

## **Four-wheel-drive camping on Fraser Island: a study of visitor preferences over the summer of 1992-93 (summary of results)**

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*Note: This paper is a summary of results from a study conducted by the author in 1993. The assistance of the Fraser Implementation Unit (Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage) and the School of Leisure Studies at Griffith University are gratefully acknowledged. Comments or requests for further information should be directed to Terry Harper on (070) 520 542 or care of the Wet Tropics Management Authority, PO Box 2050, Cairns Qld 4870.*

### **Introduction**

This survey was undertaken as a post-graduate research project for the Fraser Implementation Unit to gain a greater appreciation of who visits Fraser Island, why they visit and their preferences for campsite facilities and conditions. This information was required to assist in preparing and implementing the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. Understanding the characteristics, behaviours and preferences of visitors to Fraser Island is important in making decisions about what type of facilities should or should not be developed and where they should be located to best meet the needs of four-wheel-drive visitors to the Island.

A total of 488 surveys were sent out to people whose names and addresses were obtained from Queensland Recreation Area Management Board permit records. Of these, 27 surveys were returned to sender owing to incorrect, incomplete or a changed addresses. This left a potential sample size of 461 respondents distributed relatively evenly between people who visited the Island during the peak season December and January (241) and off-peak February and March (220). A total of 396 completed questionnaires was received by the cut-off date representing an overall response rate of 86 per cent.

### **Description of respondent characteristics**

The respondents to this study comprised 396 four-wheel-drive campers who visited Fraser Island over the summer of 1992-93. The majority of the sample came from Queensland (68 per cent), followed by 21 per cent who originated from New South Wales. Almost half the sample

(49.5 per cent) were aged between 25 and 39, with substantial groups of young adults between 15 and 24 (21.5 per cent) and mature adults between 40 and 59 (27.5 per cent). Seven respondents were more than 60 years of age. The average was 33 years.

The sample comprised 343 males (87.5 per cent) and 49 females (12.5 per cent). Respondents travelled in a variety of social groupings including mostly family (41 per cent), mostly friends (25 per cent), a combination of family and friends (16 per cent) or with their spouse or partner (14.5 per cent). The remainder represented those people travelling alone (2 per cent) or with an organised group (1 per cent).

While group sizes ranged from one to 24 people (average = 3.8 people), more than half the sample (51.5 per cent) were in groups of three people or fewer. Forty-one per cent were part of groups of four, five or six people. Only seven and-a-half per cent were in groups larger than six people.

More than half the sample (51.5 per cent) had either begun or finished higher education such as TAFE, college, or university. Slightly less than one-third of the sample (29.5 per cent) had not gone beyond year 10 studies. At the time of the survey, most of the respondents had positions in management or administration (22 per cent), professional fields (23 per cent), or were employed as tradespeople (27.5 per cent). Most were employed full-time (60 per cent), or were self-employed (28 per cent).

Most respondents (76 percent) were using their own vehicle to visit Fraser Island. The remainder hired a vehicle (13 per cent), borrowed one from a friend or relative (8.5 per cent) or used a company vehicle (2.5 per cent).

Respondents had gone on an average of 88 four-wheel-drive trips (anywhere) during their lifetime. The average number of lifetime visits to Fraser Island was 9.7 visits. A majority of respondents (58 per cent) indicated they visited Fraser Island once every year or two years.

In summary, the sample of four-wheel-drive campers comprised mostly males from Queensland and New South Wales with an average age of around 33 years. They tended to travel with family, friends or a combination of the two in groups of around four people. Respondents tended to use their own vehicle to visit the Island. On average, the sample had considerable experience with four-wheel-driving in other locations.

Both the peak (December and January) and off-peak (February-April) samples were found to be similar in age, gender proportions, previous visits, place of residence, group type, reasons for visiting, the amount of time spent participating in activities and the importance placed on these activities.

#### Reasons for visiting Fraser Island

Survey respondents were presented with a set of 30 reasons for visiting Fraser Island on their most recent visit and asked to rate their level of importance from very unimportant (1) to very important (5). Analysis revealed that enjoying the outdoors, having fun, having a good time and enjoying myself, viewing the scenery, and getting away from the usual demands of life as the most important reason for visiting Fraser Island (see table 1). Showing others how to do things, doing something creative, thinking about personal issues, to be away from the family and pass or fill in spare time were ranked the most unimportant reasons for visiting.

In addition to indicating the importance of 30 set motives, respondents were provided with an opportunity to identify any other important reasons for visiting Fraser Island not covered in the motive scale. Slightly less than half the sample (48.7 per cent) provided at least one other additional reason for visiting Fraser Island. Of these respondents, nearly a half (46.1) indicated fishing as a reason for visiting the Island during the study period. Fishing accounted for nearly one-third (27 per cent) of all additional reasons offered. Other important reasons included opportunities to participate in activities such as four-wheel-driving including testing vehicles and developing skills (29 per cent of respondents), water-based activities such as swimming and surfing (12 per cent), sharing Fraser Island with others (11 per cent), camping (9 per cent), observing flora and fauna (8 per cent) and visiting a place unspoilt by development (3.6 per cent). Some people (3.6 per cent) were visiting Fraser Island before any rumoured closures took place.

Reason for visiting	Average importance
enjoy the outdoors	4.63
have fun	4.61
have a good time and enjoy myself	4.58
view the scenery	4.55
get away from usual demands	4.52
relax	4.49
explore Fraser Island	4.42
experience tranquility	4.34
change from my daily routine	4.30
experience new and different things	4.28
something exciting or adventurous	4.25
close to nature	4.21
give my mind a rest	4.14
to be on Fraser Island	3.90
near people who enjoy the same things	3.82
do something with my friends	3.82
free to do things my own way	3.78
do something with my family	3.72
relieve built up tension	3.45
day-dream or let my mind wander	3.41
gain a sense of accomplishment	3.38
test my skills and abilities	2.92
exercise and keep physically fit	2.81
spend time on my own	2.76
meet and talk to other visitors	2.76
show others how to do things	2.72
do something creative	2.62
think about personal issues	2.49
to be away from the family	2.31
pass or fill in spare time	2.18

Table 1 Average importance of reasons for visiting Fraser Island (1=very unimportant, 2= unimportant, 3= neither important nor unimportant, 4=important, 5=very important).

#### Characteristics of most recent visit

Part three of the questionnaire dealt with characteristics of the respondents' most recent visit to Fraser Island. Additional recreational equipment such as trailers, boats and caravans was used by a small minority of respondents. About one-third of the study population travelled with up to nine other vehicles as part of a larger group (average of about three other people). Slightly more than half of the respondents (52.8 percent) shared the decision to

visit Fraser Island with other members of their group and 38 per cent of the sample identified themselves as the sole decision maker. The majority of respondents either did most of the driving themselves (72.6 percent) or shared the responsibility with someone else in the group (17.4 percent).

Most of the sample (94.5 percent) indicated Fraser Island was their first choice as a place to visit on their four-wheel-driving trip. For the

remainder, other places where they would have preferred to go included, in order of popularity, Cooloola, Cape York, and Moreton Island. Most respondents (73 per cent) indicated their four-wheel-drive trip to Fraser Island was a visit only to the island and was not associated with any other travel. Overall, the sample stayed an average of 4.7 nights on Fraser Island.

A majority (66 per cent) of respondents thought there was just the right number of people on the Island during their visit. Twenty per cent thought there was too many or far too many other people. Four per cent thought there was too few or far too few people.

Activity participation patterns

As part of the survey, respondents were requested to indicate four main activities they personally participated in during their visit to Fraser Island. They were asked to indicate which one they spent the most time doing and which activity was the most important to them (refer to table 2). The data provided a valuable insight into the activity patterns of four-wheel-drive campers. While initial observation revealed that swimming, fishing, four-wheel-drive touring, relaxing, sightseeing and walking are popular activities in terms of overall participation rates, closer analysis of the data identified different patterns in the amount of time devoted to participation and the importance assigned to the activity by participants. Whereas nearly two-thirds (63.2 per cent) of the sample went swimming in the surf, lake or stream, few respondents considered swimming as the most important activity (7.7 percent) or devoted the most time to it (5.6 percent). Similarly, but conversely, whereas only 11.5 per cent of the sample spent most of their time on the Island relaxing, nearly one quarter (23.5 percent) considered this the most important activity.

Preferred campsite facilities and conditions  
Respondents were presented with a list of 27 social, physical and managerial setting attributes and were requested to indicate how important (1=unimportant, 5=important) each of the attributes were when selecting a place to camp on Fraser Island. The results presented in Table 3

show the most important activities to be the ability to camp beside your vehicle, near natural water such as a lake, stream or ocean, plenty of natural shade, shelter from the wind and weather and away from places used by commercial tour operators. Some of the least important attributes included provision of organised activities such as slide shows, good boat launching facilities nearby, being near other camping groups and near telephones. The average importance assigned to each attribute and the standard deviation among the sample are shown in Table 3.

Other campsite preferences

Overall, preferences for toilet facilities ranged from composting (28 per cent) or flushing (24.5 per cent) toilet systems, through to no built toilet (14 per cent) or the traditional bush pit toilet (6 per cent). The ocean on the exposed eastern beach of Fraser Island (i.e. with surf) was the most preferred type of natural water body when selecting a campsite (42 per cent) followed by a stream or creek (24.5 per cent) or a freshwater lake (19 per cent). Almost half the sample (47 per cent) indicated their primary reason for building a wood fire when camping on Fraser Island was sitting around and talking. About two-thirds of the sample (67 per cent) used a fuel stove when camping on Fraser Island.

Activity	Participation Rates (*)	Most Time	Most Important
	%	%	%
Swimming	63.2	5.6	7.7
Fishing	55.1	10.6	10.5
4WD touring	48.6	27.4	11.1
Relaxing	47.0	11.5	23.5
Sightseeing	46.0	21.5	20.7
Walking	30.8	2.9	3.1
Exploring	21.7	10.0	8.6
Camping	20.4	6.2	4.6
Socialising	6.0	.3	1.9
Drinking	5.7	.3	.3
Nature appreciation	4.7	.9	2.2
Photography	4.4	.6	.9
Eating	4.4		1.2
Sports/games	2.3		.3
Sailing/Surfing	2.3		1.2
Reading	2.3	.6	
Education	1.6	.3	.3
Campfire	1.6	.3	
Sun bathing	1.3		.3
Other	1.0	.6	.6
Visiting sites	1.0		
Totals (n)	383	340	324

Table 2 Activity participation patterns including participation rates, most time consuming and most important activity.

Note: (\*) represents the proportion of the sample who participated in each activity. Total participation rates exceed 100 per cent as respondents could indicate up to four activities.

Campsite attribute	Average importance
Ability to camp beside your vehicle	4.42
Near natural water ( eg lake, stream or ocean)	4.34
Plenty of natural shade	4.31
Shelter from the wind and weather	4.19
Away from places used by commercial tour operators	4.09
Out of sight and sound of others	4.04
Attractive scenery nearby	4.03
Away from townships or houses	3.94
Close to drinking and cooking water	3.84
Clear flat area of ground	3.83
Easy vehicle access	3.77
No evidence of previous use (eg litter, bare ground)	3.72
Plenty of ground cover (eg grass or leaf litter)	3.59
Availability of firewood nearby	3.58
Distant views from your campsite	3.46
Close to good fishing spots	3.31
Built toilet facilities nearby	3.05
An existing fire ring or pit	3.04
Showers close by	3.00
Close to a section of vehicle-free beach	2.88
Near walking tracks	2.78
Logs for seating	2.53
Picnic facilities nearby (eg tables, BBQ, shelter)	2.50
Near telephones	2.24
Near other camping groups	2.22
Good boat launching site nearby	2.10
Organised activities provided (eg slide shows).	1.97

Table 3 Average importance of campsite attributes (1=very unimportant, 2= unimportant, 3= neither important nor unimportant, 4=important, 5=very important).