

'TRUE CAMPING': IS THERE A PLACE FOR IT?

ABSTRACT

Hogwash Bend is an area of about 200 hectares on the Murray River in South Australia. The main natural attractions at the site include a large sandbar of white sand, shallow water and mature river red gums providing shade along the bank. There are no facilities at the site and the area has been used for recreation and camping for up to thirty years. It is apparent that visitation over the past five years has begun to increase and the biological quality of the site is poor. Interviews with campers showed six main reasons for visitation and value of the site: friends and family, relaxation, sand and safety, access, freedom and 'true camping'. People like to 'rough it' but in reality few went without a number of home comforts which they had brought themselves. The study indicated that the provision of facilities to help minimise impacts would not be supported by campers and would negatively impact upon their experiences. The research found that some camping practices are at odds with the concept of sustainability.

KEY WORDS: camping, facilities, riverland, family, values

INTRODUCTION

Camping, 'going bush' and experiencing the natural world are a popular recreational and holiday pastime for many Australians. The increasing demands by tourists and recreationists, and the need to sustain natural environments has necessitated the introduction of a number of strategies to manage the behaviour of people in natural areas. The extent to which these strategies are accepted however, varies enormously, and it is important to understand the characteristics of visitors in order that management strategies can be designed for optimum effect.

The Murray River in South Australia is facing a number of threats from many activities including recreation and tourism which are acknowledged as important uses of the river, providing significant contributions to regional economies. In 1998, the Sustainable Recreation Steering Committee (SRSC) was set up to examine the impact of recreation at 94 sites along the Murray River in South Australia, and to recommend a course of action to ensure sustainable use. A range of activities undertaken by visitors were identified as either high impact such as camping, trailbike riding and jet skiing, or low impact such as fishing and bushwalking (SRSC 2002). The SRSC (2002, p. 9) noted that "While recreational activities may not be the primary cause of many environmental problems, they do contribute to a system that is already stressed." Some of the strategies suggested by the SRSC (2002) to help minimise these impacts include building facilities such as showers, toilets and permanent campfire places, rubbish collection, signage and car parking. The approach taken by the SRSC is to involve individuals and communities in restoration work at various sites along the river.

Values and behavioural influences

In relation to the sustainable use of sites along the Murray River, there are a number of factors that may influence the success and acceptability of the strategies recommended by the SRSC (2000) particularly values and commitment. The main aim of this research project was to provide some preliminary information about the characteristics of campers at a particular site, the reasons

for their visitation and their values for the site. It also sought to obtain an indication of the likelihood that campers would accept various management strategies.

Values are thought to underlie behaviours and a considerable research effort has attempted to measure and understand the types of values which influence behaviour in natural areas. Personal values relate to a person's own life and have been used in a tourism context to analyse travel behaviour and visitation to attractions and destinations (Blamey & Braithwaite, 1997; Madrigal & Kahle, 1994; Pitts & Woodside, 1986). Social values relate to broader community and worldly issues and are particularly relevant where an element of social good is involved (Blamey & Braithwaite, 1997). They have been used in relation to natural resource management and in the developing field of ecotourism (Fennell & Nowaczek, 2003). Two types of social values, intrinsic and instrumental have been shown to influence the level of use or conservation for a place (Winter and Lockwood 2004). Intrinsic values relate to the value of an entity for its own sake, whereas instrumental values are the benefits that humans obtain from a place (O'Neill 1992; Vilkkka 1997). The notion of an orientation is also useful to consider how a person has also been used to describe the overall way in which a person approaches the world. Environmental orientation is usually conceptualised as a continuum with an anthropocentric (human centred) and a biocentric (nature centred) perspective at the extremes, and varying positions in between (Gebhardt and Lindsey, 1995). An ecocentric orientation is focused on ecosystems, An egocentric orientation regards the self and the individual as most important and an homocentric orientation is focused upon the interests of human society but fails to give the same consideration to nature (Merchant, 1992). The way in which behaviour is directed will be influenced by which value or orientation is stronger.

It is argued that community support is necessary for restoration of the natural environment, especially with respect to behaviour such as assisting with the performance of practical on ground tasks (Bright, Barro & Burtz 2002; Moore, Jennings & Tacey 2001). Research indicates that planning for recreation and tourism has more successful outcomes when participants are involved in the planning process (Harrison & Burgess 2000; Leberman & Mason 2002). Reliance on scientific evidence alone, without input from the public has been shown to detract from the acceptance and subsequent success of strategies designed to restore natural environments (Davis, Finlayson & Hart 2001; Harrison & Burgess 2000). Commitment is also thought to influence a person's effort towards restoration (Bright, Barro and Burtz 2002). Part of a person's commitment to a place can relate to their ownership of it. Ownership need not refer to the legal sense, but as found by Cortese (2003) may relate to the part played by a river in the communal life of people. Commitment to restoration efforts may also depend upon the trust of the public towards other stakeholders and natural area managers such as landholders, government officials and researchers (Cvetkovich & Winter 2003; Jones 2002). The social and community context within which recreation activities occur is another factor which can influence the value of visitors for a site and the behaviours they support. The level of attachment that people hold for a place has been found to be influenced by family and symbolic meaning, rather than the features of the destination itself (Lee & Allen 1999).

Background to Hogwash Bend

Discussions with staff from the RMCWMB resulted in the selection of Hogwash Bend as a site with sufficiently large visitation to facilitate a study. It is anticipated that the results of this

study will assist with successful implementation of the SRSC strategies and other sites and in the development of a Local Area Plan by better understanding the characteristics of visitors.

Hogwash Bend is an area of about 200 hectares on the Murray River located 15 kilometres from Waikerie which is a popular destination for visitors, being 177 kilometres, or an easy two hour drive north of Adelaide. The main natural attractions at Hogwash Bend include a large sandbar of white sand, shallow water and mature river red gums providing shade along the bank. A small section adjacent to the main sandbar is owned by the Local Council and a small section of the riparian zone is Crown Land. The largest proportion of the site is owned privately by two landholders. There are no facilities at the site other than some rubbish bins which are cleared daily by council staff during busy times. The area has been used for recreation and camping for up to thirty years, but it is apparent that visitation over the past five years has begun to increase. Informal surveys by RMCWMB staff show that in 1998 there were 30 people, and at Easter in 2000, 80 people were counted (Waanders 2004 pers. comm.). The biological aspects of Hogwash Bend were recently assessed along with forty four other sites in the Riverland West Local Action Planning Area by Wetland Care Australia (1998). Hogwash was rated as reasonably poor and in worse condition than most other sites. The report described the site as having a "large number of stressed mature red gums near the river edge", parts of the area as unhealthy with pest plants covering the main basin of the wetland (Wetland Care Australia 1998, p. 30). The report noted a low diversity of flora and fauna, that eighty seven percent of the site was affected by heavy recreation impacts and that action is urgently required.

A number of stakeholders, including the landholders, river management groups and local people are concerned at the impact of uncontrolled visitation on the ecology of the area. The problem for the site is that although the environmental impacts along the river have been well documented, and some information about visitor numbers and activities is available, very little is known about the characteristics of people visiting specific sites. It is clear that different groups require different management practices, but managers first need to know who the people are particularly if their cooperation is required for on ground works (Jurowski et al. 1995). If the strategies of the SRSC are to have effect it is important to know how campers may react to the introduction of facilities and other management controls.

METHOD

Data were collected by observation, face to face interviews and a self complete questionnaire, from people camping at Hogwash Bend over the Easter weekend (April 9th to 12th) in 2004. Each interview took about 20 minutes and involved a semi-structured format in which people were asked about the length and frequency of their visits, perceptions of the site's naturalness, attitudes towards management strategies such as the provision of various facilities and their value for Hogwash. In many cases the interview was conducted with several people from the camp and so represented a group view. The questionnaire was designed to expand upon some of the questions asked at interview and provide anonymity for respondents. The design of the questionnaire was based on discussions with senior staff from the RMWCMB to ensure relevant information was collected. The questionnaire included questions relating to frequency and duration of visits; 10 items (on a scale of 1 to 7) to measure general attitudes towards different levels of modification of natural areas; two questions relating to perceptions of the site's health and its 'naturalness', questions

(on a scale of 1 to 7) to determine attitudes towards management and provision of various facilities at the site; and socio-demographic information. It included a series of 30 statements designed to measure values for the site (not reported in this paper).

The number of campers expected at the site was not known in advance but a physical count at Easter estimated their numbers at 225 adults and 105 children. A camp was defined simply as a distinct group of people camped around one camp fire. There were an estimated 38 camps, which varied in size from two to twenty people, made up of family and friends. The researcher was accommodated in the nearby town and traveled out to the site each day. All of the camps were approached by the researcher and asked if they would like to participate in an interview with the exception of nine camps which left before they could be approached. Two camps refused to be interviewed. An incentive (a voucher with the chance to win a \$50 voucher from a hardware store) was offered for people who participated in the interviews in consideration of their time and contribution. A total of 27 camps (71%) were interviewed.

At the completion of the interview a package containing a questionnaire booklet, a letter of introduction from the researcher and a return addressed envelope was offered for all adult members of the camp. A total of 116 questionnaires were distributed and campers were offered the option of returning the questionnaire directly to the researcher the following day or mailing it. Two questionnaires were mailed and 79 were collected the following day. A total of 68 usable surveys resulted (30% of the estimated adult population).

RESULTS

Profile of Campers

Most people were camped in tents (71) but there were also several caravans (22) and 103 vehicles. Most people brought their own portable toilets (37). There were two jet skis, two to three power boats and 15 trail bikes most of which were for children. There were also 14 dogs. There was a range of age groups represented at the site and many consisted of family groups. Most people were employed in either full time (54%) or part time (21%) positions. Retired and home duties each made up a further nine percent and seven percent were students. Household incomes tended towards the higher end of the scale within 22% earning over 78,000 and less at the lower end, with only 7% in the under \$15599 category.

Visitation habits

Of those interviewed, around eighty percent had visited Hogwash before. Over fifty percent (54%) of campers had been visiting the site for ten years or more while 29% had visited for three to six years. Many were part of family groups who had first come to the area as children with their parents and were now returning as adults with their own family. Seventeen percent were visiting for the first or second time. Almost everyone lived in Adelaide or near to the city. Few people were there by themselves, but had come at the invitation of previous campers. Around 36 percent visit only once per year (Easter) and up to 51 percent visit two or three times (Easter, October and one other weekend). A further 10 to 15 percent of people said they visit four or more times each year (sometimes to avoid other people). Five to ten percent of campers stay for a short weekend of 2 to

2.5 days, around half (48 to 59 percent) stay for the long weekend of 3 to 4 days and about 17-20 percent add up to another day. In other words eighty percent of visitors stay for up to four days. About 10 percent stay up to 8 days and around 10 percent stay from 2 to 3 weeks.

Approximately 12 camps including tents, cars four wheel drive vehicles and camp fires were situated on the sandbar itself. The remainder of the camps were set up along the bank for approximately two kilometres in one direction and about half a kilometre in the other direction. As people noted, the shallowness of the river at the sand bar generally excludes the use of power boats and only two to three were observed, which is far fewer than at other places. The activities participated in are shown in Table 1. Clearly, the more passive pastimes are more popular. An 'Other' category showed that people also enjoyed cooking at the camp fire, sitting by the fire, sleeping in and listening to the radio. There were several trail bikes at the site, and according to some respondents, these were a relatively new activity. Many people complained about the noise and dust, but were hesitant to attribute too much blame, and many thought that they should tolerate the inconvenience.

Attitudes towards facilities

Given the recommendations of the SRSC for introduction of facilities at natural sites to help reduce impacts, campers were asked their attitudes towards provision of barbeques, toilets, showers and car parking in both interviews and questionnaire. The results from the questionnaire are shown in Table 2. Clearly car parking and barbeques are not supported, but there is some support for toilets and showers. Only 43% of people agreed that no facilities are needed and this suggests that perhaps more support exists. It was clear that most people did not want facilities and they gave a number of reasons to support their claims. They argued that facilities would be most likely they would not be adequately maintained and would break down, and this would then cause them greater inconvenience. They also argued it would increase visitation to the site and therefore increase crowding. Most strongly objected to the idea of not being able to bring their cars up to their camp site, saying they wanted the security for their vehicle. Another reason given was that the facilities would spoil the naturalness of the area which in turn would decrease their experience. There was some support for toilets and showers from women, but again, they commented that it would be most likely they would not be adequately maintained. The comments below indicate the overall **negative** attitudes towards facilities.

- *may as well go to a bloody caravan park*
- *not many places that are bush, not developed, most are ruined,*
- *facilities would attract more people, would be like a picnic area "horrible",*

The anticipated impact on visitation was varied (Table 3). When asked about the impact of facility provision on their visitation, a small group (5%) indicated they would visit less often and nearly 16% said they would go elsewhere, while 20% said they would visit more often. Over half (55%) said it would not make any difference to their visitation habits.

Table 1
Campers' Activities at Hogwash (n =68)

Activity	Freq %
Drinking beer, wine	82
Relaxing and talking with friends around the camp	79
Swimming	75
Fishing	68
Walking in the bush	62
Reading, playing cards	62
Playing quiet music	54
I try to do nothing	41
Sun bathing	38
Photography	38
Water skiing	37
Bird watching	35
Trail bike riding	29
Non powered boating canoeing/kayaking	28
Power boating	27
Four wheel driving	24
Playing loud music	24
Jet skiing	15

Percentages add to more than 100 because people are involved in more than one activity

Table 2
Campers' Attitude to Facility Provision

Facility	Agree (%)
car parking	3.1
barbeques	1.5
toilets	30.8
showers	21.5
firewood provided	18.5
No facilities are needed. I like the place as it is.	43.1

Table 3
Impact of Facility Provision on Visitation

Impact of facilities on future visitation	Agree (%)
I would visit more often	20.6
I would visit less often	4.8
I would stay longer	12.7
I would stay for a shorter time	3.2
It would not make any difference to my visits	55.6
I would go somewhere else to camp	15.9

Value for Hogwash

This section describes the campers' responses to questions asked in the interview about their value for Hogwash. Their comments could be grouped in to six main categories: friends and family, relaxation, sand and safety, access, freedom and 'true camping'.

Friends and Family - the social nature of travel

Hogwash was clearly a time to enjoy the company of friends and family. Many camps comprised more than one nuclear family. Camping at Hogwash was a tradition for many people and for some, it was the only time they all came together as a group. The results support the research of Lee and Allen (1999) who found that family was a primary factor in a person's attachment to a destination.

Sand and safety

Comments about safety for children were common for each of the 12 camps on the sandbar. Because the river is quite shallow at this point it is safe for children to swim, and also it limits the use of power boats, again increasing the safety compared with other places. People also thought that other campers contributed to the friendliness and safety of the site.

Relaxation

Table 1 shows that many of the activities enjoyed at Hogwash are passive, with the most frequent being 'drinking beer, wine' and relaxing and talking with friends around the camp. The activities of daily life such as sitting around talking or water activities were popular.

Access

Hogwash is an easy two hours drive from Adelaide and so it provides an ideal escape from the city. Several campers said that they cannot afford to go to places that charge admission, such as caravan parks. Others said that few other riverside places could accommodate large groups to camp together. Several campers said they liked the fact they could choose their own site.

- *we always bush camp - never camp in caravan parks (they don't allow dogs), this is the only holiday you can afford when you've got kids*
- *there is enough room for a big group - other places can't fit five families*

Freedom - dogs, fires and bikes

The notion of freedom was evident from comments people made in relation to dogs, fires and bikes. People complained that national parks prohibited the use of fires and trailbikes and the entry of dogs thus destroying a major component of their camping experience.

- *no routines* "get a bit feral"
- *being able to do what you want is part of camping*
- *that's why we come here - no strict guidelines, most people have common sense*
- *would hate rules, wouldn't enjoy ourselves, there are enough rules in the world, why we like it because there are no rules*

Many campers interpreted the notion of freedom as the absence of management controls. The campers also saw themselves as being sensible and many said the group overall was responsible and showed "common sense". Many referred to the fact people take their rubbish with them when they leave as an indication of social responsibility. This was confirmed by an after site visit and most of the sites were reasonably rubbish free.

True camping

This aspect became evident in the discussions about facilities and as one person said: *facilities would make it more commercial "not true camping"*. Other campers made similar comments about the importance of providing one's own equipment and that too much provision was not "real" camping. The examples below illustrate this meaning.

- *we come to be self-sufficient,*
- *(facilities) takes the joy out, prefer it like is, come to be out in the bush- that's the whole idea of camping, teaches kids to survive in the natural environment,*
- *(facilities) takes away the adventure*
- *the idea of camping is to go bush,*

DISCUSSION

Many aspects of tourism focus on the provision of high quality services for visitors. Clearly, as the campers at Hogwash show, this does not suit all people. In fact, the whole emphasis of 'true camping' at Hogwash is to "bring-your-own" and to "do-it-yourself". Campers took delight in selecting their own site and setting up conveniences for themselves such as showers and cooking facilities.

The undeveloped nature of Hogwash means that people can 'rough it' and 'get back to nature'. Comments indicated that people thought the introduction of facilities would destroy the natural amenity of the site. The two main reasons were that it would not be 'true' camping, that it would attract other people and that they would be uncared for and be unreliable, that they would have to wait in line to use them. In reality however, few people went without home comforts and many had a number of domestic appliances and equipment which made their stay relatively conformable, including ground coverings, portable toilets and showers, refrigerators, televisions and radios and camping furniture. Two camps had generators which supported a number of services for them.

A sense of tradition and shared leisure time with family and friends was also an important experience at Hogwash. Even in the largest groups which held twenty people and numerous tents, vehicles and toilets, there was only one camp fire. This acted as a focus point for cooking, making cups of tea and coffee and a central point around which people tended to sit. Some people commented that Hogwash is a cheap holiday and said they were unable to afford any other kind of holiday. The income data however, indicate that overall, most campers are employed and are earning relatively good incomes. Observations also suggested that considerable sums had been spent on equipment particularly vehicles, powerboats, tents, trail bikes and equipment for cooking.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study was successful in providing an indication of the general motivations and values of campers towards their experience at Hogwash Bend. On the other hand, it has raised a number of questions and indicated several areas in which further research needs to be conducted before any firm conclusions can be drawn. Importantly, it suggests that the tradition at Hogwash may not be representative of other sites, and that each site may have a distinct group of campers with their own motivations.

Clearly the provision of facilities is a contentious issue that requires more discussion with campers. As many researchers have found, the cooperation of community is a necessary qualification for the successful implementation of management strategies.

The campers comments indicated the presence of a riverside community, the members of which hold deep and personal values for Hogwash Bend. The sustainability of the area is clearly important to campers, but as found by Lee and Allen (1999), the value that visitors hold is also linked with their experiences with family and friends and memories of previous visits. It is advisable that this community be closely involved in any further work regarding the area.

It is clear that campers value the natural area for its own sake but it is also apparent that their values for their own social interactions are the main force driving their behaviour. That is they seem to be more anthropocentric than ecocentric such that their own comfort and enjoyment is more important to them than the health of the area itself. Very few campers commented about the needs of the non-human entities at the site. For this reason, unless the campers' needs can be addressed, the introduction of the suggested management strategies are unlikely to be supported.

The study was based on short interviews and questionnaires, but has indicated some of the areas in which more detailed information is required. Research also needs to consider the social interactions of the campers, for example the existence of leaders who may have an influence in the future of the area.

One of the outcomes facing this group is that they may have nowhere else to go for their future leisure and recreation. Most groups indicated that they do not come together as a group at any other time, and they do not go to other places along the river because of a number of limitations. The dilemma here is that the nature of visitation at Hogwash creates a number of impacts at the site, yet the solutions suggested in this study would partly destroy the notion of 'true camping' and the

very reasons that make the experiences meaningful. The impacts of the campers' relative intrinsic and instrumental values for Hogwash Bend need to be understood and discussed by all parties.

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