

## HAKATERE CONSERVATION PARK: VISITOR STUDY 2007-2008

**AUTHORS:** Anna Thompson, Brent Lovelock, Arianne Reis, Carla Jellum

### ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings from a visitor survey and interviews with local users of the Hakateru Conservation Park (HCP). Firstly the report presents the findings of the survey conducted at the HCP from late December 2007 to late May 2008. Self-completion questionnaires were distributed to visitors in the area through strategically located collection and drop-off points. A total of 509 usable questionnaires were returned, by post, to the researchers. The final section of the report presents the interview findings.

The typical visitor to the HCP, responding to the survey, was a 35-54 year old New Zealander, working in a professional or managerial position. The majority of respondents were South Islanders, with 78% originating from the Canterbury and North Otago regions. International respondents comprised 18% of the sample, and were predominantly European in origin, however many of these international visitors resided in New Zealand. Visitors are most likely to be in family groups or parties of more than three people (54%), however 38% of respondents travelled in pairs or as couples. In terms of actual visitor numbers, small groups were the largest contributors.

Most respondents regarded themselves as regular users of the New Zealand outdoors, with 72% of visitors reporting over 20 years of such experience, and many (57%) belonging to some form of recreational or outdoor club. The typical visitor may have already visited the HCP before, with regular or occasional users comprising 71.5% of the sample; 28.5% of visitors being first time visitors to the area.

Respondents' main motivations for coming to the HCP, in descending order of importance, were: for the scenery/sightseeing, to experience the solitude of the area, to go tramping, to obtain easy access to nature, or to take children or family into the outdoors. Whilst tramping is clearly one of the main activities undertaken in the HCP, other activities taking place included fishing, picnicking, boating, mountain biking, bird watching, climbing, hunting, 4WDing, motor biking and horse riding. The landscape of the area is valued by visitors as it offers opportunities to experience such activities in a remote setting where the wide open spaces are valued.

The typical visitor accessed the HCP either by 2WD (43%) or 4WD (40.9%) but once within the park the main mode of moving around is by foot (61.4%). However, because of the distances that could be travelled on existing roads some visitors (31%) used 2WD and 4WD to access areas within the park. Visitors generally stayed in the park for two to three days (at least one night) and were likely to stay in a crib/bach (35.4%) within the park. Other visitors reported staying in tents and huts. Smaller numbers of visitors used campervans or caravans. Day trips were also common (31% of visitors). Visitor use was concentrated around the lakes areas with Lake Clearwater being visited by over 52% of respondents. Lake Camp (44%); Lake Heron (40%) and Mt Somers Track (32.8%) were the next most frequently visited areas.

Overall visitor satisfaction with their experiences of the area was very high, with 95% of visitors indicating that they were "very satisfied" or "satisfied". A high level of satisfaction was expressed for huts, tracks and recreational opportunities generally. Toilets and road conditions received lower levels of satisfaction (note that some of the roads concerned are managed by the Ashburton District Council). Visitors also reported lower levels of satisfaction with the information available on the DOC HCP website and in the brochure, which lacked sufficient details about the variety of huts and recreational opportunities.

Most respondents were satisfied with the current numbers of visitors in the HCP, with 75% of visitors reporting feeling not crowded at all. Eighteen percent reported feeling slightly crowded and seven percent reported feeling moderately or extremely crowded, the majority of whom were based in the vicinity of the lakes. Despite this, 97% of visitors said that they would return to the HCP. The main motivations to return were the range of recreational opportunities within the park, the environment/natural beauty of the park and its accessibility.

The main recommendations to arise from this study were made with respect to ongoing maintenance of facilities in the area, especially improving toilet facilities at the lakes. The need for detailed information about the recreational and associated features of the HCP, including a more specific map of the area was also noted. Other recommendations address opportunities to involve the public in conservation activities; the potential to develop new track systems; and the need for an on-site presence by DOC during high use periods. Finally, the study recommends DOC address the possible future growth in a diversity of visitors which will require management responses to the provision of access and possible conflict between diverse recreation groups. High use areas around the lakes and wetlands will require ongoing visitor monitoring. Both the survey and interview findings identified issues arising from the presence of vehicles (particularly 4WDs and motorbikes) in the HCP.