

Executive Summary

This visitor study report profiles a systematic random sample of Congaree National Park (NP) visitors during October 27 – November 27, 2011. This study was conducted with a systematic, random sample of visitor groups that arrived at the park visitor center. The group respondent completed a mail-back questionnaire after their visit. A total of 452 questionnaires were distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 329 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 72.8% response rate.

Group size and type	Forty-nine percent of visitor groups consisted of two people. Sixty-three percent of visitor groups consisted of family groups.
State or country of residence	United States visitors were from 33 states and Washington, DC and comprised 98% of total visitation during the survey period, with 49% from South Carolina. International visitors were from four countries, although there were too few respondents to provide reliable data.
Frequency of visits	Seventy-four percent of visitors visited the park once in the past 12 months and 62% were visiting the park for the first time in their lifetime. Eighteen percent had visited five or more times in their lifetime.
Age, ethnicity, race, and educational level	Thirty-two percent of visitors were ages 56-70 years, 23% were 21-40 years, 17% were ages 15 years or younger, and 6% were 71 or older. Two percent of visitors were Hispanic or Latino. Most visitors (95%) were White and 2% were African American. Forty-two percent of respondents had completed a bachelor's degree and 33% had a graduate degree.
Physical conditions	Six percent of visitor groups had members with physical conditions affecting their ability to access or participate in activities and services.
Awareness of park programs	Sixty-one percent of visitor groups were aware, prior to their visit, of the various programs offered at the park.
Knowledge of Congressionally designated wilderness	Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated they were aware of what congressionally designated wilderness is, before visiting the park. Forty-six percent of visitor groups said they learned about wilderness while at the park.
Non-native species management	Fifty-four percent of respondents were aware of the policy regarding removal of non-native species. Most visitor groups (90%) were in support of removal of non-native plants and 77% were supportive of removal of non-native animals.
Scientific research and education in the park	Forty-nine percent of visitor groups noticed scientists working or scientific markers or equipment being used in the park. Through programs or products, 26% of the visitors learned about the results of scientific studies conducted at the park.
Information sources	Most visitors (92%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit. Of those visitors, 51% used the park website and 28% obtained their information from friends/relatives/word of mouth.
Park as destination	Many visitor groups (75%) said the park was their primary destination and 23% said it was one of several destinations.

Executive Summary (continued)

Primary reason for visiting the area	Thirty-one percent of visitor groups were residents of the area (within a 1-hour drive of the park). The most common primary reason for visiting the park area among nonresident visitor groups was to visit the park (66%).
Overnight stays	Forty percent of visitor groups stayed overnight away from home either in the park or the area. Of those visitors that stayed outside the park (within a 1-hour drive), 52% stayed one night and 21% stayed two nights.
Accommodations	Of those visitor groups that stayed outside the park (within 1-hour drive), 71% stayed in a lodge, hotel, motel, cabin, rented condo/home, or B&B.
Time spent at park and in the area	The average length of stay in the park was 9.6 hours. The average length of stay in the area was 50 hours, or 2.1 days.
Activities	The most common visitor activities within the park were walking/hiking (85%) and visiting the visitor center (74%).
Use of park trails	The Elevated Boardwalk Trail was used by 81% of visitor groups and the Low Boardwalk Trail was used by 63%.
Information services and facilities	The information services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were park brochure/map (87%), assistance from park staff (83%), and visitor center exhibits (77%).
Visitor services and facilities	The visitor services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were boardwalks (91%), restrooms (90%), and parking areas (88%).
Protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences	The highest combined proportions of “extremely important” and “very important” ratings of protecting park resources and attributes, included clean water (94%), clean air (93%), and natural quiet/sounds of nature (92%).
Elements affecting park experience	Forty percent of visitor groups experienced airplane noise, and of those, 42% felt it detracted from their park experience. Eighty-nine percent of visitor groups experienced small numbers of visitors on trails, of which 38% felt this added to their park experience.
Expenditures	The average visitor group expenditure (inside and outside the park within a 1-hour drive) was \$181. The median group expenditure (50% of groups spent more and 50% of groups spent less) was \$52. The average total expenditure per capita was \$75.
Future visit	Regarding future organized activities/programs of interest, visitor groups preferred canoeing/kayaking (65%) and the night walk/night sky program (57%). The most often preferred future topics to learn about were plants and animals (71%) and champion trees (63%).
Overall quality	Most visitor groups (98%) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at Congaree NP as “very good” or “good.” No visitor groups rated the overall quality as “very poor.”

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho at (208) 885-7863 or the following website <http://www.psu.uidaho.edu>.