reliability of data was achieved through the feedback process (Baxter and Eyles 1997). As part of that process, interviews were translated from shorthand into typed interview transcripts and returned to each participant for review, confirmation and revision. Participants were able to make revisions and one interviewee made two changes related to the transcription. The researcher was aware of power and influence through the interviewing process. Since the researcher was a former employee of the program and regional services manager, the interviews were clearly set up in the context of this research and formally arranged to allow for tangential conversation after the interview ended (Baxter and Eyles 1997).

Complementing the interviews, the researcher reviewed the Park Visitor Centre Interpretive Display Design Concept and Plan Proposal from August 30, 2006 (Alberta Community Development 2006). A contracted design firm (lime design inc. and j.communications) wrote this proposal in consultation with Parks and

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[5] The researcher planned to record the interviews. During the first interview the recording devise malfunctioned. To maintain consistency, the subsequent interview was also not recorded.

Protected Areas staff and the Friends of Switzer Park. The Friends of Switzer Park were not available for the research interviews. However, their contribution to the interpretive plan was significant. Other documents that were reviewed during the initial phase of data collection were the Park Brochure and relevant Government of Alberta websites (Alberta Community Development 2006; Alberta Community Development 2005; Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2008a; Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2008b).

During analysis the researcher reviewed the interviews and the documents to determine the goals of the visitor centre renovation project and its expected outcomes. Interview comments were coded by subject and nature (Livingstone, Pedretti, and Soren 2002). They were also inductively coded according to eight comment categories: children, management, general park issues, gift shop, activity, content, design and staff. Careful and systematic review of the documents resulted in a distillation of nested goals and expectations for the visitor centre clientele. The findings from this data set are presented in Section 4.2 of Chapter four.

3.2.2. Data Set B: Visitor Centre Survey

The second data set had two components: a general tally of visitors entering the centre and the visitor centre survey (described below). As part of the parks ongoing program review, park personnel keep a running tally of the number of people that enter the visitor centre each day. For the purposes of comparison, each day's visitor tally was divided by 3.44 (the average party size at the visitor centre for the summer) to determine the number of parties at the visitor centre each survey day. Park managers made this information available for inclusion in this research project.

The visitor centre survey, the second source of data in data set B, consisted of a survey completed by clientele in the visitor centre at the park. The researcher

administered this survey to clientele that came into the visitor centre on Friday and Saturday during regular hours (see Visitor Centre Survey, in Appendix 5). Starting when the centre opened on each survey day (2:00 pm on Friday and 9:00 am on Saturday), one member of each visiting party was asked if he or she was willing to complete the survey (Novey and Hall 2006). Only party members who appeared to be over 18 years old were asked to participate.

Willing respondents were asked to read an information sheet (in Appendix 5). The information sheet included the context for the research, the parameters of participation and contact information for the researcher and research supervisor. Surveys were handed out until 20 were successfully completed each day or the visitor centre closed, whichever happened first. The visitor centre closed at 9:00 pm on Friday and at 4:00 pm on Saturday of each study weekend. According to park staff, in 2006 daily visitor centre attendance was at an average of 30 groups per day (Thursday to Sunday), so attempting to complete 20 surveys per day was a robust goal for each survey day.

Respondents completed the surveys while in the centre using the pencil provided. The surveys were returned to a locked box when complete and respondents received a $2.00 coupon for the gift shop in the visitor centre in return for their participation. In total, 91 surveys were completed in this way over three study weekends (Nichols 1990). 19 surveys were completed during the first study weekend, 34 during the second and 38 during the third study weekend, so the goal of 20 surveys per day was not reached every day. When the final analysis of this data set was completed, visitor centre clientele who were surveyed in the campground survey were included.

Analysis of this survey included inputting the results into an Excel document to sort each variable and estimate patterns. Response categories for each question are outlined in Table 3.2. Geographic information was extrapolated from the

postal codes provided[6]. Comments on the surveys were recorded and conflated. Then the researcher coded the subject and nature of each response. Comments were sorted into the same subjects as in the analysis of the data set A and the nature of responses was coded as either positive or negative (Livingstone, Pedretti, and Soren 2002). The findings from this data set are presented in Section 4.3 of Chapter four.

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[6] Locations of postal codes given by respondents were grouped into regions. The locations of postal codes were confirmed using the Canada Post online postal code look up function (Canada Post 2009). Albertan Regions were defined using the Alberta Tourism Destination Regions (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2007a).

Table 3.2 Survey Response Categories

Question	Categories
Where do you live? Postal Code or Country	Calgary, Central Alberta, Edmonton, North Alberta, Rockies, South Alberta, Canada (outside of Alberta), International
Age	16-25, 26-45, 46-65 and 66 and over
Gender	Male, Female
How many adults are with you? How many children under 16 are with you?	1 adult alone, 1 adult with children, 2 adults alone, 2 adults with children, 3 adults alone, 3 adults with children, 4 adults alone, 4 adults with children, 5 or more adults alone, 5 or more adults with children
Schooling Level	Less than high school, grade 12, trade or college, university, graduate school
Why did you come today (to the visitor centre)?	Map or directions, park programs, amenities, exhibits, gift shop, wildlife sighting, other, combination
Have you visited before?	Yes, no
How did you find out about the centre?	Friend or family contact, park website, park brochure, campground kiosk, road sign, town visitor centre, other
Satisfaction with the visitor centre	From a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being unsatisfied and 5 being very satisfied
Experience (covering questions 11 and 13 of the visitor centre survey)	Comments all coded by subject and nature Additional coding categories: children, management, general park issues, gift shop, activity, content, design and staff
Recommend?	Yes, no

3.2.3. Data Set C: Campground Survey

The third data set (C) was also made up of two data sources. The first source was the record kept by the campground operators of campground users for the entire 2007 season. This record included the detail of the number of campsites booked each night over the course of each survey weekend. Tallies provided by the

campground operators allowed for an estimate of the number of parties camping at Switzer Park on each of the survey weekends. It was available for review and use by the researcher in October 2007.

The second source for data set C was a survey conducted among campers in the park (see Campground Survey, in Appendix 6). The researcher administered this survey on Saturday evenings and Sundays in the five campgrounds. The timing was for two reasons. The first reason was so the campground survey did not influence visitation numbers for the visitor centre on each weekend by alerting campers to the visitor centre as a destination in the park. The second reason was so potential campground survey respondents who had already participated in the visitor centre survey were not included in the campground survey. However, if a camper had been to the visitor centre on the same visit, yet had not completed the visitor centre survey, that camper was surveyed and his or her responses were collated with those from the visitor centre to be analyzed together as visitor centre clientele.

To administer the campground survey, the researcher drove to the campgrounds and then approached campsites on foot. At each campsite, the researcher asked the first camper in the site if he or she was willing to complete the survey. Only campers who appeared to be over the age of 18 were approached. Willing respondents were given an information sheet to review, which described the project, provided parameters of participation and gave contact information for the researcher and research supervisor (see Appendix 6). This information sheet was left with campers for reference after the survey as well.

The researcher read the survey aloud to campers who agreed to participate (Campground Survey is in Appendix 6). Campers answered the questions verbally based on the choices read by the researcher when the questions were multiple choice, or gave complete answers when the questions were open ended. The researcher noted answers to survey questions when the question could be

answered without verbal confirmation (like gender or party size) to reduce the time of the interruption. The researcher recorded all answers on a separate sheet for each respondent. This process was repeated with the researcher approaching each campsite until 20 surveys were completed each survey day or until all the occupied campsites were surveyed, whichever happened first (Nichols 1990). Respondents received a $2.00 coupon for the visitor centre gift shop in return for their participation.

Over the three survey weekends, 86 surveys were successfully completed (19 over the first weekend, 28 over the second weekend and 39 over the third weekend). No one camper was approached multiple times on the same weekend. For analysis, any camper who had visited the visitor centre was removed so that the set of campers analyzed included only those people who were in the park, but did not visit the visitor centre.

3.3. Sample of the Surveys

Visitor centre and campgrounds surveys resulted in 177 useable responses[7]. Completed surveys were sorted in two ways. First they were sorted by survey location (either the campground, n=86 or the visitor centre, n=91) to provide survey rate and sample information. Second they were sorted by respondent type, resulting in two groups. The first group had visited the visitor centre, the "visitor centre clientele" and n=108. The second group had not visited the centre, the "campers" and n=69. This second grouping based on respondent type was used as the primary grouping for all additional analysis in the research project. A summary of the survey location sample and respondent type is in Table 3.3.

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[7] 181 surveys were completed, and 4 were omitted from analysis where respondents left more than three questions blank.

Table 3.3: Survey Location and Respondent Types

Survey Location: where the survey took place.	Number	Respondent Type: who completed the survey.	Number
Campground	86	Camper	69
Visitor Centre	91	Visitor Centre Clientele	108
Total	177	Total	177

Both data set B and data set C included a count of the total number of visitors in the centre or in the campground as well as survey respondents on each survey weekend. That comparison allows for a sample size to be determined. During the three study weekends, 1106 parties were in the campgrounds and 175 parties were in the visitor centre. Of these park visitors, 177 were surveyed either in the visitor centre or the campground. Between six and eleven percent of parties for each study weekend were surveyed in the campground, as a result of the convenient sampling strategy. In the visitor centre, between 41 and 65 percent of the clientele parties were surveyed each weekend. This sample and the difference in visitation among the study weekends and the pattern of a seasonal increase in Switzer Park visitation can be seen in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Sample for All Surveys

Date	Campground Survey Location			Visitor Centre Survey Location		
	Number of Camping Parties[8]	Number of Campground Surveys Conducted[9]	Surveys per Party	Number of Visitor Centre Parties[10]	Number of Visitor Centre Surveys Conducted[11]	Surveys per Party
June 22	112	0[12]		5	5	100%
June 23	34	8	24%	17	14	84%
June 24	20	11	55%	8	0	
Weekend Total	166	19	11%	29	19	65%
July 27	181	0		10	8	83%
July 28	89	18	20%	28	26	92%
July 29	65	10	15%	16	0	
Weekend Total	335	28	8%	54	34	63%
August 3	216	0		20	13	65%
August 4	173	28	16%	31	25	81%
August 5	216	11	5%	41	0	
Weekend Total	605	39	6%	92	38	41%
TOTAL	1106	86	8%	175	91	52%

Source: Visitor Centre Survey, Campground Survey, Visitor Center Tally and ForestTech Tally, n=177

Data sets B and C were further analyzed by respondent type. For each respondent type (campers and visitor centre clientele) all variables were considered alone and in comparison for both numerical and statistical results (Pavlikakis and Tsihrintzis V. A. 2003). Each variable was charted and tested for relation to each other variable in a pivot table (Faherty 2008). Chi-square tests were performed to determine the statistical significance of variables that appeared to have relations to one another (Faherty 2008).

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[8] Camping party = number of campsites full that night according to campground operator data.
[9] Campground survey = number of surveys completed in the campground
[10] Visitor centre party = number of parties in the visitor centre, based on average party size from visitor survey (3.44) according to visitor centre staff's tracking
[11] Visitor centre survey = number of surveys completed in the visitor centre
[12] Surveys were not attempted on Friday in campgrounds, nor on Sunday in the visitor centre.

3.4. *Chapter Conclusion*

This research project included qualitative and quantitative methods and three key data sets. Each data set was developed, collected and analyzed by the researcher over one summer, providing consistency for the research project. Data set A included interviews and document reviews. Data set B was made up of a tally of visitor centre clientele and a visitor centre survey. A campground user tally and a campground survey were in data set C. The research project was conducted over three study weekends, reaching approximately eight[13] percent of campground parties with the campground survey and fifty two percent of visitor centre clientele.

4. Chapter FOUR: Findings

4.1. Introduction

This research project had three primary research questions. The first question concerned the policy, planning and implementation of the centre's renovation. Essentially, the first question was "did the visitor centre meet its intended goals?". The second question dealt with the people using the park during the research project period, "who did and did not visit the centre and why?". Both centre clientele and other park user responses were important for understanding this question. Finally, this research project asked what the renovation reveals about the changing nature of leisure. This final research question was not answered as successfully as the first two. However, it situates this research beyond the William A. Switzer Provincial Park visitor centre renovation and connects it with other research related to leisure, learning and parks.

A combined qualitative-quantitative data collection and analysis procedure was used to answer these research questions. Interviews with decision makers, interpretive document analysis, user tallies and surveys were completed over the course of three study weekends. These procedures were described in more detail in chapter three.

The main findings discussed in this chapter are organized by data set. Data set A (interviews and policy document review) revealed the policy context for the visitor centre renovation and the policy maker expectation of the visitor profile. Data set B (the visitor centre survey) revealed the demographic composition of centre clientele, their expectations and what they appreciated in the centre. The final main finding (which was generally discovered in data set C) was that the demographic differences between visitors and campers are minor. All the findings are presented here separately. They are compared to each other since this research project compares different stakeholder expectations, different respondent types and varied experiences of the centre. At the end of this chapter further

comparisons are made between policy maker and centre clientele expectations as well as between visitor centre clientele and campers.

4.2. Data Set A: Park History and Policy Review

Data about the institutional history of the park and plans for the visitor centre renovation were gathered by conducting interviews with two key decision makers (the front line staff person and the program and regional services manager) coupled with an interpretive document analysis of the visitor centre design concept from August 30, 2006 (Alberta Community Development 2006). The visitor centre renovation included an interior renovation, exterior signage and the installation of exhibits into an existing space. Policy makers embarked on the centre renovation without formative evaluation of the intended audience, but with cumulative experience dealing with park visitors.

4.2.1. History of the Visitor Centre Renovation

William A. Switzer Provincial Park has undergone four phases of infrastructure development over its fifty year history. Three of these phases involved the current visitor centre site. Between 1958 and the early 1980s, the main purpose of the park was to provide local residents with recreational opportunitites. Subsequently in 1988 the park administration office was built to serve as a base and a reliable location for park wardens and park managers to have offices and be available for public visits (Alberta Community Development 2006; Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2008b). More recently the park office was used as a seasonal office and supply storage area. Finally, in 2004, within a context of another government office reorganization, park managers decided to host a visitor centre in the park office as a place for visitors to ask questions, a destination for park information and a government presence in the park. This last goal was important given the prevailing context of outside contractors managing the campgrounds in provincial parks in Alberta, including Switzer Park (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, 2008b).

The visitor centre renovation was completed as two distinct projects. The first project was the structural transformation of the interior building into a suitable space. The second project was filling that space with appropriate furniture and exhibits to serve the public as a visitor centre. The purpose of the renovated space was to provide a function for an unused building; and to provide a consistent presence of park personnel in Switzer Park:

> "The original layout of the building was meant to support staff and provided only a small entry with a counter as a barrier between the staff and the public. A renovation would still provide space for staff to work, but the primary function would now be to welcome and serve the public by offering a larger information, exhibition area" (Interview A).

The park office that became the visitor centre was located in a part of the park called Kelley's Bathtub (see park map in Appendix 2). It was left vacant when park employees moved to the Hinton Civic Centre in 2001. While the empty park office continued as a seasonal office for summer employees, it was unoccupied eight months of the year and therefore was an under-used space:

> "The building was originally a park administration building, it housed park rangers (term used at the time), interpreters and administration support staff. Following our department's amalgamation with Fish and Wildlife, the staff were relocated to the Town of Hinton government building. At that time the goal was to provide a one window approach for the public seeking government staff. As a result this building was left empty and used only in the summer for the interpreter staff, an interpretive staff that had been cut to one 4 month position" (Interview A).

The building's convenient location off Highway 40 made it a popular place for travelers to stop for information (see Alberta map in Appendix 1 and park map in Appendix 2). Locating the visitor centre in the building was a strategic choice:

> "The Visitor Centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park is located in the middle of the Park beside the Kelley's Bathtub day-use area. The site is easily accessed off Hwy 40 along the Hinton/Grande Prairie Hwy 40 corridor. The building was formerly the Park Office, although it did receive some contacts from visitors" (Alberta Community Development 2006).

The sign about the visitor centre on Highway 40 and the long-term location of the park office at Kelley's Bathtub were sufficient to attract visitors to the centre since it is, "located adjacent to a very busy highway and naturally attracted a lot of traffic just by virtue of its location" (Interview A). Highway 40 is known as the scenic route to Alaska and is just north of the Yellowhead Highway between Edmonton and Jasper National Park and therefore both a well traveled and a picturesque highway (see Alberta map in Appendix 1). This means at least some of the traffic is due to vacationing travelers on long journeys who might be looking for a place to stop. Choosing the site for the visitor centre was easy since the park office location was popular, and there was evidence that the public wanted information at this location. One interviewee saw that,

> "…as the interpreter began to work independently from the office, they were spending many, many hours just dealing with the public at the front counter…" (Interview A).

The visitor centre opened officially in summer 2005. The initial renovation provided additional room to display information and items for sale and increased the room's capacity to accommodate a gathering of eighteen participants at a table (Alberta Community Development 2006). Visitation to the centre increased after the renovation mostly due to the increased opening hours of the building with 673 visitors recorded in 2004 and 2932 in 2005 (Alberta Community Development 2006).

Seeing the potential for growth and service delivery, in 2005 Parks and Protected Areas engaged design and communications consultants to develop an exhibit concept plan. One portion of this plan was complete at the time of this research project, during the 2007 summer season. Both the exhibits in the visitor centre and the exterior signage describe key features of the park, discuss the value of protected areas and encourage further discovery in the local area. Photographs 1 and 2 in Appendix 9 show the exhibits around the visitor centre.

4.2.2. Connection Between the Visitor Centre and Heritage Goals

The Government of Alberta heritage goals are explicitly connected to Parks and Protected Areas and goals concerning the protection of nature. The function of heritage appreciation in Alberta is to,

> "…provide opportunities to explore, understand and appreciate the natural heritage of Alberta, and enhance public awareness and our relationship to and dependence on it" (Alberta Community Development 2006).

In order to correctly map onto these administrative goals, William A. Switzer's interpretive plan described the intent of the visitor centre as broader than just serving the park itself. Rather, the plan was to make it relevant to the whole region and to,

> "…see the Kelley's Bathtub day use area become a central hub for stimulating interest, appreciation and exploration of a broader spectrum of parks and protected areas in the NES [Northern East Slopes]" (Alberta Community Development 2006).

A closer look at how the goals of the park, the visitor centre and different levels of government planning overlap shows that the visitor centre was intended to be a gateway to more than just William A. Switzer Provincial Park. The centre was designed to link people to nature in general, with a goal to:

> "…help connect the users to their natural world, to make their visit more meaningful, and to serve as an invitation to the parks outside the doors….It is one method of promoting stewardship, tourism, further learning and overall appreciation for the natural world" (Interview A).

While the centre was intended to increase heritage appreciation and enhance the visitor experience through education and interpretation, it also had to fit within the regional goals of valuing the park network, fostering a sense of personal connection with the park landscape, and encouraging visitors to be stewards and supporters of parks. Table 4.1 shows how the goals of the visitor centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park fit within the broader heritage appreciation goals of Parks and Protected Areas overall. As shown in this table, the goals for the visitor centre fit well with those of Parks and Protected Areas in the category

of Heritage Appreciation. By comparison, there is less overlap of goals in Preservation, Outdoor Recreation and Heritage Tourism.

Table 4.1 Nested Goals for Parks and Protected Areas

Mission statement for Parks and Protected Areas:		
"Parks and protected areas are managed as a legacy for future generations through leadership, stewardship and research to protect biodiversity and provide environmental, social, and economic benefits" (Alberta Community Development 2006; Alberta Community Development 2005)		
Goals for Parks and Protected Areas	**Summary of Regional Heritage Appreciation Goals**	**Visitor Centre Goals** [14]
Preservation		
Heritage Appreciation	Support mission	
	Support management goals	Promote appropriate behavior in parks and protected areas
	Personal and non personal programming available	Enhance visitor experience Education and interpretation
	Interest in natural and cultural history of this region	Centre as hub for information
	Variety of media for theme communication	Information provided
	Value of park network (health, environmental, spiritual)	Foster a sense of personal connection Understand the role of park landscape within working landscape
	Visitors will become supporters of parks	Encourage to be stewards and supporters
Outdoor Recreation		
Heritage Tourism		

Source: Adapted from Alberta Community Development 2006 and Alberta Community Development 2005.

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[14] Visitor Centre Goals are described as "site goals", in the Interpretive Plan Document. They are listed here in relation to Heritage Appreciation Goals rather than in order.

4.2.3. Policy Maker Expectations of the Visitor Centre

Policy makers expected the visitor centre to have three specific roles: service, information and education. Centre personnel would provide service. This would be through responding to questions and interests of visitor centre clientele. Making information available to visitors and providing easy public access was also important for policy makers. Finally, the visitor centre was to play a key role in Parks and Protected Areas' public education program through visitor education as well as acting as a hub for formal school programs. Each of these expectations are described here in more detail.

Service

The first expectation was that the centre would serve the public by providing a venue for visitors to interact with park visitor centre personnel and get answers to questions about the area. Answering individual visitor questions was seen as a way for Parks and Protected Areas to serve the public and provided an opportunity for meaningful connection:

> "[The visitor centre] provides an opportunity for us to make effective, meaningful, memorable contact with our public … There was no other place that could serve as a portal between our staff and the public in this area, or for that matter we had no other place like it in all of West Central Alberta" (Interview A).

Policy makers saw a need for this partly because of visitor expressions of interest in the past:

> "There was a demonstrated desire by the public simply by the sheer numbers of people stopping at the building. They were looking for information, directions, and of course, had a variety of questions related to bears and bear safety, hiking, camping etc" (Interview A).

Services were established in the visitor centre through employing visitor services staff and situating them at an open and visible information desk. The centre was staffed with one visitor services officer five days a week, including weekends. Photograph 7 in Appendix 9 shows that visitor centre staff members have a large desk and a prominent place in the visitor centre renovation. The same photo also

shows the array of official park information available for visitor centre clientele to take with them. These are both visual reminders of this first policy maker expectation that the centre would serve the public.

Information

Information sharing was the policy makers' second expectation for the visitor centre. Information was offered to visitor centre clientele by both staff and signage. Both could provide information about Switzer Park and the local area. Information sharing was described in interviews as a key part of the role of staff at the visitor centre. One interviewee explained the benefit of having staff in the centre to enhance visitor learning, describing the learning areas as,

> "…the flora, fauna, about what recreational opportunities there are in the park, about bear safety. They learn about whatever they want to ask about" (Interview B).

Policy makers expected that visitors would be motivated to visit the centre to learn about the opportunities for recreation in Switzer Park, to collect maps of the park and details about park programs. One interviewee described visitors as having the chance to,

> "… learn that parks and protected areas offer a wide variety of spaces and opportunities for exploration. They gather the information they need to explore not only Switzer Park, but all the other … protected areas in the Hinton area" (Interview A).

Besides information about Switzer Park, policy makers expected visitor centre clientele to learn about the surrounding areas and Parks and Protected Areas in general while at the visitor centre. Policy makers even saw their influence extending throughout the Northern East Slopes region. Photograph 3 in Appendix 9 shows the new displays and storage space built to highlight local area information and the focus on the region surrounding William A. Switzer Provincial Park.

Education

The third expectation of policy makers was that the centre would communicate
Parks and Protected Area's official message of heritage appreciation and educate
the public about the environment in this region:

> "The main theme for the Visitor Centre Exhibits can be summarized as:
> 'Parks and Protected Areas Strengthen the Fabric of the Northern East
> Slopes'" (Alberta Community Development 2006).

> "People learn the history of the park, they learn about all aspects of the
> [heritage appreciation] mandate. They learn about recreation
> opportunities. And a better visit enables them to enhance their experience
> of the park" (Interview B).

Policy makers hoped visitors would leave the centre with a better understanding
of the value of protected areas. The value of parks and protected areas is
discussed in the 2002 Heritage Appreciation Guidelines. These articulate for
policy makers the value, stating that,

> "Alberta's parks and protected areas preserve the province's
> environmental diversity and cultural heritage for all time" (Alberta
> Community Development 2005).

The other heritage appreciation guidelines describe protected areas that are
managed for ecological and experiential purposes. The guidelines conclude that,
"Safeguarding parks and protected areas is everyone's responsibility" (Alberta
Community Development 2006, p. 11). Policy makers expected visitor centres
like the one at Switzer Park to be instrumental in communicating these ideas to
the public.

Taken together, policy makers suggested that via service, information, and
education the new visitor centre would meet the centre's goals. These would both
in the form of management goals for heritage appreciation and the public's
perceived desire for an information and education hub in Switzer Park.

4.2.4. Policy Maker Expectations of the Visitor Centre Clientele

In addition to identifying the manner in which the visitor centre would serve the public, policy makers also identified the type of clientele that they expected to visit the centre. First, the visitor centre was seen as a new service for current visitors to Switzer Park rather than as an enticement for unfamiliar visitors to visit the park for the first time. Policy makers expected centre clientele to already be in the park, either as campers or day-users and to be,

> "… looking for more information on birds, trees, something they saw, something to do, out of interest, or looking for direction to get to another place in the area" (Interview A).

While policy makers were generally hesitant to exclusively describe the people who would visit the centre, they conceded that the likely clientele would fall into one of three categories: locals (from the communities of Hinton and Edson), tourists stopping for a short rest on their way to nearby Jasper National Park, or families who were camping for the weekend. One interviewee described four types of expected visitors without identifying a typical one. The interviewee listed,

> "…out of area tourist who wants to know about the "sites"; tourist from Alberta / Canada who wants recreation activities; old timers who want history and don't want recreation; families who are interested in activities, programs" (Interview B).

The interpretive plan describes the main summer audience as,

> "…tourists, primarily families with children from Alberta and BC" (Alberta Community Development 2006, p. 10).

Another interviewee described the varied groups of visitor centre clientele as,

> "…campers trying to find their way to the campground , people traveling to other destinations using hwy 40…Kelley's Bathtub is a great pull out and rest stop so they will come in to the visitor centre…day users coming for picnics and to use the beach" (Interview A).

Finally, the interpretive plan includes a summary audience assessment, coming to this conclusion:

"Informal audiences are on vacation and seeking information that will enhance their recreational experiences. While some may participate in formal programs, they are primarily there for enjoyment, learning needs to be fun to capture their interest. These visitors are seeking general information on the park and the larger region, including camping, trails, boating and fishing" (Alberta Community Development 2006, p. 10).

4.2.5. Summary

The key informant interviews and policy review placed the visitor centre renovation in the context of other changes at William A. Switzer Provincial Park. Location, precedence and increased staffing were all key in the visitor centre renovation decisions. The policy maker expectations of the centre's role in the park were substantial. They aligned generally with the heritage goals for Parks and Protected Areas and specifically with the perceived roles of a centre: service, information and education. Policy makers expected the visitor centre clientele to be diverse and to be stopping at the centre to learn about the park and the area.

4.3. Data Set B: Visitor Centre Survey

In addition to understanding the intent of the visitor centre, this research sought to identify who visited the centre, who did not, and why. This information was obtained via a visitor centre survey conducted on Fridays and Saturdays on each of three weekends in the summer of 2007. This included a total of 91 responses obtained from visitors inside the centre, and additional centre clientele who were first surveyed in the campground to bring the total number of the visitor centre clientele respondents to 108[15]. The following pages provide results from the survey, including descriptive statistics of the visitor centre clientele, the clientele's reasons for visiting the centre, and their satisfaction with the service and information. Details of the visitor centre clientele responses are provided in Appendix 7 for reference.

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[15] Sample process explained in detail in Chapter 3, section 3.3.

4.3.1. Visitor Centre Clientele

The visitor centre clientele came mostly from Alberta and then from other parts of Canada and a small number were of international origin. They visited in groups that were diverse in terms of age, party composition and educational level. Demographic descriptions of the visitor centre clientele are detailed below and summarized in Table 4.2.

In terms of geographic origin, nearly half (46 percent) of the clientele at the centre were from Edmonton (the closest major metropolitan area) and 15 percent were from the Rockies and the nearby town of Hinton. Only 13 percent of visitor centre clientele were from parts of Canada outside of Alberta and seven percent were international visitors. Three-quarters (73 percent) of the visitor centre clientele had never been to the park before.

The gender of visitors was evenly distributed with 44 percent male and 56 percent female visitors. This does not, however, indicate the overall gender distribution of visitors at the centre, since only one person per visiting group filled in the survey[16]. The majority of centre clientele (88 percent) were between the ages of 26 and 65. The two ends of the age spectrum were represented equally by visitor centre clientele in the 16 to 25 year old group and the 66 and over group.

Two adults alone at the visitor centre was the most common party size and composition (47 percent). There were also a sizeable number of parties (31 percent) where two adults and children came to the centre together. Only four percent of visitors were single adults or a single adult and children. The remaining parities all had more than two adults who came together with or without children (18 percent).

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[16] While the first person to enter the centre was given the survey to fill out, there were instances when that person would hand over the survey to another member of the party to complete. In each of those instances, a man was handed the survey and gave it to a woman to complete.

Every sort of educational level was represented by visitor centre clientele. The largest group (38 percent) had a trade school or college background. University graduates made up 27 percent of the centre clientele and 11 percent had graduate school experience. Most of the remaining visitor centre clientele had a high school diploma (20 percent).

Table 4.2 Visitor Centre Clientele Description

		Visitor Centre Clientele (%) n=108
Geographic Origin	International	6
	Canada (not Alberta)	13
	Southern Alberta	1
	Calgary	3
	Northern Alberta	6
	Edmonton	46
	Central Alberta	10
	Rockies (includes Hinton)	15
Age	16-25	6
	26-44	44
	46-65	44
	over 66	6
Gender	Male	44
	Female	56
Party Composition	2 adults alone	47
	2 adults with children	31
	single adults or single adult and children	4
	> 2 adults with or without children	18
Children	Visiting with Children	48
	Visiting without Children	52
Educational Level	No High School	4
	High School Diploma	20
	Trade School or College	38
	University Degree	27
	Graduate School	11
Park Experience	Been to centre before	27
	Never been to centre before	73

Source: Visitor Centre Clientele Responses (see Appendix 7)

4.3.2. Reasons for Visiting the Centre

Of the 91 visitor centre clients that completed their survey at the centre, all were asked on the survey to give their reason for visiting the centre[17]. Visitors responded that they came to the centre to see the exhibits (23 percent) and to get a map (21 percent). People who visited the centre also wanted to find out about programs (12 percent), to access amenities (10 percent) and to visit the gift shop (two percent). No respondent marked "wildlife sightings" as a reason for visiting the centre. Figure 4.1 shows the frequency of responses regarding visitor centre clientele's reasons for visiting the centre.
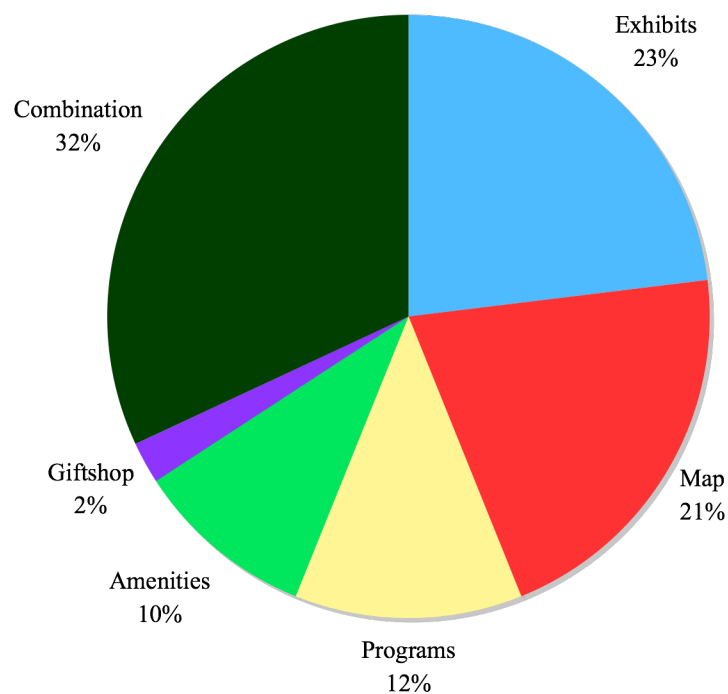
Figure 4.1 Reasons to Visit the Centre
Source: Visitor Centre Survey (see Appendices 5 and 7), n=91

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[17] Visitor centre clientele who were surveyed in the campground were not asked the reason they visited the centre, and therefore not included in Figure 4.1.

Reasons for visiting the centre were also described in the open-ended survey questions. A complete list of open ended survey responses is in Appendix 7. Visitors reported in this section that they expected information services and expressed general curiosity saying the centre was a, "great idea, good for adults and kids". Some visitors stopped only briefly and commented, "did not have time to look much" or "didn't really look but what [I saw] was good". For other visitors, the centre was a destination itself. One returning visitor mentioned, "I have been here on a school tour and it was excellent". Another remembered the previous offerings at the centre, "glad to have it open, it has been closed in past years".

No respondent marked "wildlife sighting" as a prime reason for visiting the centre. However, comments about wildlife included a visitor who said he or she, "learned about bugs". Other visitors expanded on the wildlife questions they had answered, such as, "names of flowers" and "info on where to look for birds".

Visitor centre clientele learned about the centre through various means, and were asked to recall their sources in the survey. The road sign directing highway traffic is important and 54 percent of visitor centre clientele found out first about the centre through the road sign. A personal contact was another key way clientele learned about the visitor centre. Table 4.3 shows the ways visitor centre clientele learned about the centre.

Table 4.3 Information Source for Visitor Centre Clientele

Information Source to Find Out About the Visitor Centre	Visitor Survey Responses (%) n=108
Local	3
Combination	9
Contact	19
Map	1
Road Sign	54
Brochure	8
Website	2
Information Booth	5

Source: Visitor Centre Clientele Responses (see Appendix 7)

4.3.3. Visitor Preferences

Visitor centre clientele made positive comments about the centre and 98 percent said they would recommend the centre to others. While comments were wide ranging, they did fall into sets of key categories according to topic. Comments were coded by subject and each comment was included in one or more categories. Based on survey responses[18], three comment categories were clearly important to visitor centre clientele: content, staff and design (see Figure 4.2).

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[18] Visitor centre clientele who were surveyed in the campground were not asked for general comments about the centre, and therefore not included in Figure 4.2.
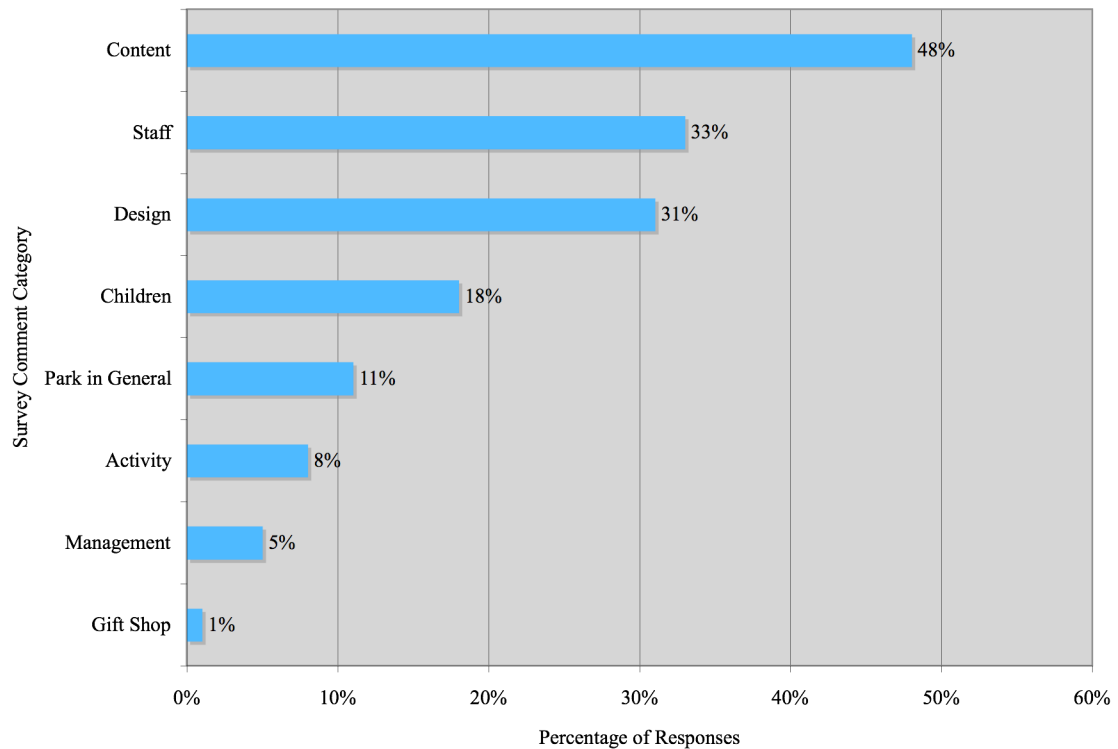
Figure 4.2 Subject of Survey Comments from Visitor Centre Clientele
Source: Visitor Centre Survey (see Appendices 5 and 7), n=91, comments
categorized by researcher

The content of the visitor centre was referred to in half of the comments on the

visitor centre survey. Some visitors described the specific content that was helpful

at the centre:

> "Found them [the exhibits] informative. Discovered what wildlife is in the
> park."

> "They're very neat and informative - learned a lot about bugs in the lake.
> Good programs for visitors and park guides were very friendly and
> helpful."

> "Interesting - good pictures and good interactive displays - microscope was
> interesting".

Other visitors referred to information that was immediately helpful to the visitor

on the day of the visit:

> "Very well done. Identified an insect we saw at our campsite"

> and "I did learn about how to be 'bear smart'".

The final content comments related more broadly to general information for a visitor's trip with general statements like: "enjoy reading about the area" and "[I learned] about fishing spots".

The second key comment category was about the front line staff person at the visitor centre, who was mentioned in 33 percent of the visitor centre survey responses (see Figure 4.2). Most of the comments were positive and often in the form of a description of the staff person such as, "very friendly and helpful", "very professional attendant" and "staff exceptionally friendly and helpful". The staff person's ability to respond personally to questions with custom answers was valued by visitor centre clientele.

Visitor centre clientele mentioned design in one third (31 percent) of the comments on the visitor centre survey. One distinctive feature of the centre is that it is flexible. The modular exhibits could change from year to year. Photographs 2 and 3 in Appendix 9 shows panels that can be changed from year to year. Another distinctive feature is that the centre was new. One visitor remarked on the new design, particularly the, "very vibrant signs". Clientele commented that the centre was, "well layed out". For some visitors, the design was family oriented, so even if it was not unusual compared to other centres, it was worth visiting. Specifically a visitor described the centre as,

> "…nothing really new as our family has visited many visitor centres in our camping experiences. Our kids always enjoy looking / reading anyways and trying out interactive displays".

The cougar (a mounted specimen on a wall with a mural) was mentioned by name three times in the visitor centre survey comments. The cougar was not mounted for the renovated visitor centre, but was instead maintained from the earlier use of the building as an administration office for park rangers. The cougar mount was well integrated into the new centre and a new mural was added, providing an ideal place for photograph staging. Photograph 4 in Appendix 9 shows the cougar in

context at the centre, and photograph 8 in Appendix 9 shows a close range image of the mounted cougar with the new mural background.

The overall flexible design of the centre incorporated two particularly seasonal or temporary exhibits that may change over the course of the summer to stay current with what is outside. In summer 2007 these changing sections dealt with bugs in the pond and birds near the lake. Photograph 10 in Appendix 9 shows these temporary exhibits. Displays like these connect with visitor interest about what they might see outside and also connect to the immediate natural surroundings of the centre. They are an area of integration for interpreters at the centre as well.

The current centre layout encourages visitor flow, ease of navigation and includes places where visitors can sit down (see Photograph 4 in Appendix 9). However, all visitor needs could not be met at the centre. It has no washroom[19] and visitors commented on that and suggested relaxing amenities such as, "free coffee would be a nice touch".

Finally, the visitor centre design was seen as appropriate for children, and visitors appreciated this with comments like,

> "this is great. The kids related to topics they had learned about in school. Very informative"

> "my children love hands on" and

> "I bet my kids will love it, but they didn't visit yet".

4.3.4. Summary

The visitor centre survey was the key research protocol for data set B. Results from this survey described the demographic composition of visitor centre clientele over the course of the research project. Visitors also revealed on the survey the reasons they chose to visit the centre. Common reasons included getting a map

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[19] There is a public washroom in an outhouse in the adjoining day use area.

and seeing the exhibits. Visitor centre clientele made positive comments about the centre renovation when they were asked to describe their feelings about the centre in a comment. The survey comments were wide reaching and most could be categorized regarding the content, staff, design and children at the centre.

4.4. Data Set C: Campground Survey

In addition to interviews with policy makers, a policy review, and a survey of visitor centre clientele, a general survey of campers at the park campground was conducted to determine how many of the park visitors actually visited the centre during their trip to the park and who was camping. Surveys for campers were completed in the five campgrounds at Switzer Park by the researcher approaching campsites on Saturday evening and Sunday morning of each survey weekend in the summer of 2007. Visitor centre clientele who had not already been surveyed at the centre were included in this campground survey. However, those respondents were set aside to be considered as visitor centre clientele. Here term "camper"[20] is used here to refer to the Switzer Park visitors who did not go to the visitor centre as part of their time in the park.

4.4.1. Campground Clientele

Campers shared many demographic attributes with the visitor centre clientele. They tended to be from Edmonton or from the local region. They visited in diverse groups in terms of age, party composition and educational level. Table 4.4 includes specific results for each category. Over half of the campers (59 percent) had been to the park before.

In terms of geography, nearly half of the campers (45 percent) were from Edmonton. Only the Rockies (which includes Hinton) and Central Alberta also had more than one tenth of campers represented with 29 percent and 13 percent

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[20] Using the general term "camper" is not meant to indicate that survey respondents represent all campers at all times, nor that visitor centre clientele did not also camp.

respectively. Very few campers were international visitors or from outside Alberta in Canada. Campers who responded to this campground survey were 61 percent male and 29 percent female. This does not necessarily reflect the overall gender distribution of campers, however, because the sampling process required that first person seen in a campsite was approached to conduct the survey[21]. Nearly half of campers (48 percent) were between the ages of 26 and 45. The next largest group (25 percent) was campers between 46 and 65. Young people between 16 and 25 represented 16 percent of the campers. Seniors comprised the smallest camper group.

The party size of campers was nearly evenly distributed between two adults alone (33 percent), two adults with children (30 percent) and more than two adults with or without children (32 percent). Campers were well educated. Over one third had a university education and three percent also had a graduate school background. Another third of the campers had a trade or college background and 20 percent had high school diplomas. Some of the groups that had not finished high school were in high school at the time of the research.

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[21] While the first person at the campsite was given the survey to fill out, there were instances when that person would hand over the survey to another member of the party to complete. In each of those instances, a woman was handed the survey and gave it to a man to complete.

Table 4.4 Camper Description

		Campers (%)
Geographic Origin	International	1
	Canada (not Alberta)	1
	Southern Alberta	0
	Calgary	1
	Northern Alberta	9
	Edmonton	45
	Central Alberta	13
	Rockies (includes Hinton)	29
Age	16-25	16
	26-44	48
	46-65	25
	over 66	11
Gender	Male	29
	Female	61
Party Composition	2 adults alone	33
	2 adults 2 children	30
	single adults or single adult and children	5
	> 2 adults with or without children	32
Children	Visiting with Children	49
	Visiting without Children	51
Educational Level (percentage)	No High School	13
	High School Diploma	20
	Trade School or College	29
	University Degree	35
	Graduate School	3
Park Experience	Been to park before	59
	Never been to park before	41

Source: Campground Survey (see Appendices 6 and 8), n=69

4.4.2. Reasons for Camping

Relaxation, camping and a convenient location were the top three reasons
campers gave for coming to Switzer Park[22]. One quarter (23 percent) of campers
said relaxation was their main reason for coming to the park. Camping was
specifically mentioned by 20 percent of the campers and the location was noted

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[22] Visitor centre clientele surveyed in the campground were asked specifically why they were camping and therefore are included in Figure 4.3.

by 17 percent as convenient. Convenience was described either as on the way to another destination or as a good meeting place for a particular group of people. Figure 4.3 shows the distribution of reasons campers gave for camping.
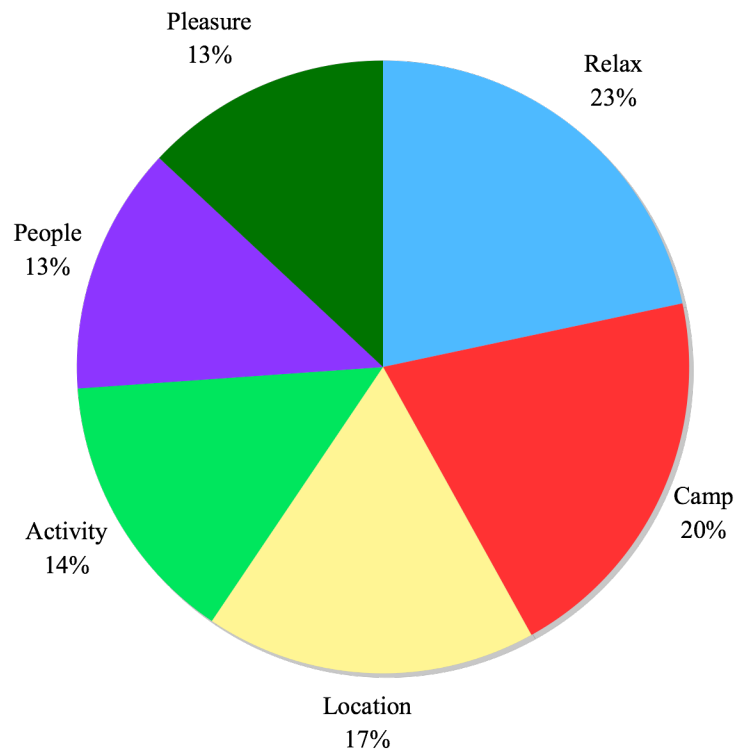
Figure 4.3 Reasons Campers Came to Switzer Park
Source: Campground Survey (see Appendices 6 and 8), n=86, comments categorized by researcher

The majority (63 percent) of campers found out about the park either through a personal contact or a combination of methods, including the fact that they were local. The only other method that was mentioned by more than one tenth of the campers was seeing the road sign. The website, brochure and maps were all cited as ways campers heard about the park, but none were mentioned more than one tenth of the time. Table 4.5 shows details of camper's information sources.

Table 4.5 Information Sources for Campers

Information Source to Find Out About Switzer Park	Campers (%) n=69
Local	30
Combination	0
Contact	33
Map	6
Road Sign	17
Brochure	3
Website	9
Information Booth	1

Source: Campground Survey (see Appendix 6)

Survey results in this research project show that campers chose their activity based on relaxation and the appeal of camping itself. Most campers knew about the park because it was familiar to them. Many campers were social, talking about other people as a reason to camp and other people as the source of learning about Switzer Park in the first place.

4.4.3. Camper Preferences

Campers spoke positively about their experience in the park. Their comments related to the park facilities, potential activities and children. Campers liked the park because of its associated activities, the positive environment for relaxation, and because it was a familiar place. Some comments were about the amenities, like,

"We love it here, amazing free wood and site available!"

Most (91 percent) campers said they would recommend the park to others. Campers were generally positive in their remarks about Switzer Park, yet brief like, "wood is nice" and "park is nice".

There were also some negative comments, both from campers who would not recommend the park (nine percent) and others who simply had negative comments (that made up 23 percent of all comments). Negative comments by campers included discussion of the upcoming campground renovations that were planned for summer 2008. One visitor commented specifically, "this year the park is run down, look forward to the renovation". Another area of complaint was the campground management, and having private contractors manage Alberta park campgrounds. Campers who listed facilities issues with the campground as their reason for concern, said they would not recommend the park to others saying, "facilities for camping need to be improved". One camper who said he would not recommend the park clarified that it was because he wanted to keep the park a secret.

Campers were all asked whether they would go to the visitor centre and the average response was a likelihood of three (with one being not very likely and five being very likely). The reasons for not visiting the centre were,

"no time"

"in the wrong direction on the highway"

"I don't need another place to shop" and

"need bigger signs about the centre, might go with the kids".

There were some who had tried to visit but after the centre closed in the evening and said that it "wasn't open when we went". None of these campers indicated they would try to return to the centre. All of the camper comments can be found in Appendix 8.

4.4.4. Summary

The campground survey was the main source of data for data set C. Results from this survey described the visitors who chose to camp and to not visit the visitor centre while at Switzer Park. In summary, campers were positive though brief in

their comments about the park. Some negative remarks were also offered during the research project, generally regarding campground management. Common reasons for camping included relaxation, enjoying the activity of camping and the opportunity to socialize.

4.5. Comparisons

The results of this research, while interesting alone, provide the most insight by examining them in combination. Here comparisons are first made between policy maker expectations and the results from visitor centre clientele. This comparison identifies whether or not policy maker expectations were met. Second, the responses of visitor centre clientele are compared with those of campers to try to ascertain how these two groups of park visitors are similar or different.

4.5.1. Policy Maker Expectations versus Survey Results

Policy makers expected visitor centre clientele to visit in search of information services, and to be local from Alberta. They also had expectations about visitor motivation and preferences. Visitor centre clientele comments and demographic attributes generally aligned with these expectations. Policy makers also expected children to be in the majority of visitor groups and that local visitors would have an average educational background. Here the policy maker expectations are compared to the different visitor centre clientele survey responses.

Children

Children were expected to be a central reason for visiting the park visitor centre, however over half of the visitor centre clientele groups were actually traveling without children (52 percent). Children were certainly present at the centre, but the surveys did not indicate that they were the most frequent reason for stopping at the visitor centre. This is a key difference between policy maker expectations and actual visitor centre clientele behaviour. Centre clientele who did come with children mentioned them in their comments one third of the time. This identifies

children and families with children as an important user group, yet does not confirm that children were the primary reason for visiting the centre for the majority of visitor centre clientele.

In addition to policy makers expecting people visiting with children to be the primary audience, people who did not visit the centre also commented that children might enjoy it. For example, children were the subject of seven percent of campground survey comments. This finding suggests that there remains a shared perception that the visitor centre should cater to groups with children even if visitation patterns do not warrant this. This finding also emphasizes an area for future development, ensuring that the visitor centre continues to cater to adults as well as children.

Education

The interpretive plan differentiated the local population's educational level from the general education level of people at the park. The policy maker expectation, as reflected in both interviews and the interpretive plan, was that 30 percent of the people in the park from Edson and Hinton would have a trade or college education and that 70 percent of people in the park from those communities would have high school diplomas as their highest level of education. The expectation was also that these groups would visit the centre. In both the visitor and campground survey, 15 percent of Edson and Hinton residents had a university degree and 41 percent had a trade school or college education, while 21 percent had a high school diploma and 24 percent had no high school diploma. Table 4.6 shows that there are important differences between education levels expected by policy makers and the much higher levels reported by actual visitor centre clientele and campers. The implications of this relate to program planning, future marketing efforts and alternative methods of communication for different groups in the region.

Table 4.6 Education Levels of Different Respondent Types and Policy Maker Expectations

Education Level	Expected (%)[23] Edson and Hinton Residents	Actual (%) All Edson and Hinton Respondents n=34	Actual (%) Visitor Centre Clientele n=108	Actual (%) Campers n=69	Actual (%) All Survey Respondents n=177
No High School		24	4	13	7
High School	70	21	20	20	20
College or Technical	30	41	38	29	35
University		15	27	35	30
Graduate School			11	3	8

Source: Visitor Centre Survey and Campground Survey (see Appendices 5 and 6) and Interpretive Plan (Alberta Community Development 2006)

4.5.2. Visitor Centre Clientele versus Campers

Comparing the visitor centre clientele with the campers revealed only three attributes that were significantly different: previous visits to Switzer Park, learning about the park, and geographic origin[24]. Other areas where differences were not significant, but were interesting, were education levels and age. Each of these attributes is presented in table 4.7 and includes the percentage of response from the surveys and the results of basic statistical analysis.

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[23] As indicated in interview and policy documents (Alberta Community Development 2006).

[24] Locations of postal codes given by respondents were grouped into these regions. The locations of postal codes were confirmed using the Canada Post online postal code look up function (Canada Post 2009). Albertan Regions were defined using the Alberta Tourism Destination Regions (Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2007a).

Table 4.7 Visiting the Centre as a Function of Prior Visits to the Park, Learning about the Park, Geographic Origin, Education and Age

Variable	Visitor Centre Clientele (%) n=108	Campers (%) n=69	x^2	*P*-value
Previous Park Visits			18.7	<0.001
Been to Park / Centre Before	26	59		
Never Been to Park / Centre	74	41		
How Learned About Park			37.6	<0.0001
Local	3	30		
Combination	9	0		
Contact	19	33		
Map	1	6		
Road Sign	54	17		
Brochure	8	3		
Website	2	9		
Information Booth	5	1		
Geographic Origin			19.9	<0.006
International	6	1		
Canada (not Alberta)	13	1		
Southern Alberta	1	0		
Calgary	3	1		
Northern Alberta	6	9		
Edmonton	46	45		
Central Alberta	10	13		
Rockies (includes Hinton)	15	29		
Education			10.5	<0.033
No High School	4	13		
High School	20	20		
Trade or College	38	29		
University Degree	27	35		
Graduate Studies	11	3		
Age			10.7	<0.014
16-25	6	16		
26-45	44	48		
46-65	44	25		
66+	6	11		

Source: Visitor Centre Survey and Campground Survey and Results (see Appendices 5, 6, 7 and 8)

Previous Park Visits

Whether or not a respondent had visited before was an area of significant difference between campers and visitor centre clientele. For 74 percent of visitor centre clientele this was their first time, whereas 59 percent of campers had been to the park before. Table 4.7 indicates that these numbers are statistically significant saying that visitor centre clientele had a greater representation of people that had never visited before (x^2 = 18.7, df =1 p= <0.001). This could be explained by the feature that new visitors tend to want a map and additional information about the park.

Comments from both campers and visitor centre clientele indicated a strong sense of ownership of the park. In the campground, campers responded quickly to the question "how did you hear about the park" with, "it's always been here" or "we've always come, for sure". Also at the visitor centre, there were clientele who returned to the park multiple times, yet visited the centre to see what was happening in "their park". Therefore the significance of previous visits and the satisfaction of those visits is an important finding to consider when planning future visitor centre programs.

How Learned About the Park

How park visitors learned about the park was significantly different for visitor centre clientele and campers. Whereas nearly 60 percent of visitor centre clientele learned about the park by seeing the road sign, over 60 percent of campers learned about the park through a contact or because they were local and knew the area. This difference is significant (x^2 = 37.6, df=5, p=<0.0001). Table 4.7 also shows other ways the two respondent types each learned about the park. This difference indicates the power of word of mouth in the local community for publicizing the park and also the serendipity of many visitors as they stop at the visitor centre after only seeing a sign on the road.

Geographic Origin

When considered in categories, the locations people came from to visit Switzer Park were significantly different between the campers and the visitor centre clientele. Most strikingly, there was a greater proportion of campers from the Rockies (which includes Hinton) than visitor centre clientele from the region (29 percent compared to 15 percent). Out of province visitors and international visitors nearly all came to the visitor centre. International visitors made up six percent of the visitor centre clientele compared to one percent of the campers. Non-Albertan Canadians made up 13 percent of the visitor centre clientele compared to one percent of the campers as well. This means a total of 91 percent of all non-Albertan people surveyed in this research project chose to visit the centre. This could be because this group needed a map, or because they were looking to learn more generally about the area. The region where the geographic origins of visitor centre clientele and campers were similar was people from Edmonton, the largest metropolitan area approximately four hours away by car. Table 4.7 compares the visitor centre clientele and camper geographic origin to one another and to the total proportion of geographic origins for the research project, showing the significance (x^2 = 19.9, df =7 p= <0.006).

Education Levels

The largest difference between the groups in terms of education was at each end of the education spectrum. Graduate degrees were held by 11 percent of visitor centre clientele, whereas only three percent of campers had graduate degrees. In contrast, four percent of visitor centre clientele did not have high school diplomas, whereas 13 percent of campers were in that group. Despite the graduate school levels and the statistically significant differences, the visitor centre clientele and the campers exhibit the identical percentage (38 percent) of respondents having either a university degree or graduate school completed when these two categories are combined. The difference between the groups in their education levels (x^2 = 10.5, df =4, p=<0.033) was not statistically significant. Table 4.7 shows the visitor centre clientele to have slightly higher education levels compared to campers.

Age

The largest groups of visitor centre clientele were in either the 26 to 45 year old age group or the 46 to 65 year old age group. Visitor centre clientele were evenly distributed with six percent in the 16 to 35 age group and the over 66 age group. Camper ages were more equally distributed through each group with the largest group (48 percent) being in the 26 to 45 age category. The next largest group was 46 to 65 (25 percent) and 16 percent of campers were 16 to 25, while 11 percent were over 66. Table 4.7 shows age categories in terms of visiting the centre or not as not statistically significant (x^2 = 10.7, *df* =3 *p*= <0.014). The implications of these differences are related mostly to program development and gearing documentation appropriately.

4.5.3. Summary

Policy makers renovated the visitor centre based on their expectations around the visitor centre clientele. In many respects, the clientele were as they expected. Visitor centre clientele were looking for information services at the centre. However they differed in terms of their visiting group including children and their education levels. This research project also included the comparison of the responses of visitor centre clientele and campers to try to ascertain how these two groups of visitors were similar or different. Though in many ways these groups were similar, they differed in terms of age and education level. The most striking differences in terms of visitation pattern were between those who had been to the park before and first time visitors and due to how visitors learned about the park and their geographic origins.

4.6. Chapter Conclusion

All three data sets revealed interesting features of Switzer Park policy makers, visitor centre clientele and campers. Policy makers expected the centre to be a hub for education in the park. Visitor centre clientele were looking for information

and appreciated the content, staff and design of the centre. Campers were similar demographically to visitor centre clientele, except a larger portion of them had been to the park before. The demographics of visitors reflected the demographics of the resource industry communities around the park.

In comparison the different data sets showed trends that delineate along past experience, geography, information about the park, age and education to determine park activities and preferences, if not visitor segments. This research project also showed specific motivations for visitor centre clientele and campers. Knowing these motivations is helpful for predicting user satisfaction and for future policy decisions.

5. Chapter FIVE: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

The Switzer Park visitor centre was intended as a way to encourage people to further explore nature. Visitor centre clientele expected to find information, and they appreciated the design and the staff interactions there. Counter to policy maker expectations, they were not exclusively local visitors and they did not necessarily visit with children. These main findings connect to one another to create a picture of visitors and their educational interests. These findings also reflect how Canadians' sense of what nature means may be changing and how leisure decisions are adapting accordingly. The following discussion connects these main findings with current ideas around leisure, learning and parks as represented in Figure 5.1.
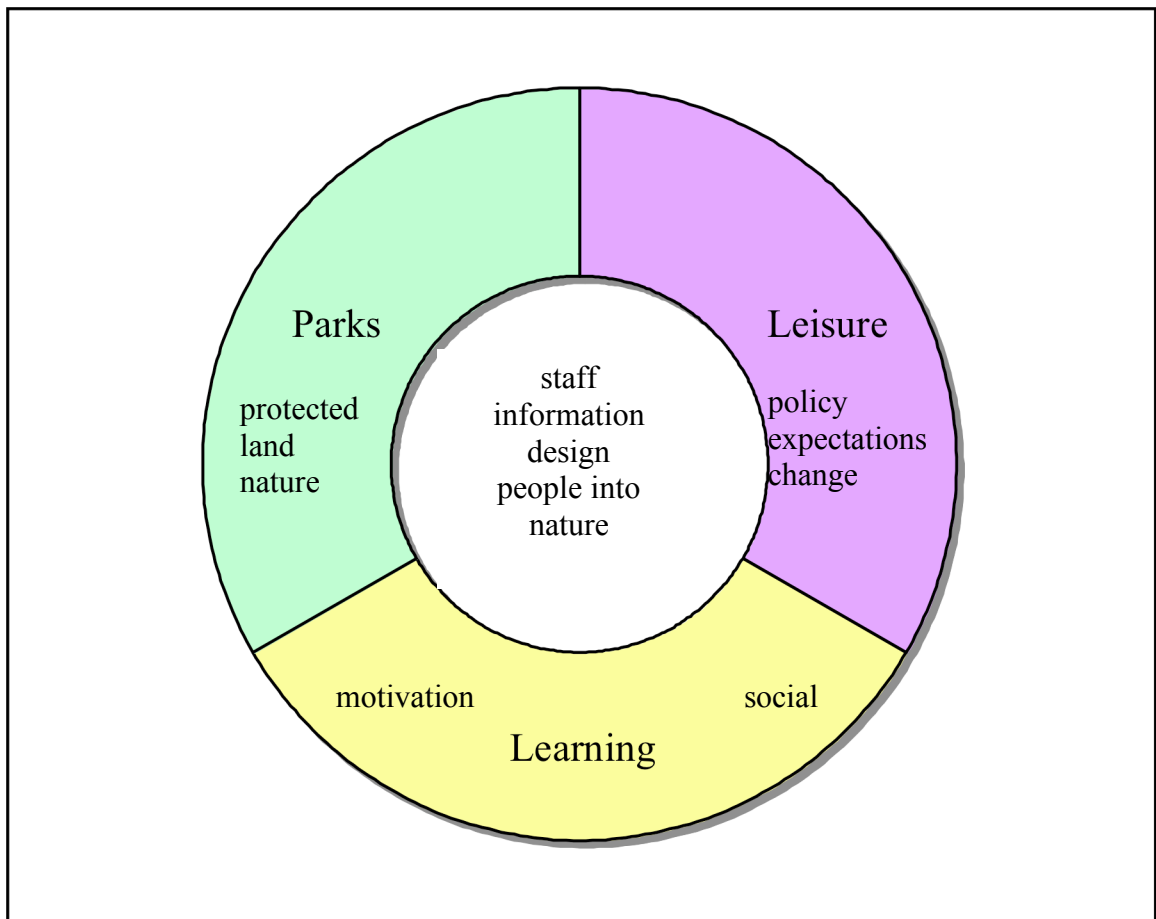
Figure 5.1 Connection Between Themes and Findings

5.2. Leisure: Policy Expectations and Change

Decisions around how to spend leisure time are personal (Green et al. 2006; Gross and Brown 2006). Policy makers expected that beyond personal decision making, there would be a particular 'type' of visitor to William A. Switzer Provincial Park. They also expected that the centre would serve as a hub for further exploration of the park. Policy makers mostly correctly predicted the reasons that visitor centre clientele chose to go to the visitor centre, but they did not predict the typical visitor centre clientele. This disconnect is an example of how leisure and expectations of leisure time are changing. Here each of these elements is dealt with individually.

5.2.1. Policy Maker Expectations

Policy maker expectations were based on experience and observation. A relatively modest volume of visitors at the centre in the past may have influenced the policy makers at Switzer Park and their expectations about visitor centre clientele. Also, visitor centre staff would have spoken primarily with engaged visitors, or the type of visitor who makes an effort to communicate with park staff. The engaged and interested group of visitors is the first to integrate management and conservation messages (Papageorgiou and Kassioumis 2005). Experience and observation are often methods for policy makers to understand visitors. It is particularly free choice learners who make an eager and approachable audience for managers and policy makers (Falk and Sheppard 2006). This translates to facilities that benefit from well trained staff with direct visitor experience. Staff observations serve as research material for policy makers. These observations can often identify opportunities for subtle changes resulting in substantial improvements in service (Hooper-Greenhill 1994).

Policy makers expected that the visitor centre clientele would exhibit common traits beyond the fact that they all chose to visit the centre. These included expectations that visitors would be similar in terms of where they came from

(geography), level of education and age. Such expectations are not unreasonable as previous research has indeed found that outdoor recreation enthusiasts can be sorted based on education and occupational type (Brooks, Wallace, and Williams 2006; Floyd, Jang, and Noe 1997; Rollins and Robinson 2002). In addition, other studies suggest that some types of people enjoy visitor centres, particularly those who value formal education and structural experiences (Butler and Hvenegaard 2002; Rollins and Robinson 2002).

Policy maker expectations extended beyond visitor traits to goals and communication objectives for the centre. For example, policy makers felt that since William A. Switzer Provincial Park's land base expanded during the Special Places Campaign in 2000 there were new messages about the protected area to communicate to the local community. The visitor centre was a place to reach constituents in a friendly atmosphere and with clear value-driven government activities. Policy makers expected services at the visitor centre to be provided as part of the park mandate and to continue under the auspices of meeting the multiple heritage appreciation goals (Alberta Community Development 2006).

5.2.2. Visitor Experience

Visitors represented a different than expected demographic and their experience at Switzer Park was different accordingly. Policy makers predicted that people traveling with children would preferentially go to the visitor centre. Instead, the differences between the visitor centre clientele and campers were related to previous park visits, geography and motivation. Policy makers expected that local people would visit the centre more than those from further away in Alberta or Canada. Instead it was local visitors who did not visit as often. The determining factors were the geographic origin and the uniqueness of the visit for visitor centre clientele. In fact, park visitors were almost guaranteed to stop at the visitor centre if they were stopping at the park for the first time or if they were from outside of Alberta.

Studies in Canada show parks as leisure choices to be common for a highly educated population (Alberta Community Development 2003; Statistics Canada 2007). Green's research validated a lifestyle scale to describe the public's interests in addition to broad socio-demographic factors (Green et al. 2006). At Switzer Park, park visitors (both campers and visitor centre clientele) were equally educated and were both more highly educated than the average Albertan population (Alberta Community Development 2003; Statistics Canada 2007). Education level was not the difference between the two groups that the policy makers expected. The implications of this disconnect may be seen in material delivery or level of program offering. Further investigation around lifestyle factors or other leisure choices is necessary to understand these groups (Green et al. 2006).

Another area of tension between expectations and results was that groups with children did not preferentially visit the centre, nor did the majority of park users have children with them during the research project study weekends. This is despite the strong positive messages associated with visiting parks with children (Louv 2005; Nabhan and Trimble 1995). Parks are seen as places where children learn skills of observation and discover the natural environment (Louv 2005). However, in the case of Switzer Park visitor centre, information geared at an adult audience in the visitor centre was an important communication tool given the unexpected visitor centre clientele patterns. This research also shows that the ageing population who are venturing out to new leisure destinations are so far at the campgrounds in Swtizer Park rather than the visitor centre (Nazareth 2007).

Policy makers wanted the visitor centre to "help connect users to their natural world to make their visit more meaningful and to serve as an invitation to the park(s) outside the doors" (Interview A). Different ideas about nature were layered into the visitor centre to emphasize the invitation. Visitor centre clientele did not specifically comments on this invitation. However, they did positively

respond to the presentation of the park. The centre displays were fresh, current and relevant to the change of seasons outside the centre. This care translates as value and emphasizes visitor affective response to the park (Duncan and Duncan 2001). Visitor centre upkeep is more than superficial. It shows the park is well cared for, the modern centre and well-maintained signage communicates the value of the park to new people and emphasizes the attention afforded it for those who already appreciate the centre and the park (Allen 2004).

5.2.3. Changing Nature of Leisure

People usually decide to visit a park as a leisure activity because they value outdoor education and environmental conservation (Gross and Brown 2006). Sometimes people visit parks as a cultural tradition, which may or may not be related to environmental awareness (Gross and Brown 2006). While the choice to visit a park remains common, however, the length of time visitors spend in parks is decreasing in favour of driving through natural areas (Louv 2005). At Switzer Park, this shift in focus for a park visit was seen in the visitor centre clientele who were searching for logistics rather than an educational experience at the centre, often because the group was simply driving through. This is one interesting way that people's allocation of leisure time is changing even as nature becomes more accessible (Urquhart 2001; Whitson 2006). Despite these observations, due to the nature of the questions in this research, it does not contribute to general ideas around the changing nature of leisure.

What can be observed was that despite increased pressure on time, or perhaps because of it, relaxation remains a strong motivation for leisure activities. In their reasons for camping, campers at Switzer Park talked about relaxation, spending time with people, camping and having fun. Campers did not talk about learning, and did not see themselves as learners in relation to the park visit. This group would fit on the activity side of Morgan and Hodgkinson's motivational continuum (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999). Conversely, visitor centre clientele

talked about the exhibits, getting a map and programs as their reasons for visiting. They did not talk about relaxing as a reason to visit, nor as a valid use of the centre. The visitor centre clientele generally were on the education side of this continuum (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999).

5.3. Learning: a Leisure Activity

The Switzer Park visitor centre is a gateway location, a place of introduction and preparation for outdoor exploration. At the same time, it is a place of learning on its own. The visitor centre success is connected to how it addresses clientele learning patterns and meeting their motivations. The learning that takes place at the visitor centre is an information exchange. Beyond that, it is also a social experience. Key findings around information, staff and the design are discussed here in the context of literature related to free choice learning.

5.3.1. Learning in Visitor Centres

Free choice learning benefits from a set of conditions that also make learning fun (Packer 2006). These are a sense of discovery, appealing to multiple senses, the appearance of effortlessness and the availability of choice (Packer 2006). At the visitor centre while these conditions were present, visitor centre clientele comments related specifically to the content of the centre exhibits, the staff who were in the centre and the modern design and layout.

Visitor centre clientele appreciated the information that was accessible at the centre. Maps, fishing regulations and safety information answered visitor questions and concerns and were readily available. At Switzer Park there were nonetheless some real constraints based on the centre's design on the degree and extent of actual visual participation in learning. Visitor participation was not possible in the aspects of the centre that focused on matters of local and immediate importance like way-finding or regulations since these topics require clear content delivery. In this case, ideas about constructivism, or making

knowledge oneself was tempered by the real-time safety and environmental needs of the park. These constraints contributed to the centre's choice to present information drawing upon a "realist-constructivism" philosophy (Bassett 1999).

The mistaken expectation that children would preferentially visit the centre is an issue for general learning that takes place at the centre. Areas geared at children's learning can dissuade adults from participation because they look childish or embarrassing (Falk 2006). At Switzer park, activities geared at children included feeling animal fur and drawing what can be seen under the microscope. These sophisticated ways of engaging multiple senses are very effective at reaching children and adults alike. Accordingly, adult visitor centre clientele were not disparaging of exhibits and activities geared at children. Instead, many participated peripherally in the activities and commented on how helpful the exhibits would be for children. This group fits Morgan and Hodgkinson's altruistic definition as an altruistic orientation even when they are not actively hosting guests (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999).

5.3.2. Motivation and Satisfaction

The success of the visitor centre renovation was determined by aligning visitor motivation and expectations with the new centre. Substantial changes in the centre and the variety of communication techniques were successful. Visitor centre clientele liked the design of the new centre, the content of the exhibits and the centre staff. Visitor centre clientele enjoyed themselves, often commented on the "interesting" displays and appreciated the centre as a source of relevant information. These ways of giving people opportunities for involvement in something out of the ordinary creates meaning and value. This is one way that people can have very satisfying visits to the centre (Ellis and Rossman 2008).

Visitor centre clientele were motivated by learning in line with the free choice learning motivation that often accompanies long term leisure choices (Ballantyne

et al. 2007; Ballantyne, Packer, and Hughes 2008). Visitor centre clientele mentioned maps, programs, area information and exhibit content as reasons to visit the centre. These would place visitor centre clientele on the education side of the continuum of motivation between education and activity (refer back to Figure 2.1 to see an example of this continuum and Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999).

While motivation is important, the visitor centre is accessible to a main highway and strong motivation is not required to turn in and visit the centre. The ease of stopping at the centre makes it challenging to analyze strong motivational trends in the visitor centre clientele. The location and the fact that nearly sixty percent of visitor centre clientele learned about the park through the road sign, emphasizes the importance of the road sign pointing to Kelley's Bathtub and the visitor centre. Without it, most centre clientele would not know about the centre. The sign also provides a simple reminder to passing motorists to turn in. This is not a strong motivating factor for going to a visitor centre, but it does connect with the basic role the centre can play in a social outing.

5.3.3.   Social Aspects of Learning and Leisure

Social contact is a strong motivation for free choice learning because the social aspect of a leisure experience can be both memorable and constructive (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999). Much of the research in free choice learning suggests that talking about a visit, sharing an idea with another person and even interaction with staff people confirms meaning and understanding (Hwang, Lee, and Chen 2005). Visitors to the Switzer Park visitor centre tended to come to the centre in groups, to relate to the staff and thus to show strong social interaction. Comments about the visitor centre often related to the experience and the traveling group showing how visitor centre clientele were interested in the social experience. This research further points to the importance of the "quality of social interaction" as a key free choice learner motivation (Morgan and Hodgkinson 1999). Being an

open, gathering place means the centre meets the social needs of many visitors (Black 2005; de Rojas and Camarero 2008; Pekarik 2007).

With the importance of social connection, interactions with staff also fill a social role. Visitor centre staff duties were mostly informational, while other research has focused on the social role of personal interpretation (Hwang, Lee, and Chen 2005). The visitor centre clientele comments were about the quality of the conversations rather than staff knowledge or educational effectiveness. The staff were described as "friendly", "approachable" and "great" more often than they were described as "knowledgeable", for example. Available and approachable staff at the visitor centre critically contributed to visitor satisfaction.

The centre provided a logical and predictable place for the public and staff to meet. Since policy makers wanted "effective, meaningful, memorable contact with our public" (Interview A), the social satisfaction of visitor centre clientele can be seen as an indicator of both the positive learning environment and the potential for personal interactions as part of free choice learning. The final goal was well-achieved particularly by staff in uniform, keeping with visitor's ideas about park management attention and the distinction between government services and campground contractors.

5.4. Parks: a Landscape for Leisure

Beyond the visitor centre, people coming to Switzer Park chose to visit a place that was both a natural area and a park. They have chosen this destination instead of the many other options both indoor (like a shopping centre or a movie theatre) and outdoor (like an amusement park or golf course). This decision is related to many factors around a desire to connect with the natural world, an interest in restoration and a person's environmental awareness (Green et al. 2006; Packer and Ballantyne 2002). In this research project these aspects were apparent, as visitor centre clientele were interested in regional recreation opportunities and in

both bear safety and biodiversity. Campers spoke about restoration and relaxation opening as a motivation for being at the park, This section considers leisure in normalized places, the role of parks in nature education and the connection to natural and familiar places and their role in Canadians' lives.

5.4.1. Connection to Place

The visitor centre is a building in the forest. It was a destination for many visitors and while there they were introduced to lesser-known protected areas in the Northern East Slopes Region. These protected areas all had a different level of legislated protection than Switzer Park. Explaining their protected category and describing their role as a recreation area or a nature preserve were key aspects of presenting them as possible visitation destinations. Discussion about specific protected areas also led to the visitor centre describing how the protected area continuum operates in Alberta. This was not described as a reason for visitor centre clientele to enter the building, but it was a unique venue for that information to be shared.

Affective experiences in parks are formative, involve significant times and people, and very often have a social component (Louv 2005; Petrick 2004). These were all experiences common for visitors to the centre and campers in Switzer Park. The visitor centre may eventually become a touchstone for repeat park visitors, however in its first year, it attracted new visitors. Repeated visits to the park are an important way people solidify their connection with the area. For clientele, the visitor centre may not itself have changed lives after one visit (Sachatello-Sawyer et al. 2002). However, the centre encouraged a return visit and the repeated journey to a park may change a person's life.

The findings among the set of campers indicated that if they did not already know about the park, they learned about it from a friend, or came upon it by driving through. These personal and lucky encounters create a special and personal

connection to the place. Personal attachment to a park is a common reason for visiting (Gross and Brown 2006; Hwang, Lee, and Chen 2005). Campers knew the park already, wanted to relax while in the park, and were focused on activity rather than on education. Generally campers had visited Switzer Park before, and many of them had been camping at the park for years. For them, the park visit was familiar and its familiarity was part of its appeal. Campers said "it's always been here" when asked how they heard about Switzer Park. The park is a familiar one, and thus plays a role in affective experience, even a special and personal connection to the place (Brooks, Wallace, and Williams 2006; Larsen 2004).

5.4.2. Protected Land, Safe Landscapes

One reason for protecting land is to provide a place for leisure, tourism and recreation (Proctor 1998; Weaver 1997). Parks are seen as beautiful, serene and accessible (Duncan and Duncan 2001). At the same time, protected land is often wild, rough and different than the normal, productive land (McNamee 2002; McNamee 2003). That difference is the reason landscapes are set aside for protection and sometimes a long period of protection leads to a more wild landscape (such as the absence of farming or forestry in an area like Switzer Park). It is these two key aspects of safe leisure areas and protected wilderness that together create tension for visitors to many parks.

Choosing to go to a visitor centre is a way to visit a park while enjoying a safe and secure social environment for people to relate to nature. The renovated visitor centre is a beautiful place to be, from the view on the expanded deck to the new dramatic backdrop at the information desk (Allen 2004). The design is flexible and carried through from the outside to the inside giving a continuity of message and voice. The signage outside sets a positive tone for visitor centre clientele approaching the centre. There are a variety of places for people to sit, rest, wander and explore within a relatively small space (Hwang, Lee, and Chen 2005). For some people, the centre may have been too comfortable. While meaning to

encourage outdoor exploration, it may have given visitors an excuse to get back in the car and keep driving.

In the visitor centre there is a contradiction that exploring the representation is actually taking a person away from exploring the actual park. In this case the simulated environment is situated within the actual environment (Shields 1991; Shields 2004). There are many possible reasons for this contradiction. It could be due to people's decreasing comfort with the unpredictable, wild natural world and parallel comfort with the built environment (Louv 2005). It may be due to a general risk aversion among visitors. A further challenge for a visitor centre is finding ways to appeal to visitors and their desire for representation while still encouraging that they return outside. At Switzer Park the representation is relatively minor compared to the space itself, so the issue of simulacrum is not as prevalent as at museums where dioramas are the main display technique, for example.

Perhaps the comfort with the centre was less around its displays and more connected to the familiarity of an official building. Structures like schools and offices are clear to understand and navigate. A visitor centre usually means a place to get information and orient oneself to a place or a new idea. At Switzer Park, the safety and predictability of the visitor centre motivated some people to learn about the large wildlife in the park while on their visit. An example of the role of representation at the visitor centre is the mounted cougar with the mini diorama about biodiversity. The cougar mural was not a true representation of what someone might see outside, since the likelihood of seeing a cougar while visiting Switzer Park is very low. However, it was a popular photo stop for visitors who must have enjoyed the chance to safely have their photo taken beside a cougar.

5.4.3. The Canadian Park Experience

Well known parks in Canada receive significant attention from visitors and governments. However, much of the protected land in Canada is made up of parks with modest annual visitation (McNamee 2002). This research project provides a Canadian example of a smaller scale project in a lesser known park that can serve as inspiration. This visitor centre renovation project could be a model for future projects or other parks. Just as William A. Switzer Provincial Park is modest in the Canadian context, so too was the visitor centre renovation modest in terms of capital projects in parks.

Within Canada, large tracks of protected land are important to provide habitat for large mammals and other sensitive wildlife (Gatewood 2003; Yellowstone to Yukon 2008). Visitor centres like the one at Switzer Park are ideal venues for educating the public about ecosystems and habitat protection. The centre plays a vital role as a regional hub for other protected areas. This aspect of the centre was not discussed in the visitor centre survey, yet was commented on by both policy makers and individual visitor centre clientele. That model has potential in other jurisdictions, serving a local population and a tourist economy. The centre is also a model of environmental decision making to repurpose an existing structure for such an educational role.

5.5. Chapter Conclusion

The Switzer Park visitor centre is an example of the interactions between leisure, learning and parks in Canada. The centre renovation crystallized local policy maker expectations about visitors and served as a showcase for conveying ideas about heritage appreciation. Through text, signage and content the centre was intentionally designed to encourage people to further explore nature. While visitors did not represent the groups policy makers expected, they responded positively to the content, the design and the staff interactions there. Motivated visitors and the social context of the visit resulted in positive learning

experiences. Finally, the visitor centre at Switzer Park represents a leisure choice that that is rooted in a particular park. The visitor centre clientele were able to explore an indoor environment to constructively prepare or reflect on the natural world. Both visitor decisions and the park responses have implications for other studies in leisure, learning and parks.

6. Chapter SIX: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

The Switzer Park visitor centre renovation made productive use of an existing building in a provincial park in Alberta. The visitor centre was designed to meet Parks and Protected Areas' goals and to meet the informational, programmatic and inspirational interests of current Switzer Park users. Visitor centre clientele wanted to find information and found themselves liking the design and the staff in the visitor centre in addition to the information they initially sought. Campers wanted the opportunity for relaxation and recreation. Since most of them knew the park already, they knew that they were in the ideal place. This chapter includes a summary of the research project. Contributions to the field in terms of changing ideas of nature, learning and parks are all discussed. Substantive contributions to policy makers are also introduced. Finally, the study limitations are outlined in the final section of this concluding chapter.

6.2. Research Project Summary

The goal of this research project was to examine the purpose and effectiveness of a newly-installed visitor centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park. Interviews and surveys were completed with policy makers and park visitors to answer three main research questions:

- Did the visitor centre meet its intended goals?
- Who did and did not visit the centre once it was installed and why?
- What can the centre renovation reveal about the changing nature of leisure?

While the first two questions were addressed in the findings, the final question was not thoroughly enough investigated for significant recommendations. Recommendations from this research related to the first two research questions will be relevant for this park, other parks in Alberta and similar leisure and educational facilities.

This research project included the use of qualitative and quantitative methods in three key data sets that were developed, collected and analyzed over summer 2007. Interviews and document reviews made up data set A. Data set B included a visitor centre clientele tally and a visitor centre survey. The final data set, data set C, brought together a campground user tally and a campground survey. The research project was conducted over three study weekends, reaching approximately one sixteenth of campground parties in the park those weekends.

All three data sets revealed interesting features from Switzer Park policy makers, visitor centre clientele and campers. Policy makers expected the centre to be a hub for education in the park and expected visitor centre clientele to be local. Visitor centre clientele were looking for information and appreciated the content, staff and design of the centre. In this way they did come to the centre as a hub for information, if not always broader education. Visitor centre clientele were usually there for the first time, were highly educated and from beyond the local area. Campers were similar demographically to visitor centre clientele, except a larger portion of them had been to the park before. The user groups also had different methods for learning about the park. While the campers tended to be local and to know someone who had been to the park, the visitor centre clientele tended to learn about the centre from a road sign. This research project also saw connections between visitor centre clientele and camper motivation. Knowing these motivations will help to predict user satisfaction and assist future policy decisions.

6.3. Research Project Contributions

Policy makers hoped the Switzer Park visitor centre renovation would encourage people to further explore nature and visitor centre clientele expected local information. The centre clientele appreciated the centre design and its staff and came from beyond the local area. The main findings of this research project relate to changing leisure decisions, free choice learning and parks.

6.3.1. Changing Ideas of Leisure

This project did not contribute to changing ideas of leisure, as its methodology was insufficient to achieve this research objective. However, the research did discover that parks personnel may not always know the audience as well as they think. Their expectation was not entirely met that visitor centre clientele would be local and interested in activities and education at the centre. Instead at Switzer Park, visitor centre clientele were searching for logistics and information, often because the group was simply driving through and three quarters of the time since the group was new to the park. This indicates the way in this case leisure decision making relates to new experiences and the importance of familiar establishments like visitor centres for park users. At Switzer Park, campers had been to the park before and wanted to relax, while visitor centre clientele were new to the park and interested in information, interacting with the staff at the centre and its design. This difference between the user groups reinforces the value of diversity and variety in planning leisure choices for a broad demographic of leisure participants in a place like Switzer Park.

6.3.2. Learning

This research project corroborated Packer's description of the key aspects of free choice learning opportunities, particularly effortless discovery and using multiple senses (Packer 2006). Effortless discovery was seen as visitor centre clientele found maps and key information about the park. Multiple senses were reached for all ages by the interactive and participatory exhibits geared at children. The overall design of the centre had a strongly positive influence on visitor centre clientele which overshadowed any issues with individual displays or techniques. Positive learning was also closely linked to the trained staff in the centre and the social interactions possible there.

This research also revealed the important social role that free choice learning offers visitors. Staff members were lauded for being approachable and visitor centre clientele tended to visit in groups. These social cues confirm the importance of the

visitor centre for new park visitors when combined with the predominately first time visitor profile. This was both due to staff friendliness and to the ability the staff had to customize information and delivery of that information for different visitors. The learning that took place with the guidance of the staff members included a strong government or management connection, as the visitor centre staff were in parks uniforms and very identifiable at the centre.

6.3.3. Parks

Within Canada, large tracks of protected land are important to provide habitat for large mammals and other sensitive wildlife (Gatewood 2003; Yellowstone to Yukon 2008). The Switzer Park visitor centre was an ideal venue for educating the public, particularly the public who were not yet familiar with the park, about ecosystems and habitat protection. The centre is also a regional hub for other protected areas. While at the centre, visitors were introduced to lesser-known protected areas in the North Eastern Slope Region and to how the protected area continuum operates in Alberta.

This research project emphasizes the role familiarity plays in park affinity or affective loyalty. Switzer Park has a group of loyal return visitors who camp, but did not need to visit the centre. It also sees a group of potentially loyal visitors who are new to the park and visit the centre as an introduction, a source of information and a social experience. The visitor centre clientele may grow their affinity for the park as they are more familiar with it. Positive comments are one way that this is starting to occur and will be perhaps the strongest result for policy makers who hope the centre encourages future exploration.

The Switzer Park visitor centre is a Canadian example of a small scale project in a relatively unknown park. The visitor centre renovation project could be a model for future projects or other parks. This model even includes a common technique that is popular, yet contradictory: the simulated environment. In this model, spending time exploring the representation in the centre is actually taking a person away from

exploring the park (Shields 1991; Shields 2004). However, the rich learning may account for a more curious park visitor in the future.

6.4. Substantive Contributions (Recommendations to Policy Makers)

Developing recommendations for policy makers was not the primary focus of this research project. However, a few key ideas came through both visitor centre clientele comments and researcher observation. These recommendations are outlined with detailed examples in Appendix 10.

Generally, any substantive contributions are within a small and local context. William A. Switzer Provincial Park operates the visitor centre on a small budget and with one staff member dedicated to it seasonally. The centre is both a communication tool and an educational opportunity within the park. Its continued success relates primarily to providing information clearly, knowing its clientele and keeping the centre up to date both visually and in terms of content. Studies are often commissioned after significant money is spent on large-scale public projects. This project is particularly relevant for parks that want to be environmentally responsible and sustainable and repurpose existing buildings and to build basic visitor centres. The renovation had a short timeline, a small budget and a relatively small footprint. The environmental benefits of this type of renovation are valuable.

This research project considered the positive visitor experience and ways it could be enhanced based on visitor comments. Amenities may increase visitor comfort, such as places to sit, rest and converse as well as access to refreshments, washrooms and transportation. With additional amenities the centre can respond to gatherings of both adults and children and the visitors can spend their energy on the visit, rather than on the search for amenities. Signage and staffing are two aspects of the visitor centre renovation that are already strong for the visitor experience. The road sign and the design of the centre signage are effective and aesthetically pleasing. Finally, the

trained staff members in the centre and their approachability were important for the visitor centre clientele's positive experience.

6.5. Limitations and Future Research

The study limitations of this research project fall into three main categories: time, methods and scope.

6.5.1. Time

Time at the park was limited to three study weekends. The surveys were short to increase the sample size. This precluded the gathering of detailed demographics like group make up, marital information, ethnicity, overnight plans, and learning outcomes. Additional demographic data might have provided enhanced points of comparison to similar studies in other parks, but would not have added value for William A. Switzer Provincial Park itself.

6.5.2. Methods

Limitations related to the methods were also time sensitive. The short surveys were predominantly quantitative, and therefore the comments on the surveys were truncated and brief. It would have been useful to follow up with either interviews or an observation of survey respondents to gather more substantive qualitative responses from visitor centre clientele. However, no contact information was gathered in the methodology of the research. Scheduling conflicts also meant that two interviews with additional policy makers (a staff person and a manager) were not completed as planned. Therefore the breadth of perspective in the interviews was reduced.

6.5.3. Scope

The scope of the sample was limited to the people coming to the visitor centre and being at their campsites when roving took place. There was no reliable way of

knowing how many people were driving through the park in total, so the campground parties were used as an approximate park population figure. In addition, the research project design was limited to the single park with distinct slices of time over one summer. Given the small park and the small renovation project, the results are relevant mainly for other small operations. There is the additional need in a research project of this size to reconcile the goals of Parks and Protected Areas with larger projects at some point in the future.

6.6. Chapter Conclusion

This research project confirms the strong visitor interest in parks and visitor centres in Canada as a choice for leisure and learning. Survey results in this research project indicate that visitors value the social, spontaneous and informational aspects of the visitor centre. With findings like that, this research fills a gap between park research in geography and visitor learning research in the museum field. The contributions of this research include strong support for parks with free choice learning opportunities and for opportunities for personal encounters with park staff. The substantive contributions will assist Switzer Park to continue providing a valuable service and to learn even more about the people who visit. The protected area focus of this visitor centre evaluation provides a window from geography into the public's perception of leisure, learning and parks.

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Appendix 1: Map of Alberta
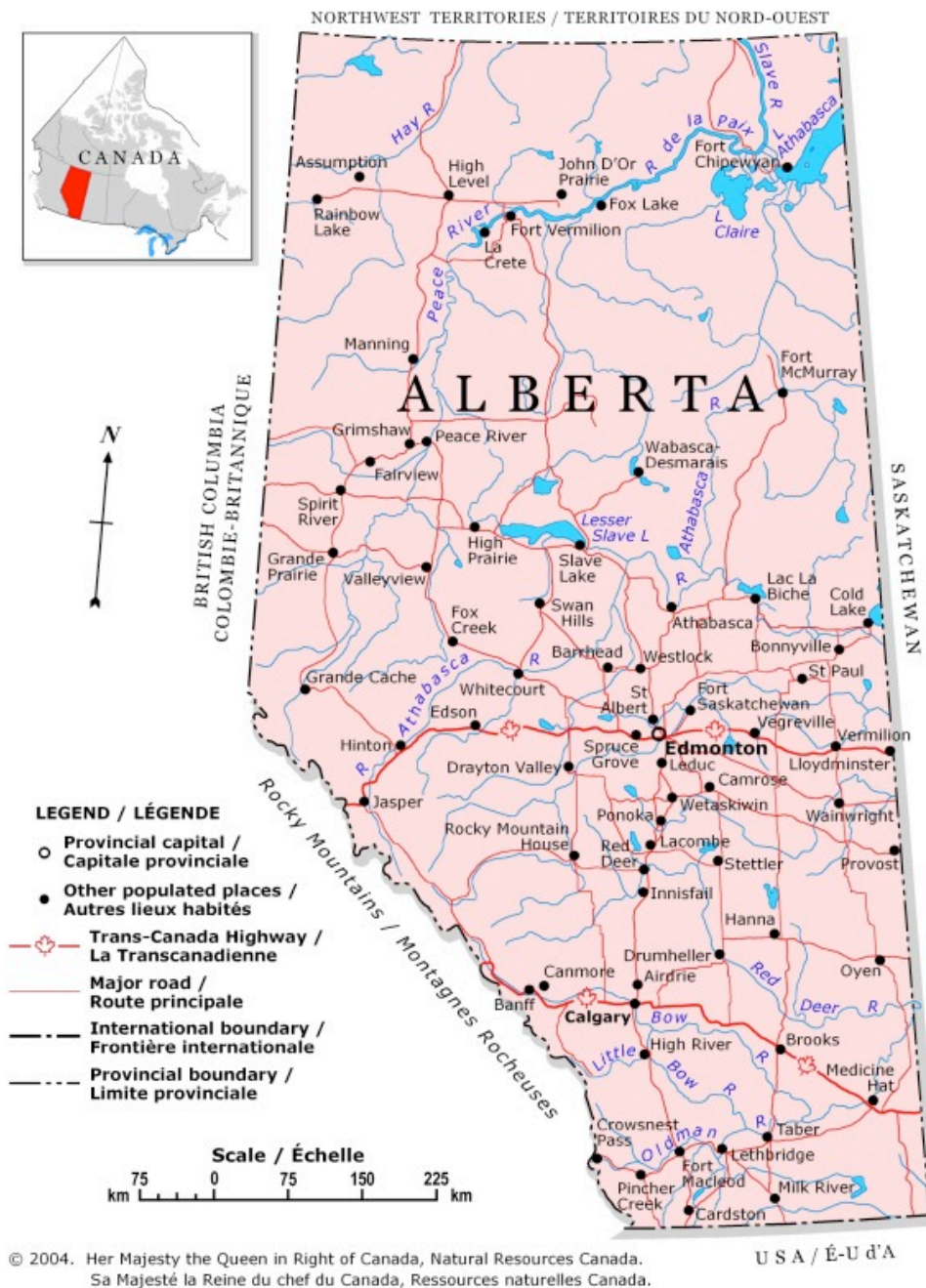
Source: Natural Resources Canada 2009, see also
http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/maps/reference/provincesterritories/alberta/referen
cemap_image_view

Appendix 2: Map of William A. Switzer Provincial Park
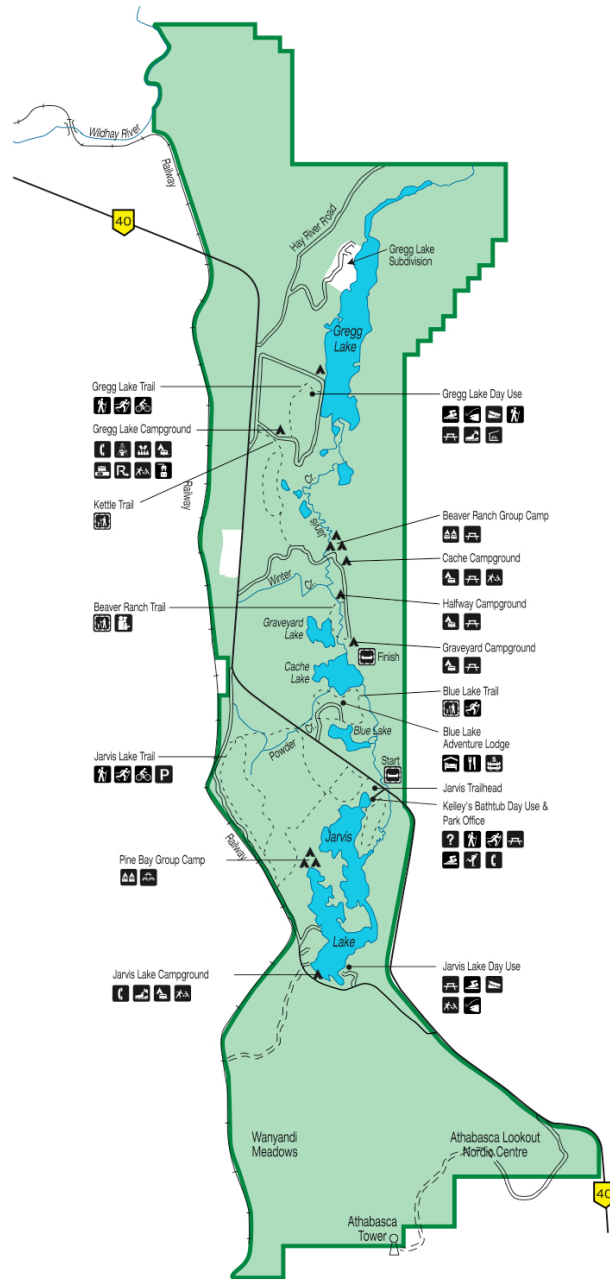
Source: Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2008, see also
http://tpr.alberta.ca/parks/switzer/parkmap_flash.html

Appendix 3: Ethics Approval (Gross-Garvin-approval-#1494.pdf)

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Arts, Science & Law Research Ethics Board (ASL REB)
Certificate of REB Approval for Fully-Detailed Research Project

Applicant: Heather Gross

Supervisor (if applicable): Theresa Garvin

Department/Faculty: Earth and Atmospheric Sciences / Faculty of Science

Project Title: Visitor Centre Usage in a Provincial Park

Grant/Contract Agency (and number):

Application number (ASL REB member): # 1494 (DK-05-23-07-042)

Approval Expiry Date: May 23, 2008

CERTIFICATION of ASL REB Approval

I have reviewed your application for ethics review of your human subjects research project and conclude that your project meets the University of Alberta standards for research involving human participants (GFC Policy Section 66). On behalf of the *Arts, Science & Law Research Ethics Board* (ASL REB), I am providing expedited approval for your project.

Expedited research ethics approval allows you to continue your research with human participants, but is conditional on the full ASL REB approving my decision at its next meeting (*June 8, 2007*). If the full ASL REB reaches a different decision, requests additional information, or imposes additional research ethics requirements on your study, I will contact you immediately.

If the full ASL REB reverses my decision, and if your research is grant or contract funded, the Research Services Office (RSO) will also be informed immediately. The RSO will then withhold further funding for that portion of your research involving human participants until it has been informed by the ASL REB that research ethics approval for your project has been granted.

This research ethics approval is valid for one year. To request a renewal after *May 23, 2008*, please contact me and explain the circumstances, making reference to the research ethics review number assigned to this project. Also, if there are significant changes to the project that need to be reviewed, or if any adverse effects to human participants are encountered in your research, please contact me immediately.

ASL REB member (name & signature): Don Kuiken, PhD

Date: May 23, 2007

Appendix 4: Data Set A, Interviews

Information Sheet for Interviews

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">
UNIVERSITY OF **ALBERTA**

Earth and Atmospheric Sciences
Faculty of Science

eas

I-26 Earth Sciences Building
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E3

www.ualberta.ca/eas
eas.enquiries@ualberta.ca

Tel: 780.492.3265
Fax: 780.492.2030
</td></tr>
</table>

Visitor Centre Usage in a Provincial Park: Information Sheet for Interviews

My name is Heather Gross. I am a graduate student in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. This interview is part of a research project evaluating the new exhibits in the visitor centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park. I am interested in how you intended the visitor centre to be used in the park. Combined with surveys of park visitors, this research will help the park plan future projects.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will answer questions related to your job and your role with the park visitor centre. I expect that this process will take no more than 30 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. I cannot, however, grant you anonymity since your responses based on your position would identify you. Though your name will not appear in the final reports, your position title will. If at any time you do not wish to answer a question or discuss an issue, you may do so without penalty. If you are willing, I will record the interview and transcribe it after our meeting. I will return the transcription to you for review. At that point I will make any changes you ask me to.

Participating in this interview implies that you give your consent for the results to be used, in summary form for academic purposes (publications, websites, and meetings). At any time, you can withdraw this consent by contacting me by any means below. In addition, you will be given a consent form with this information package to sign and return to me. If you do not receive that form, or if you do not return it to me, the content of the interview will not be included in this study.

During the study only my supervisor and I will have access to your interview transcription and it will be stored in a locked box or on a protected computer. After 5 years the interview transcriptions will also be destroyed and disposed of. The results of this research will be available to you if you provide me with your email address. The results will form part of my master's thesis at the University of Alberta and may be used for publication in academic journals or appear on a website.

My contact information:	My supervisor's contact information:

Name: Heather Gross
Email: heather.gross@ualberta.ca
Phone: (780) 492-5880
Address: Department of Earth and
             Atmospheric Sciences, 1-26
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	Name: Dr. Theresa Garvin
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	             Canada

This information is being collected as part of a research project in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. Thank you to the University of Alberta, the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Conservation Association for supporting this research.	

Appendix 4: Data Set A, Interviews CONTINUED
Consent Form for Interview Participants

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Earth and Atmospheric Sciences
Faculty of Science

(eas)

1-26 Earth Sciences Building
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E3

www.ualberta.ca/eas
eas.enquiries@ualberta.ca

Tel: 780.492.3265
Fax: 780.492.2030

Title of the Study: Visitor Centre Usage in a Provincial Park
Student Name: Heather Gross
Email: heather.gross@ualberta.ca
Phone: (780) 492-5880
Address: Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, 1-26 Earth Science
                         Building University of Alberta, T6G 2E3, Canada

Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?   ☐Yes ☐No

Did you have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?   ☐Yes ☐No

Do you understand that you can choose to not participate at any time,
without penalty?   ☐Yes ☐No

Do you understand that anonymity can not be guaranteed?   ☐Yes ☐No

Do you agree to having our interview recorded?   ☐Yes ☐No

Do you understand that you will be able to review the interview transcript? ☐Yes ☐No

Do you understand who will have access to your responses?   ☐Yes ☐No

Do you give permission for the researcher to use your responses in
academic situations (for academic publications, website and meetings?)   ☐Yes ☐No

Do you want to receive a report about this research?
(If yes, please provide your address)   ☐Yes ☐No

Email Address: _____

Do you agree to take part in this study?   ☐Yes ☐No

Signature _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Appendix 4: Data Set A, Interviews CONTINUED

Sample Policy Maker Interview Guide

1. What is your position / title and how were you involved in the Visitor Centre development at William A. Switzer Provincial Park?

2. Why did you decide to renovate the visitor centre and install interpretive displays? If you did not make this decision, why did the decision makers decide to renovate the centre?

3. What do you think visitors learn from visiting the centre?

4. How does this visitor centre project fit into the Parks and Protected Area mandate?

5. Describe what you think the typical visitor to the visitor centre would be like.

6. Describe what you think the typical park visitor is like.

Appendix 5: Data Set B, Visitor Centre Survey

Information Sheet for Visitor Centre Surveys: Visitor Centre Usage in a Provincial Park

My name is Heather Gross. I am a graduate student in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. This survey is part of a research project evaluating the new exhibits in the visitor centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park.

I am interested in how you use or intend to use the visitor centre in the park. This research will help the park plan future projects.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will answer questions related to your park visit. I expect that this process will take 5 -10 minutes. When you are finished the questions, you are entitled to a $2 coupon to use at the Friends of Switzer Park Gift Shop located in the visitor centre.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. In addition, your name will not be requested on the survey and your home town or country will be recorded only so that I can make a map of participants after the study. During the study only my supervisor and I will have access to your survey and it will be stored in a locked box or on a protected computer. After 5 years the surveys will also be destroyed and disposed of. Summaries of this research, but not the surveys themselves, may be used for academic or government planning purposes.

The results will form part of my master's thesis at the University of Alberta and may be used for publication in academic journals or appear on a website.

My contact information:	My supervisor's contact information:
Name: Heather Gross Email: heather.gross@ualberta.ca Phone: (780) 492-5880 Address: Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, 1-26 Earth Science Building University of Alberta, T6G 2E3, Canada	Name: Dr. Theresa Garvin Email: theresa.garvin@ualberta.ca Phone: (780) 492-5880 Address: Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, 1-26 Earth Science Building University of Alberta, T6G 2E3, Canada

A summary of this research will be available to you if you provide Heather Gross with your email address.

Thank you for visiting William A. Switzer Provincial Park.

This information is being collected as part of a research project in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. Thank you to the University of Alberta, the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Conservation Association for supporting this research.

Appendix 5: Data Set B, Visitor Centre Survey CONTINUED
Sample Visitor Centre Survey: Visitor Centre Usage in a Provincial Park

1. Where do you live?
    a. In Canada, the first 3 digits of your postal code _____
    b. Outside of Canada, your state or country _____

2. What is your age? (Check one)
    ☐16-25 years   ☐46-65 years
    ☐26-45 years   ☐66 years or over

3. Please check one box to describe your gender: ☐M ☐F

4. How many other adults (16 and older) are with you today? ____

5. How many children (under 16) are with you today? ____

6. What level of schooling have you completed? (Check the appropriate level)
    ☐less than High School   ☐University
    ☐Grade 12   ☐Graduate School
    ☐Trade or College

7. Why did you come to the Visitor Centre today? (Check all that apply)
    ☐for a map or directions   ☐to find out about park programs
    ☐amenities (looking for a washroom)   ☐to look at the exhibits
    ☐to buy something from the gift shop   ☐to report a wildlife sighting
    Other (please list) _____

8. Have you visited this Visitor Centre before? (Check one) ☐Yes ☐No

9. Where did you first learn about the Centre? (Check all that apply)
    ☐Friend or Family contact   ☐Park Brochure
    ☐Park Website   ☐Campground Kiosk
    ☐Road Sign   ☐Town visitor centre
    Other (please list) _____

10. How satisfied are you with the Visitor Centre? (Check one)
                NOT SATISFIED ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 VERY SATISFIED

11. In a few words, describe how you feel about the exhibits in the visitor centre. Did you learn anything new?
    _____
    _____

12. Would you recommend this visitor centre to others? (Check one) ☐Yes ☐No

13. Other comments.
    _____
    _____

Appendix 6: Data Set C, Campground Survey

Earth and Atmospheric Sciences
Faculty of Science

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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www.ualberta.ca/eas
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Tel: 780.492.3265
Fax: 780.492.2030

Information Sheet for Campground Surveys: Visitor Centre Usage in a Provincial Park

My name is Heather Gross. I am a graduate student in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. This survey is part of a research project evaluating the new exhibits in the visitor centre at William A. Switzer Provincial Park.

I am interested in how you use or intend to use the visitor centre in the park. This research will help the park plan future projects.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will answer questions related to your park visit. I expect that this process will take 5 -10 minutes. When you are finished the questions, you are entitled to a $2 coupon to use at the Friends of Switzer Park Gift Shop located in the visitor centre.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. In addition, your name will not be requested on the survey and your home town or country will be recorded only so that I can make a map of participants after the study. During the study only my supervisor and I will have access to your survey and it will be stored in a locked box or on a protected computer. After 5 years the surveys will also be destroyed and disposed of. Summaries of this research, but not the surveys themselves, may be used for academic or government planning purposes.

The results will form part of my master's thesis at the University of Alberta and may be used for publication in academic journals or appear on a website.

My contact information:		My supervisor's contact information:	
Name:	Heather Gross	Name:	Dr. Theresa Garvin
Email:	heather.gross@ualberta.ca	Email:	theresa.garvin@ualberta.ca
Phone:	(780) 492-5880	Phone:	(780) 492-5880
Address:	Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, 1-26 Earth Science Building University of Alberta, T6G 2E3, Canada	Address:	Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, 1-26 Earth Science Building University of Alberta, T6G 2E3, Canada

A summary of this research will be available to you if you provide Heather Gross with your email address.

Thank you for visiting William A. Switzer Provincial Park.
This information is being collected as part of a research project in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. Thank you to the University of Alberta, the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Conservation Association for supporting this research.

Appendix 6: Data Set C, Campground Survey CONTINUED

Campground Survey Script:

1. Hello, my name is Heather Gross and I'm a student at the University of Alberta. Today we are doing a survey of campers about services offered at Switzer Park. The survey takes about five minutes of your time; would you be willing to participate?

    [no] Thank you for your time. Enjoy your stay. *Researcher leaves and tallies as "non response".*

2. [yes] I have an information sheet here about the project that I will leave with you. Before we start, let me assure you that your responses will be anonymous and confidential and that you can stop the survey at any time. Is that alright?

    [no] Thank you for your time. Enjoy your stay. *Researcher leaves and tallies as "non response".*

3. [yes] Are you from Canada?

    [no] What country are you from? (Country Name)_____

4. [yes] What are the first three digits of your postal code, so I can make a map of where people are from? _ _ _

5. *The researcher marks down approximate age of respondent and gender.*
    Approximate age (Check one)   Gender ☐M ☐F
        ☐16-25   ☐46-65,
        ☐26-45   ☐66 or over

6. How many other adults (16 and older) are with you today? ____ Children (under 16)? _____

7. What level of schooling have you completed? (Check one)
        ☐less than High School   ☐University,
        ☐Grade 12   ☐Graduate School
        ☐Trade or College

8. What is the main purpose of your visit to the park? _____

9. Have you visited the park before? (Check one) ☐Yes ☐No

10. Where did you first learn about the park?
        ☐Friend or Family contact   ☐Park Brochure
        ☐Park Website   ☐Campground Kiosk
        ☐Road Sign   ☐Town visitor centre
        Other (please list) _____

11. Would you recommend the park to others? (Check one) ☐Yes ☐No

12. Have you visited or do you intend on visiting the visitor centre? (Check one) ☐Yes ☐No

    (over)

Appendix 6: Data Set C, Campground Survey CONTINUED

Campground Survey Script CONTINUED (from previous page)

13. Did you know that the park had a visitor centre? (Check one) ☐Yes ☐No

14. [yes] Where did you first learn about the visitor centre?

        ☐Friend or Family contact   ☐Park Brochure
        ☐Park Website   ☐Campground Kiosk
        ☐Road Sign   ☐Town visitor centre
        Other (please list) _____

15. How likely are you to visit the centre on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not very likely and 5 being very likely?

                              ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

16. _____

17. That's the end of the survey. Do you have any other questions or comments?

18. _____

Thank you for your time. Enjoy your stay. Here is a $2 coupon for the visitor centre gift shop, if you decide to visit it and the information sheet about this research.

Researcher leaves.

Appendix 7: Visitor Centre Clientele Responses

Visitor Survey Data n= 108

Respondent	Date	Geographic Region	16-25	26-45	46-65	66+	Gender	Adult	Child	Education	Reason	Visited Park Before	Learned about Park	Recommend Park
1	23-Jun	Canada (Other)		1			Male	2		Graduate	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
2	23-Jun	Edmonton			1		Male	1		Graduate	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
3	23-Jun	South			1		Male	2		High School	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
4	23-Jun	North		1			Male	2		High School	Combination	Y	Combination	Y
5	23-Jun	Rockies		1			Female	2	1	Trade or College	Gift Shop	Y	Local	Y
6	24-Jun	Edmonton		1			Female	2		High School	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
7	24-Jun	Edmonton		1			Female	3		Graduate	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
8	24-Jun	BC			1		Male	2	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
9	24-Jun	BC			1		Male	3		High School	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
10	24-Jun	Rockies	1				Female	2		no High School	Exhibits	N	Combination	Y
11	24-Jun	Canada (Other)	1				Male	2		University	Amenities	N	Road Sign	Y
12	24-Jun	Rockies				1	Female	2	1	Trade or College	Programs	N	contact	Y
13	24-Jun	Central		1			Female	2		University	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
14	24-Jun	Edmonton		1			Female	2	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
15	24-Jun	Central		1			Female	2		University	Combination	Y	Road Sign	Y
16	24-Jun	North		1			Female	2		University	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
17	24-Jun	Central		1			Female	4		High School	Exhibits	Y	Road Sign	Y
18	24-Jun	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	Combination	N	Combination	Y
19	24-Jun	Edmonton		1			Female	2		Graduate	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
116	25-Jun	Edmonton		1			Female	2		High School	camp	N	Road Sign	Y
20	28-Jul	Canada (Other)			1		Male	2		High School	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
21	28-Jul	BC		1			Female	2		High School	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
22	28-Jul	North			1		Male	2		University	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
23	28-Jul	Central			1		Female	2		University	Combination	Y	Road Sign	Y
24	28-Jul	Edmonton			1		Female	2	1	Trade or College	Amenities	N	Road Sign	Y
25	28-Jul	Canada (Other)			1		Male	2		no High School	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
26	28-Jul	Switzerland			1		Female	5		University	Combination	N	Contact	Y
27	28-Jul	BC			1		Male	3		High School	Exhibits	Y	Contact	Y
28	29-Jul	North	1				Female	2	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
29	29-Jul	Rockies		1			Female	1		High School	Programs	N	Brochure	Y
30	29-Jul	Rockies			1		Female	1	1	Trade or College	Map	N	contact	Y
31	29-Jul	Edmonton			1		Female	3	1	Trade or College	Combination	N	Combination	Y
32	29-Jul	Edmonton		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	Combination	N	Combination	Y
33	29-Jul	BC			1		Female	2		High School	Amenities	N	Road Sign	Y
34	29-Jul	Rockies		1			Male	2		High School	Combination	Y	Contact	Y
35	29-Jul	Edmonton			1		Female	2	1	Trade or College	Combination	Y	Combination	Y
36	29-Jul	Calgary			1		Female	2	1	Trade or College	Map	N	Brochure	Y
37	29-Jul	Edmonton			1		Male	2		Graduate	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
38	29-Jul	Rockies		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	Programs	Y	Brochure	Y
39	29-Jul	Switzerland			1		Female	2	1	Trade or College	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
40	29-Jul	Central		1			Female	2		University	Programs	N	Campground	Y
41	29-Jul	Rockies			1		Male	5	1	Trade or College	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
42	29-Jul	Rockies	1				Male	4		no High School	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
43	29-Jul	Rockies		1			Female	3		High School	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
44	29-Jul	Rockies		1			Male	5	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	Brochure	Y
45	29-Jul	Calgary		1			Female	2		University	Programs	N	Campground	Y
46	29-Jul	USA			1		Male	2		University	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
47	29-Jul	Edmonton			1		Female	2		University	Combination	N	Combination	Y
48	29-Jul	Edmonton			1		Male	5	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	Contact	Y
49	29-Jul	Edmonton		1			Female	2		Graduate	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
50	29-Jul	Central			1		Female	2		High School	Map	N	Campground	Y
51	29-Jul	Rockies		1			Male	3	1	Trade or College	Combination	Y	Contact	Y
52	29-Jul	USA				1	Male	2	1	Trade or College	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
53	29-Jul	Central			1		Female	4		High School	Amenities	N	Combination	Y
129	29-Jul	Edmonton				1	Male	2	1	Trade or College	relax	Y	Road Sign	Y
132	29-Jul	Rockies	1				Male	3		no High School	activity	Y	Local	Y
133	29-Jul	Edmonton			1		Male	2		Graduate	relax	N	Map	Y
136	29-Jul	Edmonton		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	relax	N	Contact	N

Visitor Survey Data n= 108

Respondent	Date	Geographic Region	16-25	26-45	46-65	66+	Gender	Adult	Child	Education	Reason	Visited Park Before	Learned about Park	Recommend Park
141	30-Jul	Edmonton		1			Male	5		High School	relax	Y	Contact	Y
145	30-Jul	Edmonton			1		Male	4	1	Trade or College	activity	Y	Contact	Y
54	4-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	4		High School	Amenities	N	Road Sign	Y
55	4-Aug	Central			1		Female	2	1	Trade or College	Amenities	N	Road Sign	Y
56	4-Aug	Central		1			Female	3	1	Trade or College	Combination	N	Brochure	Y
57	4-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
58	4-Aug	BC			1		Female	2	1	Trade or College	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
59	4-Aug	Rockies		1			Female	2	1	Trade or College	Amenities	N	contact	Y
60	4-Aug	Edmonton			1		Male	2		University	Programs	Y	Combination	Y
61	4-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	Map	N	Website	Y
62	4-Aug	North			1		Female	2		Graduate	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
63	4-Aug	Edmonton			1		Female	2		University	Combination	Y	Contact	Y
64	4-Aug	Edmonton		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	Map	Y	Road Sign	Y
65	4-Aug	Canada (Other)		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
66	4-Aug	North			1		Female	2		University	Exhibits	N	Campground	Y
67	5-Aug	Calgary			1		Female	1		University	Combination	N	Road Sign	Y
68	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	Gift Shop	N	Brochure	Y
69	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Male	3	1	Trade or College	Amenities	Y	Road Sign	Y
70	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	Programs	N	Road Sign	Y
71	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	3		University	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
72	5-Aug	Edmonton			1		Female	2		University	Programs	N	Road Sign	Y
73	5-Aug	BC			1		Female	4	1	Trade or College	Programs	N	contact	Y
74	5-Aug	Edmonton			1		Male	4	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	Y	Brochure	Y
75	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
76	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	Programs	N	Road Sign	Y
77	5-Aug	BC			1		Female	2		Graduate	Combination	N	Town Information	Y
78	5-Aug	Rockies			1		Male	5	1	Trade or College	Combination	N	Contact	Y
79	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	5	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	Contact	Y
80	5-Aug	Rockies		1			Female	5	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	contact	Y
81	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	Exhibits	Y	Road Sign	Y
82	5-Aug	Edmonton			1		Male	2		University	Exhibits	Y	Road Sign	Y
83	5-Aug	England				1	Male	2		University	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
84	5-Aug	Israel			1		Female	4	1	Trade or College	Map	N	Road Sign	Y
85	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	Combination	Y	Combination	Y
86	5-Aug	Edmonton			1		Male	5		Graduate	Combination	Y	Brochure	Y
87	5-Aug	Edmonton			1		Male	2		High School	Combination	N	Website	Y
88	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	Y
89	5-Aug	Central			1		Female	2	1	Trade or College	Exhibits	N	Road Sign	N
90	5-Aug	Switzerland	1				Male	2		Graduate	Programs	N	Road Sign	Y
91	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Male	3	1	Trade or College	Amenities	N	Road Sign	Y
152	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		High School	like	Y	Road Sign	Y
153	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	relax	Y	Contact	Y
154	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Male	2	1	Trade or College	relax	N	Contact	Y
160	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			Female	2		University	relax	N	Brochure	Y
164	5-Aug	Central				1	Female	2		High School	relax	Y	Local	Y
165	5-Aug	BC				1	Male	2		High School	relax	Y	Contact	Y
167	5-Aug	Edmonton				1	Female	3		High School	people	N	Contact	Y
173	5-Aug	Edmonton			1		Male	2		Graduate	like	Y	Road Sign	Y
179	6-Aug	Edmonton			1		Female	2		University	relax	N	Road Sign	Y
182	6-Aug	Edmonton			1		Male	5	1	Trade or College	activity	Y	Road Sign	Y

Appendix 7: Visitor Centre Clientele Responses CONTINUED

Visitor Survey Comments n=108

Respondent	Date	Comments	Additional Comments
1	23-Jun	did not have time to look too much, but look very "appealing"	publicize it more on the in-Canada scale
2	23-Jun	well done, interesting	very professional attendant
3	23-Jun	looks like a great out door playground, very clean	neat place
4	23-Jun	I found them very realistic and full of character	keep this place going. Very helpful, nice to view things, hike, and very friendly staff
5	23-Jun	sure	very informative, friendly
6	24-Jun	very interesting, something different	
7	24-Jun	friendly people	
8	24-Jun	yes I did learn something new, looks great	very helpful person
9	24-Jun	very nice	great place to visit
10	24-Jun	good to see that persons care	enjoy the little hike
11	24-Jun		great view
12	24-Jun	found them informative. Discovered what wild life is in the park	
13	24-Jun	very good info, friendly staff, well equipped. Yes - found out about park, walks, etc.	hope to return after renovations - It's a beautiful park
14	24-Jun	great exhibits to see animals, skins etc.	great hospitality
15	24-Jun	interesting - good pictures and good interactive displays - microscope was interesting	I have been here on a school tour and it was excellent
16	24-Jun	clean, friendly, welcoming, interesting	
17	24-Jun	yes we ejoyed the exhibits	very nice
18	24-Jun	the centre is layed out well. Its not jam pack [sic] and overwhelming. The staff were very helpful.	thanks for the info!
19	24-Jun	helpful, informative, interesting, eye-catching - didn't have a chane to spend much time	very helpful staff
116	25-Jun	already there	
20	28-Jul	very informative, friendly and knowledgeable staff	
21	28-Jul	didn't really look. But what seen was good [sic]	
22	28-Jul	yes, it's a new experience for us, visiting wildlife	good spanish
23	28-Jul	kids enjoyed it the animal displays are nice	
24	28-Jul	Looked great - didn't read many	very helpful friendly people
25	28-Jul		
26	28-Jul		I think the Visitor Centres in Canada are a very good institution!
27	28-Jul	yes, great idea, good for adults and kids	
28	29-Jul	they're good	
29	29-Jul	my children love hands on	
30	29-Jul		
31	29-Jul	yes - info on where to look for birds	
32	29-Jul		
33	29-Jul	very informative, great displays!	
34	29-Jul	learned about different bugs	free coffee would be a nice touch
35	29-Jul	yes, the animals that live in the area. Information from employees.	beautiful trails and helpful employees
36	29-Jul	friendly people	
37	29-Jul	very well done. Indentified an insect we saw at our campsite	thanks, it is a beautiful facility

Appendix 7: Visitor Centre Clientele Responses CONTINUED

Visitor Survey Comments n=108

Respondent	Date	Comments	Additional Comments
38	29-Jul	learned about bugs	
39	29-Jul	interesting	
40	29-Jul	They're very neat and informative - learned a lot about bugs in the lake.	Good programs for visitors and park guides were very friendly and helpful.
41	29-Jul	entertaining	
42	29-Jul	good	
43	29-Jul	excellent	
44	29-Jul	great, seen lots of bugs, pond dipping	good job
45	29-Jul	very nice, helpful staff, our kids were entertained	
46	29-Jul		
47	29-Jul	educational, interesting and fun	staff exceptionally friendly and helpful
48	29-Jul		
49	29-Jul	I bet my kids will love it, but they didn't visit it yet	great job
50	29-Jul	nicely displayed	
51	29-Jul	always a good learning centre	
52	29-Jul	not enough time to see all	
53	29-Jul	neat to see staff working with the kids	
129	29-Jul	already there	
132	29-Jul		
133	29-Jul	already there	
136	29-Jul		
141	30-Jul		
145	30-Jul	hard to get a spot now, it's so crowded	
54	4-Aug	cool	very nice
55	4-Aug	about fishing spots	
56	4-Aug	the exhibits are very educational and informative	
57	4-Aug	nothing really new as our family has visited many visitor centres in our camping experiences. Our kids always enjoy looking / reading anyways and trying out interactive displays.	keep it up to date
58	4-Aug	very helpful and interesting	
59	4-Aug	it was very nice (loved the cougar)	
60	4-Aug	well layed out with local items of interest	friendly staff and knowledgable
61	4-Aug	nice set up. Like that kids can come in and colour	the parks centre lady Tanya was very helpful
62	4-Aug	attractive and easy to access	very helpful with information
63	4-Aug	I liked the "bear smart" display. I was reminded of bear safety. I enjoyed the idea of "lakes alive" even though I didn't spend time at that display. Need more signs - like showers, Kelly's Bathtub	I liked the connection to the deck overlooking Kellys Bathtub. Is the display finished? It feels incomplete. The use of phone used by the staff at the desk is very distracting. The conversation is heard throughout the exhibit area.
64	4-Aug	awesom, very friendly for all, clean	no bar
65	4-Aug	wildlife (taxidermy) is great	informative and friendly staff
66	4-Aug	interesting, youth friendly	thank you
67	5-Aug	very informative, some resources for teaching	very friendly staff
68	5-Aug	very beautiful	cool tshirts
69	5-Aug	this is great. The kids related to topics they had learned about in school. Very informative.	

Appendix 7: Visitor Centre Clientele Responses CONTINUED

Visitor Survey Comments n=108

Respondent	Date	Comments	Additional Comments
70	5-Aug	kids loved them! Very interactive.	
71	5-Aug	nice display, interactive	
72	5-Aug	yes, about the park	great park
73	5-Aug	yes, names of the flowers, aquatic bugs	very nice, cougar is very impressive
74	5-Aug	good assortment of animals and plants in the area	one of the wardens stopped by our campsite last night and gave us an informative talk on beavers
75	5-Aug	really great for kids, lots of hands on activities	
76	5-Aug	very nice centre	
77	5-Aug	very well done to especially for children	
78	5-Aug	very clean and nice	
79	5-Aug	wonderful. Very beautiful. I did learn about how to be "bear smart".	very impressive
80	5-Aug	yes, very interesting	
81	5-Aug	my children learned about what is at the park, wildlife and pond life	very nice and informative centre
82	5-Aug	very vibrant signs, enjoy reading about the area	
83	5-Aug	helpful and well presented	
84	5-Aug	nice place	
85	5-Aug	very nicely layed out, like that it is interactive, good for children, microscopes are a nice touch	like the outdoor informative signs about the park, very helpful and interesting
86	5-Aug	glad to have it open. It has been closed in the past years.	we enjoy the park and come back each year.
87	5-Aug	very good and friendly, good for 6 year old	
88	5-Aug	very informative	
89	5-Aug	okay	a message board would be nice
90	5-Aug	very interesting to look at the exhibits but nothing new	very friendly
91	5-Aug	cougar = wow	
152	5-Aug		
153	5-Aug		
154	5-Aug		
160	5-Aug	were briefly at the centre and will stop again	
164	5-Aug		
165	5-Aug	it's on the list!	
167	5-Aug		
173	5-Aug	already there	
179	6-Aug	hot tub at Kelley's?	
182	6-Aug		

Appendix 8: Camper Responses

Camper Survey Data n = 69

Respondent	Date	Geographic Region	16-25	26-45	46-65	66+	M	F	Gender	Adult	Child	Education	Reason	Visited Park Before	Learned About Park	Recommend Park
101	24-Jun	North		1				1	Female	2	1	University	activity	Y	Local	N
102	24-Jun	Edmonton		1			1		Male	2	1	University	relax	Y	Contact	Y
103	24-Jun	Rockies			1			1	Female	2	0	no High School	relax	Y	Local	Y
104	24-Jun	Rockies			1		1		Male	2	0	no High School	location	N	Map	Y
105	24-Jun	Edmonton			1			1	Female	2	0	High School	location	N	Contact	Y
106	24-Jun	Rockies		1				1	Female	3	3	High School	camp	Y	Local	Y
107	24-Jun	Rockies			1			1	Female	5	0	Trade or College	location	Y	Local	Y
108	24-Jun	Edmonton	1					1	Female	2	0	High School	activity	Y	Road Sign	Y
109	25-Jun	Rockies			1		1		Male	2	0	no High School	location	Y	Local	Y
110	25-Jun	Rockies		1			1		Male	2	2	University	camp	Y	Local	Y
111	25-Jun	Central			1			1	Female	4	3	Trade or College	relax	Y	Local	Y
112	25-Jun	North	1					1	Female	2	0	High School	relax	Y	Contact	Y
113	25-Jun	Rockies			1			1	Female	4	4	University	relax	Y	Contact	Y
114	25-Jun	Edmonton		1			1		Male	2	2	University	location	Y	Local	Y
115	25-Jun	Central		1				1	Female	4	4	Trade or College	location	Y	Local	Y
117	25-Jun	Rockies		1			1		Male	2	0	University	activity	Y	Local	Y
118	25-Jun	Rockies		1			1		Male	2	1	High School	location	N	Local	Y
119	25-Jun	Edmonton	1					1	Female	3	0	University	camp	N	Road Sign	Y
120	29-Jul	Central	1					1	Female	3	3	High School	activity	N	Website	Y
121	29-Jul	Edmonton	1					1	Female	5	0	High School	camp	Y	Contact	Y
122	29-Jul	Rockies			1		1		Male	1	0	Trade or College	relax	Y	Contact	Y
123	29-Jul	Edmonton		1			1		Male	1	2	Trade or College	relax	N	Brochure	Y
124	29-Jul	Canada (Other)		1			1		Male	2	2	Trade or College	fun	N	Road Sign	Y
125	29-Jul	Rockies		1				1	Female	2	0	High School	relax	Y	Contact	Y
126	29-Jul	Edmonton		1			1		Male	3	0	Trade or College	camp	N	Contact	Y
127	29-Jul	Edmonton		1				1	Female	2	0	University	fun	N	Contact	Y
128	29-Jul	USA				1	1		Male	2	0	High School	people	Y	Contact	Y
130	29-Jul	Rockies		1				1	Female	3	3	Trade or College	activity	N	Brochure	Y
131	29-Jul	Edmonton		1			1		Male	3	0	University	relax	Y	Website	N
134	29-Jul	Edmonton	1				1		Male	5	0	Trade or College	activity	N	Website	Y
135	29-Jul	Edmonton			1		1		Male	3	0	no High School	location	Y	Road Sign	Y
137	29-Jul	North		1				1	Female	1	2	Trade or College	activity	Y	Road Sign	Y
138	30-Jul	Rockies			1		1		Male	2	4	no High School	like	Y	Local	Y
139	30-Jul	Rockies			1		1		Male	2	3	no High School	relax	Y	Local	Y
140	30-Jul	Rockies				1	1		Male	4	2	Trade or College	relax	Y	Local	Y
142	30-Jul	Central			1		1		Male	2	2	University	camp	N	Map	Y
143	30-Jul	North			1		1		Male	2	2	Trade or College	like	Y	Local	Y
144	30-Jul	Rockies		1			1		Male	3	0	Trade or College	camp	Y	Town Information	Y
146	30-Jul	Rockies		1				1	Female	3	2	Trade or College	location	Y	Local	Y
147	30-Jul	Calgary				1	1		Male	2	2	no High School	people	Y	Local	Y
148	5-Aug	Central		1			1		Male	2	2	University	activity	N	Website	Y
149	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			1		Male	2	0	High School	people	Y	Road Sign	Y
150	5-Aug	Edmonton			1		1		Male	2	2	High School	camp	Y	Contact	N
151	5-Aug	Edmonton			1		1		Male	2	0	Trade or College	location	Y	Road Sign	Y
155	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			1		Male	2	0	University	activity	N	Contact	Y
156	5-Aug	Rockies	1					1	Female	4	0	University	relax	Y	Contact	Y
157	5-Aug	North		1			1		Male	2	0	Trade or College	people	N	Road Sign	N
158	5-Aug	Edmonton		1				1	Female	2	4	Trade or College	like	Y	Local	Y
159	5-Aug	Edmonton	1				1		Male	5	0	no High School	fun	Y	Road Sign	Y
161	5-Aug	Central		1				1	Female	2	4	University	camp	N	Website	Y
162	5-Aug	Edmonton			1			1	Female	2	0	High School	like	N	Road Sign	Y
163	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			1		Male	2	1	Graduate	like	N	Road Sign	Y
166	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			1		Male	2	1	Trade or College	people	N	Contact	Y
168	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			1		Male	2	3	Graduate	camp	N	Contact	N
169	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			1		Male	2	2	University	activity	Y	Map	N
170	5-Aug	Edmonton	1				1		Male	2	0	University	camp	N	Contact	Y
171	5-Aug	Edmonton	1					1	Female	2	0	University	fun	N	Map	Y
172	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			1		Male	3	2	University	relax	Y	Contact	Y
174	5-Aug	Edmonton		1			1		Male	3	0	University	camp	N	Contact	Y
175	5-Aug	Central		1			1		Male	2	2	Trade or College	camp	N	Contact	Y
176	6-Aug	Edmonton		1				1	Female	2	0	University	relax	Y	Contact	Y

Appendix 8: Camper Responses CONTINUED

177	6-Aug	Central	1					1	Female	2	0	High School	relax	N	Contact	Y
178	6-Aug	Edmonton		1				1	Female	2	0	University	location	N	Road Sign	Y
180	6-Aug	Rockies		1			1		Male	2	0	High School	people	Y	Local	Y
181	6-Aug	Rockies				1	1		Male	2	2	no High School	people	Y	Local	Y
183	6-Aug	North			1		1		Male	2	0	University	people	Y	Local	Y
184	6-Aug	Edmonton			1		1		Male	4	2	Trade or College	people	N	Contact	Y
185	6-Aug	Central		1				1	Female	5	2	University	camp	N	Website	Y
186	6-Aug	Edmonton			1		1		Male	2	0	University	location	Y	Contact	Y

Appendix 8: Camper Responses CONTINUED

Camper Survey Comments n = 69

Respondent	Date	Comments	Campground	1 to 5 likely to visit centre
101	24-Jun	don't want to recommend it to others to keep it a secret	Jarvis	1
102	24-Jun		Jarvis	1
103	24-Jun		Jarvis	1
104	24-Jun		Jarvis	1
105	24-Jun		Jarvis	1
106	24-Jun	visitor centre's in the wrong direction (going to Hinton from Jarvis)	Jarvis	1
107	24-Jun	didn't know there was a gift shop there	Jarvis	1
108	24-Jun	what does the visitor centre have in it?	Jarvis	1
109	25-Jun	used to go to Gregg Lake every year, want the Government to run the park, thought that the visitor centre was private and Kelly's was off limits	Kelleys Bathtub	2
110	25-Jun		Gregg Lake	1
111	25-Jun		Lakeside	3
112	25-Jun	not into the centre, but went to Kelley's Bathtub	Lakeside	3
113	25-Jun	not going this time	Lakeside	2
114	25-Jun		Lakeside	1
115	25-Jun		Gregg Lake	1
117	25-Jun		Gregg Lake	1
118	25-Jun	my kids might go	Gregg Lake	1
119	25-Jun		Gregg Lake	3
120	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	3
121	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	2
122	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	1
123	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	4
124	29-Jul	love it here, amazing free wood and site available!	Lakeside	3
125	29-Jul		Lakeside	4
126	29-Jul		Lakeside	3
127	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	3
128	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	1
130	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	1
131	29-Jul	this year the park is run down, look forward to the renovation	Gregg Lake	3
134	29-Jul	wanted to go in, but it was too late	Gregg Lake	2
135	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	1
137	29-Jul		Gregg Lake	1
138	30-Jul		Cache Lake	4
139	30-Jul	maybe next time	Cache Lake	1
140	30-Jul		Cache Lake	1
142	30-Jul	wasn't open when we went	Jarvis	1
143	30-Jul		Jarvis	1
144	30-Jul		Jarvis	1
146	30-Jul	maybe with the kids - I don't need another place to shop	Jarvis	1
147	30-Jul		Jarvis	3
148	5-Aug		Gregg Lake	1
149	5-Aug	don't come next year, due to renovations	Gregg Lake	4
150	5-Aug	park is nice, too many facilities are lacking in the campground	Gregg Lake	3
151	5-Aug	didn't like the reserved spots, when siites were free	Gregg Lake	4
155	5-Aug		Gregg Lake	4
156	5-Aug		Gregg Lake	4
157	5-Aug	facilities for camping need to be improved	Gregg Lake	1
158	5-Aug		Gregg Lake	4
159	5-Aug	I wouldn't mind to check it out	Gregg Lake	3
161	5-Aug	wood is nice	Gregg Lake	4

Appendix 8: Camper Responses CONTINUED

162	5-Aug		Gregg Lake	3
163	5-Aug		Gregg Lake	3
166	5-Aug	no time	Gregg Lake	1
168	5-Aug		Lakeside	3
169	5-Aug	bathrooms in campsite need work	Lakeside	4
170	5-Aug		Lakeside	4
171	5-Aug	we passed it coming in	Lakeside	4
172	5-Aug	need bigger signs about the centre, might go with the kids	Lakeside	3
174	5-Aug		Lakeside	3
175	5-Aug	going home today	Lakeside	1
176	6-Aug	went years ago	Jarvis	3
177	6-Aug		Jarvis	4
178	6-Aug	usually rough it	Jarvis	3
180	6-Aug		Jarvis	1
181	6-Aug	visit with the kids	Jarvis	2
183	6-Aug	want more information about boating on the website	Graveyard	1
184	6-Aug		Graveyard	3
185	6-Aug	mabe nicer weather	Cache	1
186	6-Aug		Cache	2

Appendix 9: Photographs

Photo 1: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: view of the visitor centre from the parking lot
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Photo 2: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: view of the signage outside the entrance to the visitor centre
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Appendix 9: Photographs CONTINUED

Photo 3: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: information kiosk inside the visitor centre, focus on North Eastern Slope Region
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Photo 4: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: view of the inside of the visitor centre, including cougar, activity tables and gift shop area
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Appendix 9: Photographs CONTINUED

Photo 5: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: view of the visitor information desk with mural and uniformed staff
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Photo 6: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: view of the visitor information desk with mural
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Appendix 9: Photographs CONTINUED

Photo 7: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: view of the visitor information desk with park information on shelves
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Photo 8: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: mounted cougar with back painted mural
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Appendix 9: Photographs CONTINUED

Photo 9: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: gift shop items and display cases
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Photo 10: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: interactive and temporary displays in the visitor centre
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Appendix 9: Photographs CONTINUED

Photo 11: William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor Centre
Description: view from the deck on the back of the visitor centre of Kelley's Bathtub (and Jarvis Lake)
Source: Heather Gross, July 2007

Appendix 10: Recommendations for William A. Switzer Provincial Park Visitor

Centre

This recommendation summary is for Switzer Park policy makers and future decision makers as part of continually improving the visitor centre.

Way finding
Many visitors were looking for maps. Orientation and way finding are standard visitor centre roles and can be enhanced by additional interactive maps of the area as well as materials in languages other than English.

Groups at the Centre
While visitors did not preferentially visit with children, they did tend to come to the centre in groups. Future visitor centre improvements could relate to this pattern and its related altruistic motivation. Some exhibits were designed to be appropriate for children, with backless stools at most activity stations and interactive exhibits with "hands on" components for a younger audience. More comfortable seating and conversation areas would be inviting for adults traveling in groups. Accommodation for groups and adults could also include a library, a resource browsing area, computers or internet access where adults could plan trips and learn about the area.

Participation
Encouraging participation at the visitor centre may enhance people's connection to the park and comfort in further exploration. Enhanced trip planning tools, a comment board or story-sharing tool could connect visitors to one another. These participatory aspects of the visitor centre relate to an idea of nature that is inviting and approachable.

Amenities
Offering amenities is one way to keep people comfortable and allow them to focus on their visit and the park itself. If visitors have places to sit, rest and converse as well as access to refreshments, washrooms and transportation, they can spend their energy on the visit, rather than the search for these things. Washroom facilities and coffee were both requested by visitor centre clientele in the survey.

Green Services
The renovation had a short timeline, a small budget and a relatively small footprint. A small team carried out the renovation and the centre runs with only one staff person at a time. The operation of the centre is sustainable in terms of staffing as well as overhead given the size of the centre. Using the existing building meant that less money was required for the renovation than would have been required for a full scale visitor centre construction. It maintains flexibility as well, and if offices are required at the park in the future, they can easily be reinstated.

Appendix 11: Situating the Researcher

I came to work at William A. Switzer Park in summer 2001 as one of two seasonal interpreters at the park. Jeanette Brooks was my immediate supervisor and I worked at the Kelley's Bathtub park office along with the seasonal conservation officers. While we were in the office, any visitors that came by could get maps and information directly from us. We also ran a small gift shop (mostly sweaters and some books) with the merchandise displayed behind the desk. Beyond working in the office, the majority of my time was spent doing programs with the public: school programs in June and visitor programs on weekends in July and August. These usually involved hiking near the campgrounds or more formal representations at the Gregg Lake Amphitheatre. For summer 2002 I was hired back to Switzer Park, this time as the its only summer interpreter. Both summers I lived in the park, in shared staff accommodation at Jarvis Lake.

While I worked summers in the park, I was working the rest of the year as an interpreter at the (then) Provincial Museum of Alberta. I worked on exhibits with a variety of themes, including Wild Alberta, the renovated natural history exhibit about Alberta that opened in 2004. When Jeannette Brooks, who became the Visitor Services Manager for the region, wanted to renovate the Switzer Park visitor centre, she spoke with me at the museum about display ideas and popular program elements.

It is with this background that I chose Switzer Park as my research area when proposing my research project for the masters program in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences in 2006. The timing coincided with the visitor centre renovation, and the park was interested in some form of evaluation of the centre. I, in turn, was interested in staying connected to the park and in engaging theoretically with issues around representation, exhibit design and visitor satisfaction in an outdoor recreation context.

I am very aware of the potential influence my familiarity with the park might have on my research. For that reason, I chose to survey visitor centre clientele rather than interview them, since during the survey they would not become aware of my connection to the park outside of my role as a researcher. In addition, I chose to focus on the visitor centre space rather than the programs offered by interpreters in the park. The latter seemed too closely aligned with my own experience to maintain objectivity. Finally, I wrote both a field notebook and policy recommendations that were relevant to the park outside of my formal thesis research. These tools and this awareness hopefully encouraged increased objectivity in the research project itself and the discussion of the park in the thesis.