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**1987 SUMMER USE SURVEY  
OF  
MINNESOTA STATE PARK VISITORS**

**ALL-PARK SUMMARY**

**PREPARED BY:**

**OFFICE OF PLANNING  
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

**APRIL 11, 1988**

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## INTRODUCTION

To better understand the needs, motivations and satisfaction of state park visitors, 1500 surveys were distributed to park guests between late July and mid August, a calendar period that coincides with high summer use. The number of surveys was determined by the budget and the scope of the survey. The scope of the survey was to characterize visitor opinions on a broad basis and not on a park-by-park basis.

All 63 parks were involved in the survey. Both weekday and weekend visitors were surveyed at each park. Each park was assigned a specific time and day to begin distribution. One survey was handed by park staff to each exiting party until the allotted surveys were given out. The specific hours of survey distributions were selected to ensure, as much as possible, a mixture of campers and day users. When the survey was given to an exiting visitor, the name and address of the visitor were obtained so that reminders and additional survey forms could be sent to those who did not respond in a reasonable length of time.

The overall return rate for the survey was 88 percent, a high rate by any standard. A major contributor to high return rate was undoubtedly the personal contact with park staff at the time the survey was distributed.

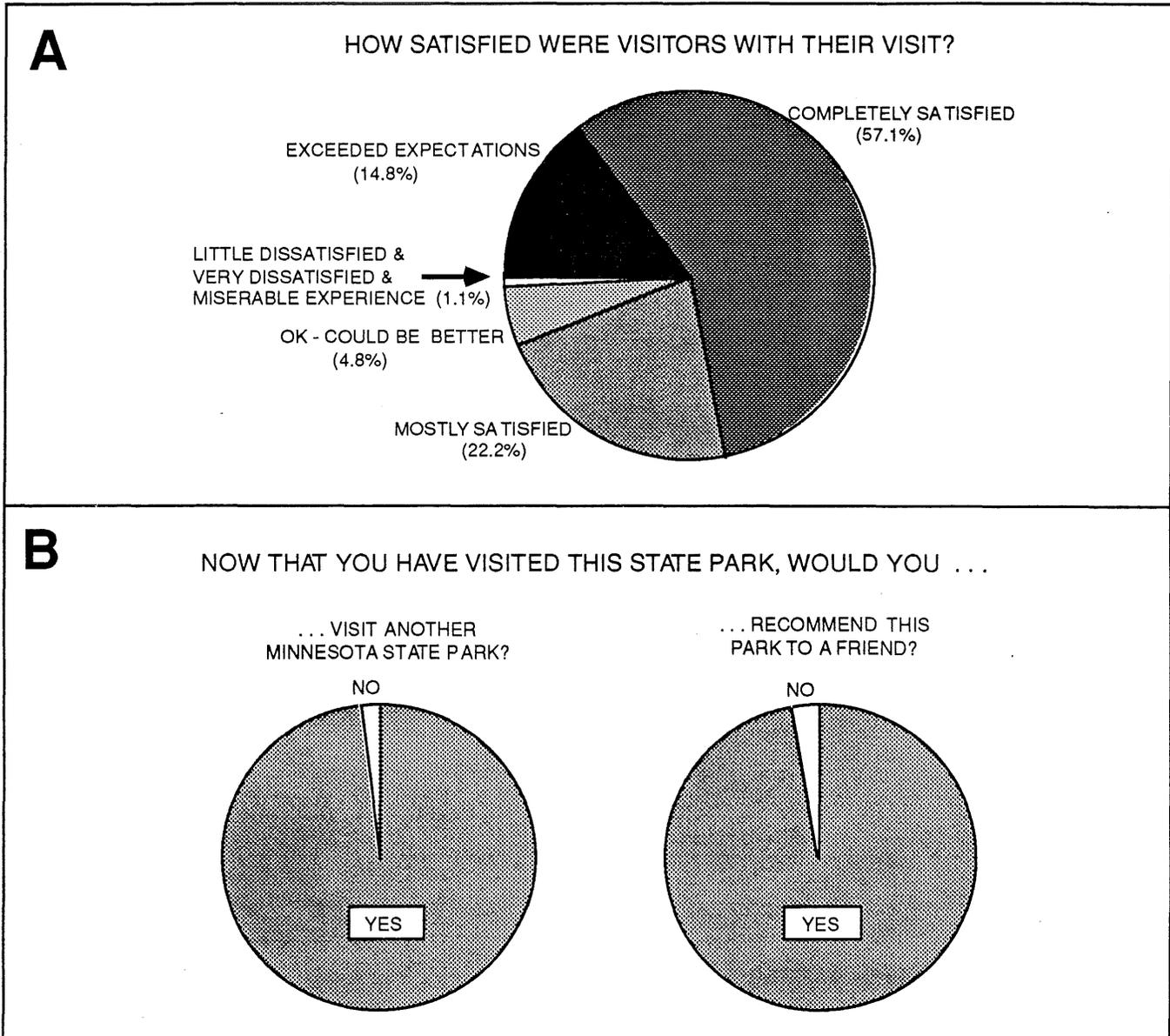
The survey sample was expanded to represent the opinions of all park visitors. This was done using actual visitor statistics for the survey period. The sample was expanded by park, type of user (camper or day user) and day of week (weekday or weekend).

What follows is a summary of the opinions of all visitors to all parks. A complete tabulation of survey results, with breakdowns by type of user (camper and day user) and size of park, is available for those who want to view the results in greater detail. It can be obtained from the Division of Parks and Recreation in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The complete document contains the survey instrument and is 80 pages in length.

## VISITOR SATISFACTION

Most visitors were satisfied with their park outing (Chart A). Over 70 percent were either completely satisfied or had their expectations exceeded. Another 22 percent were mostly satisfied. Only 1 percent of visitors were dissatisfied to any extent.

High satisfaction was further demonstrated by the overwhelming proportion of visitors who — based on their experience — would visit another Minnesota state park and would recommend the park they visited to a friend (Chart B).

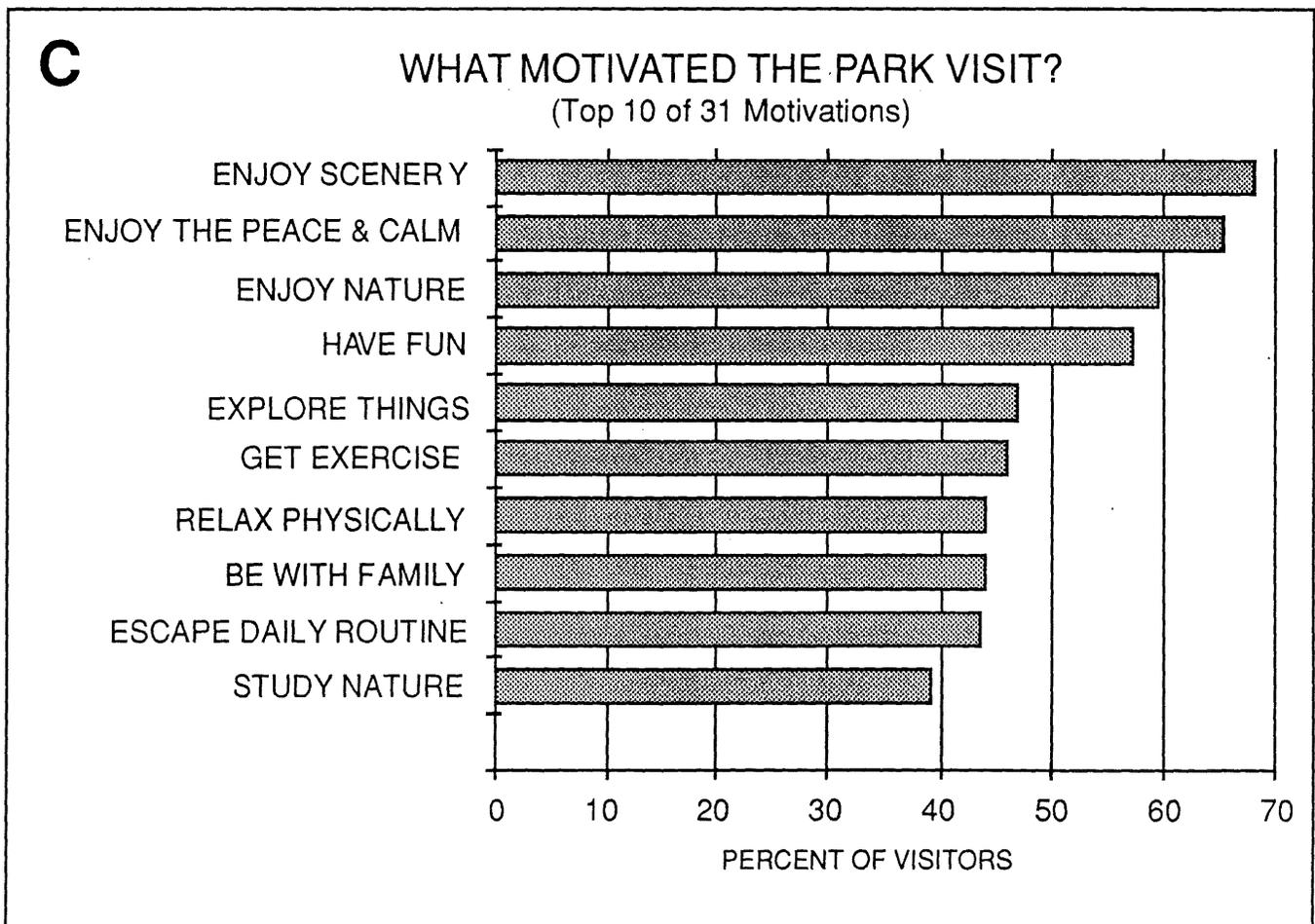


## MOTIVATIONS FOR PARK VISIT

Motivations are direct statements of the benefits visitors expect to receive from the park outing. They define the park experience from the visitor's perspective. As such, they represent an effective language with which to speak to current and potential park users.

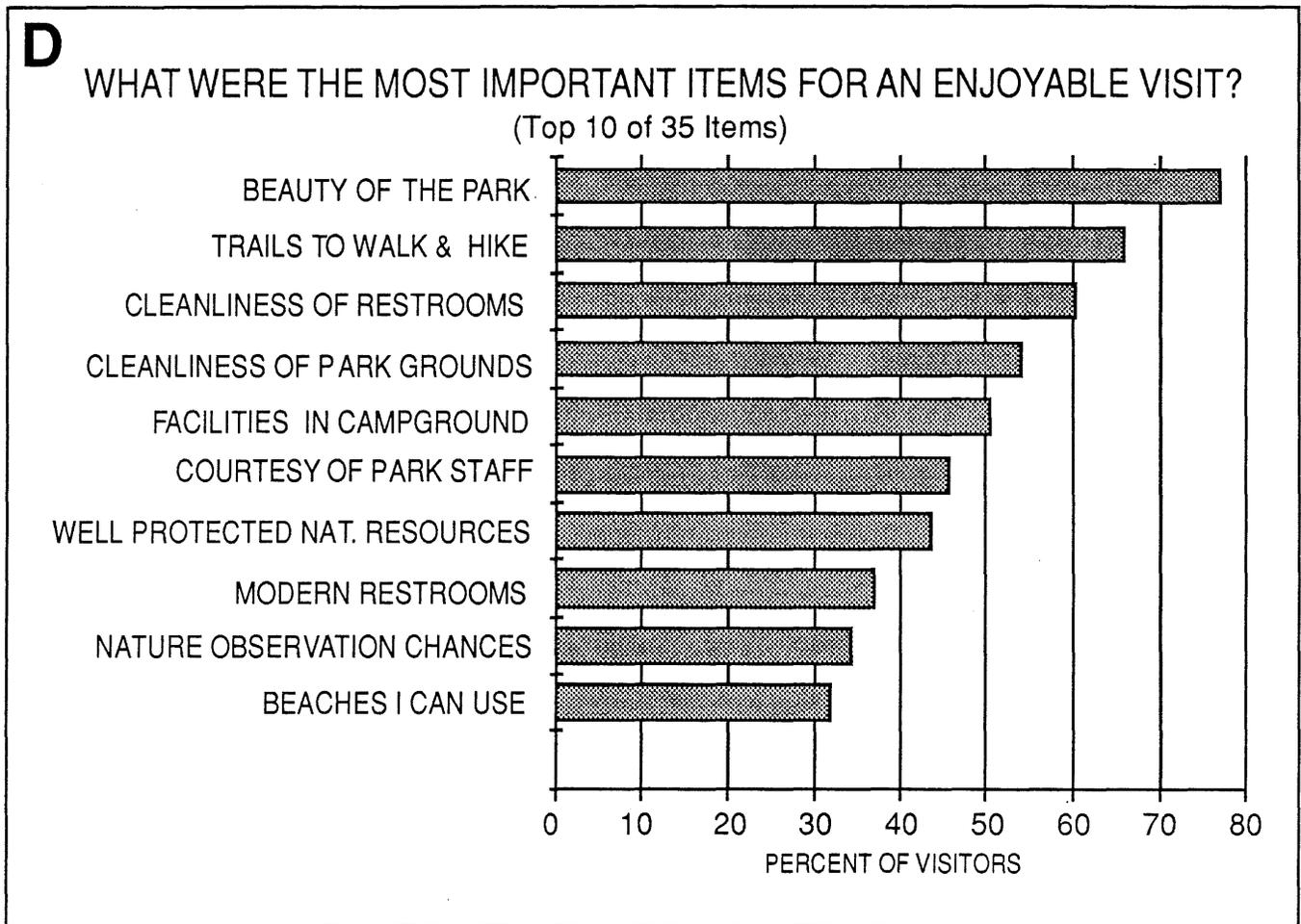
The most prevalent visitor motivations were to obtain a general 'natural' experience: to enjoy scenery, nature, and peace and calm of the park (Chart C). Fun, relaxation, exercise and an escape from daily routine were also primary motivations, as they are for most types of outdoor recreation. Other high-ranking motivations were to obtain educational (explore, study) and family experiences -- two types of experiences that are emphasized in the parks.

The least important visitor motivations were to obtain a challenging outdoor experience, to be where the social action is, and to reflect on personal values. Parks, in other words, were rarely seen by visitors as places to build self-confidence through a challenging experience. Nor were they commonly seen as places to obtain either of the latter two experiences given above.



## IMPORTANT ITEMS FOR AN ENJOYABLE VISIT

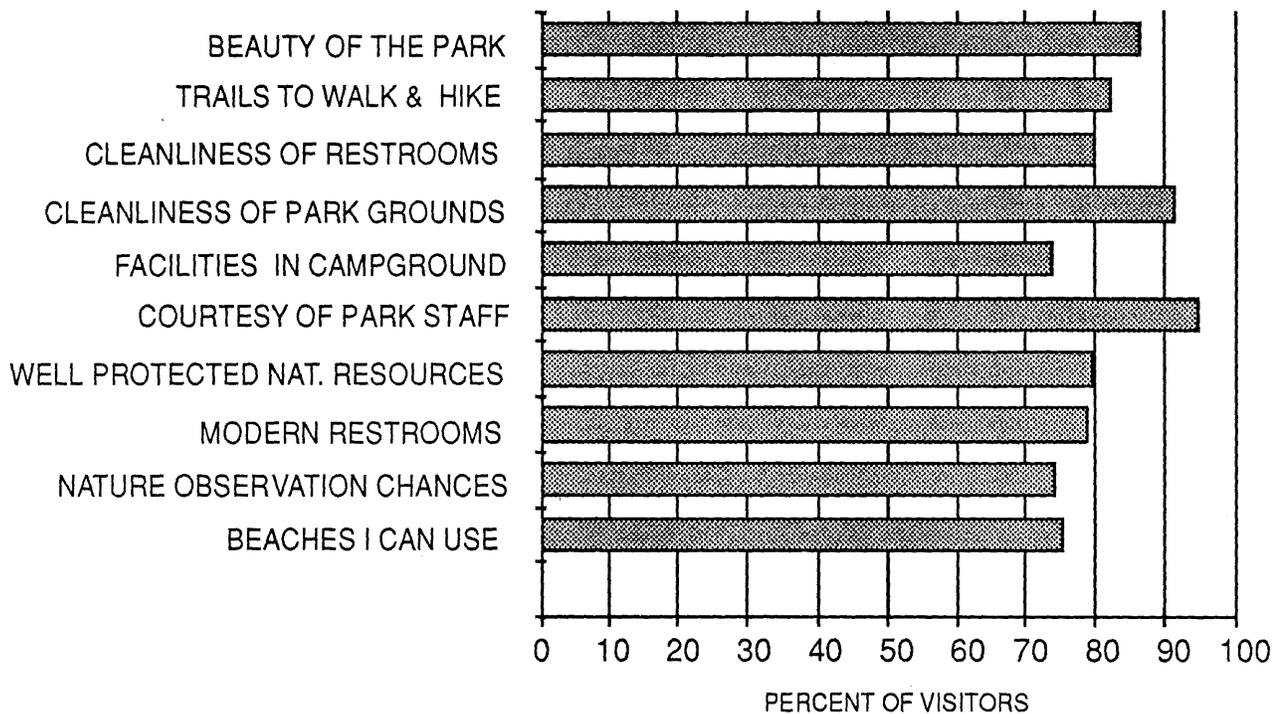
Nature provides the most important item for an enjoyable visit: beauty of the park (Chart D). People provide the rest: facilities, management and services. The highest-ranking facility was trails to walk and hike, followed by campgrounds, restrooms and beaches. To protect the natural resources of the park was seen by just under half of the visitors as important to their enjoyment of the park. Services, in the forms of cleanliness and staff courtesy, were also ranked near the top. In fact, visitors ranked these services as highly as they did key facilities.



How well did the park provide the preceding important items? To answer this question visitors were asked to rank park performance in providing their important items on a five-point scale: very poor, poor, average, good and excellent. The results of the quality rankings indicate that the parks performed well above average. Over 70 percent of the visitors judged the quality of their most important items as 'good' or 'excellent' (Chart E).

# E

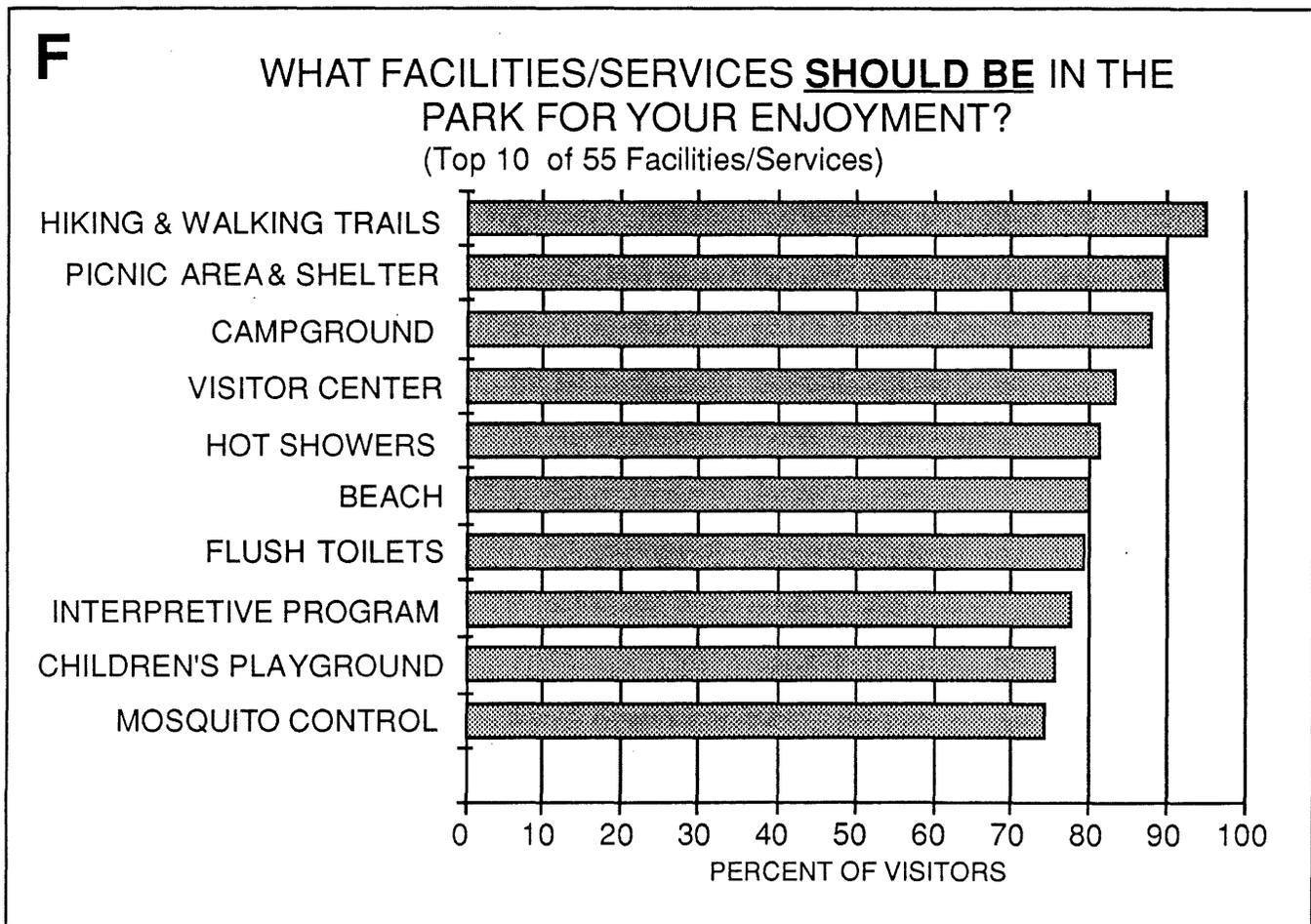
PARK PERFORMANCE: RATINGS OF **GOOD TO EXCELLENT** ON THE MOST IMPORTANT ITEMS FOR AN ENJOYABLE VISIT  
(Ratings of the Top 10 of 35 Items)



## WHAT VISITORS SAY SHOULD BE (AND SHOULD NOT BE) IN THE PARKS

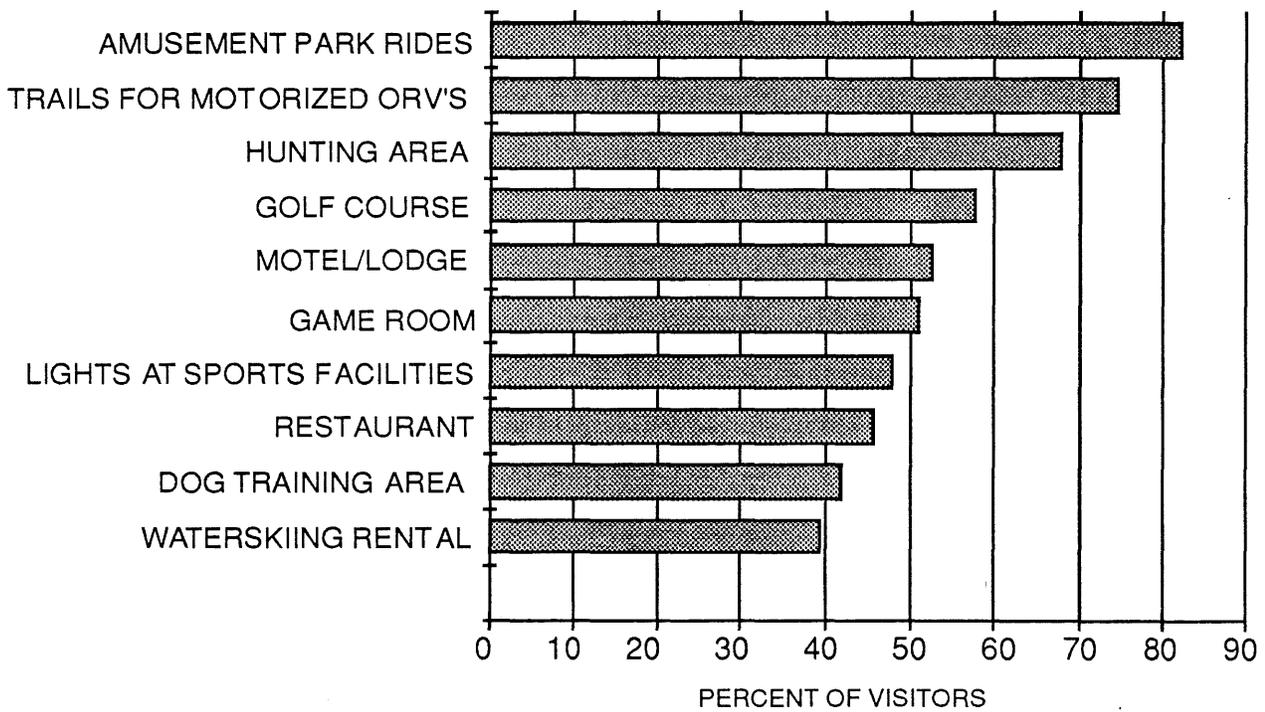
When asked what should and should not be in the park for their enjoyment, visitors strongly supported the parks as they are today and, thereby, the philosophy that has guided the development and management of today's park system.

The top items that visitors say should be in the park for their enjoyment are largely the basic park-provided facilities, services, recreation opportunities and recreator comforts (Chart F). Alternatively, the top items that visitors say should not be in the park for their enjoyment would, if provided, bring into the parks a more 'urban' type of recreation experience (Chart G). The present 'natural' type of recreation experience would be correspondingly diminished. To provide the 'should not' items is to risk losing current visitors and, as likely, to attract a new clientele who are looking for such facilities, services and associated recreation experiences.



**G**

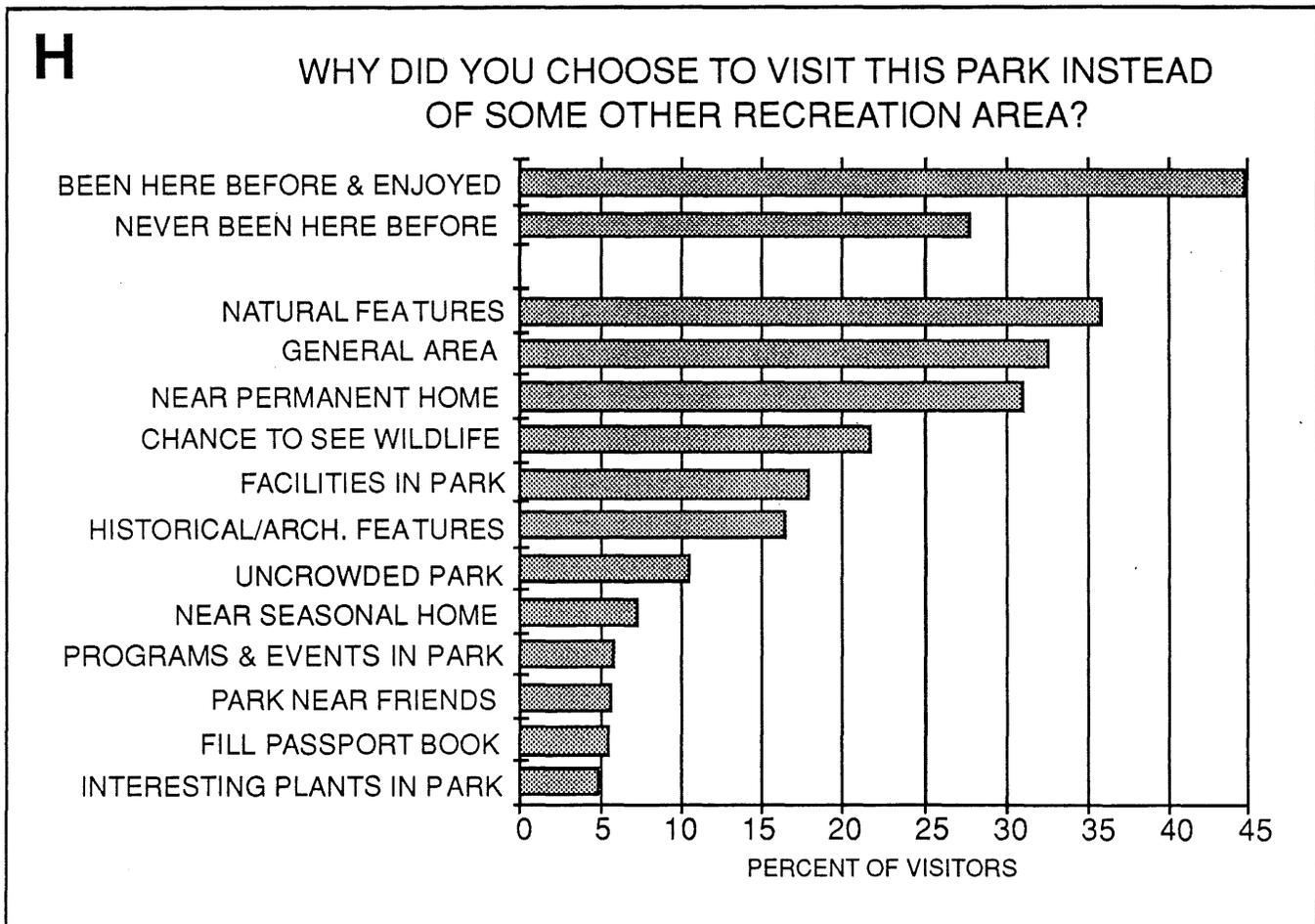
**WHAT FACILITIES/SERVICES SHOULD NOT BE IN THE  
PARK FOR YOUR ENJOYMENT?  
(Top 10 of 55 Facilities/Services)**



## REASONS FOR SELECTING THE PARK

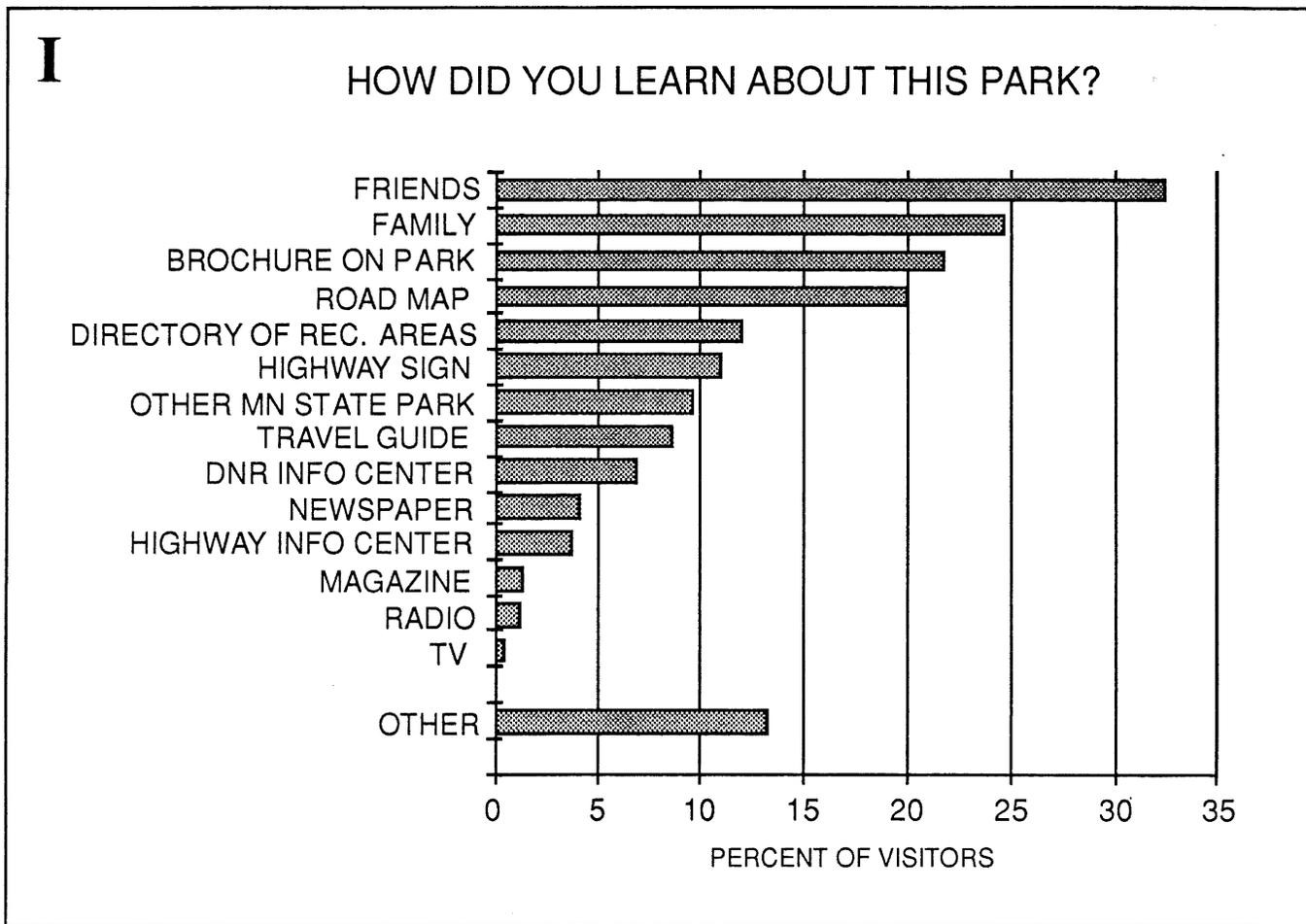
Past satisfaction was the most frequent reason visitors gave for selecting the park instead of another recreation area (Chart H). However, many visitors selected the park because they had never been there before (see page 10 for a discussion of visitation history).

The natural features of the park were a major draw. This is not surprising given the importance visitors ascribed to park beauty and to the opportunity to obtain a 'natural' type of experience from the park outing. Other frequently given reasons involved park location, both in terms of the general area of the park and in terms of proximity to visitor's homes. A middle-frequency set of reasons for selecting the park included wildlife observation opportunities, park facilities and the historical/archaeological features in the park. All remaining reasons were given by fewer than one-in-nine visitors.



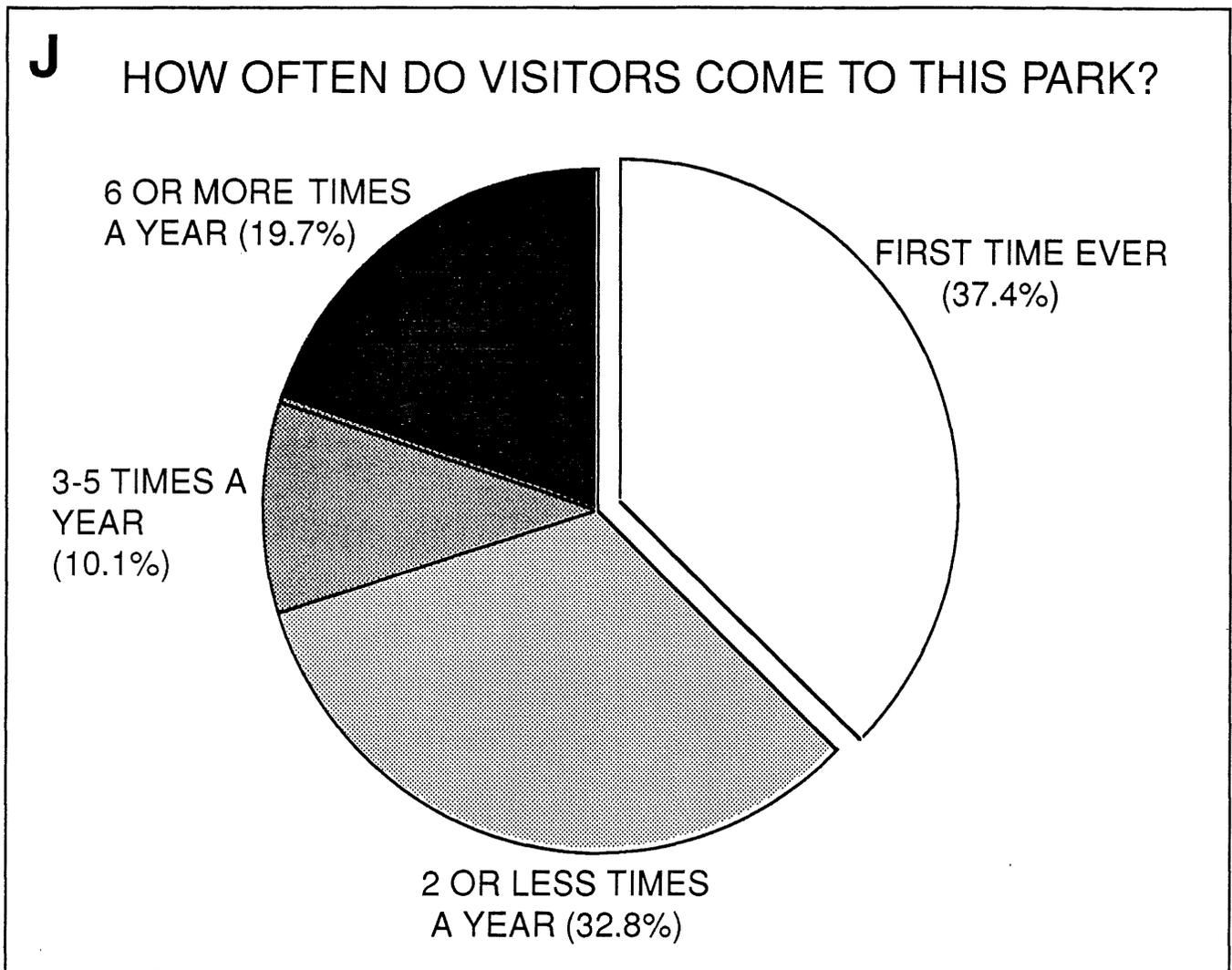
## SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON THE PARK

The most important source of information on the park was friends and family (Chart I). That is, word of mouth predominated. Another key group of information sources was printed material in the forms of brochures, directories and travel guides. Next came travel aids (road maps and highway signs), followed by DNR sources (other state parks and DNR information center). The least important sources of information were the media: newspapers, magazines, radio and television.



## FREQUENCY OF VISIT TO THE PARK

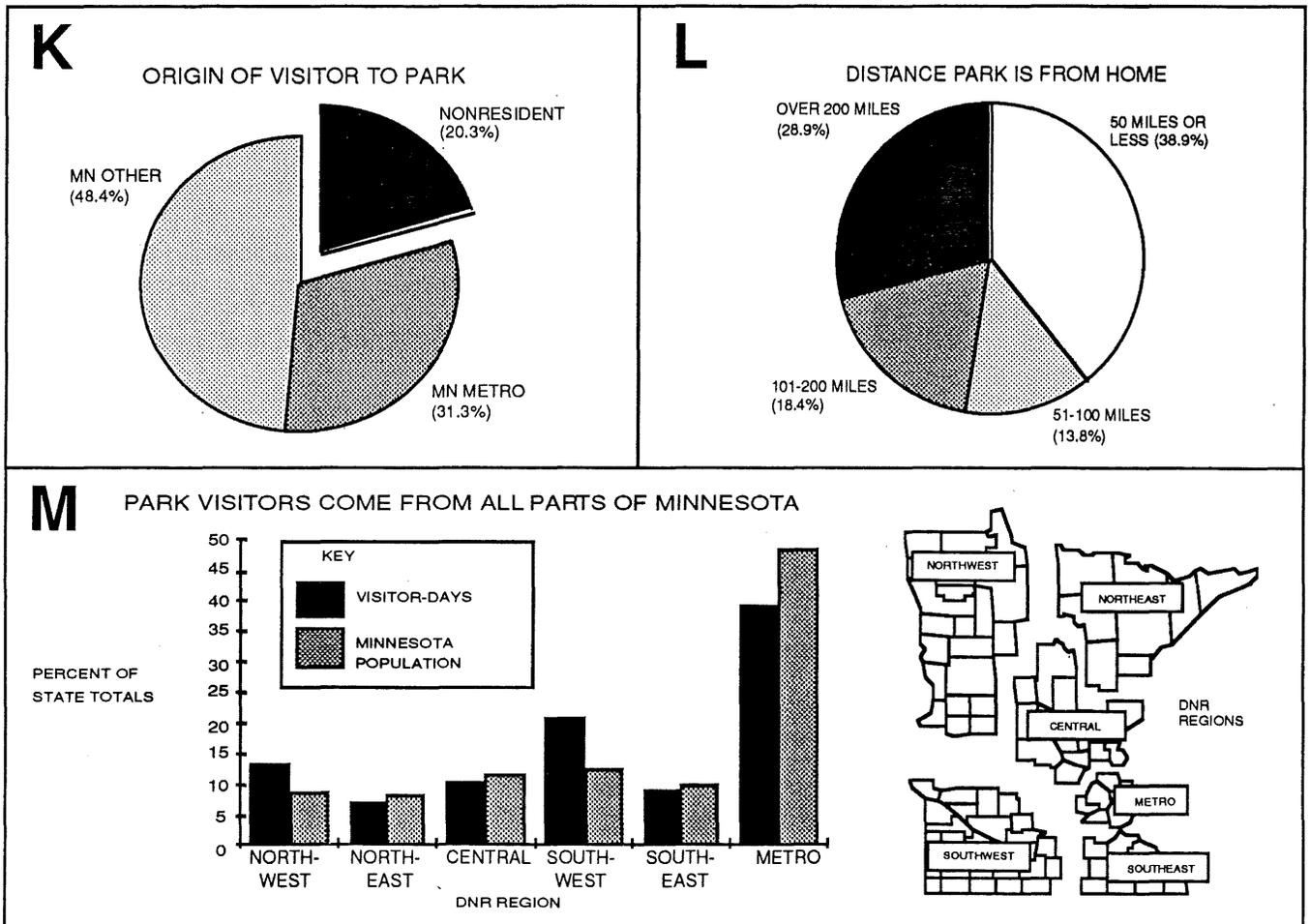
Most visitors (70%) were first-time or infrequent users of the park (Chart J). The more regular clientele, who used the park at least 3 times a year, comprised the remaining 30 percent of visitors.



## ORIGIN AND TRAVEL DISTANCE OF VISITORS

Eighty percent of park visitors were Minnesotans (Chart K), who came from all regions of the state in numbers largely representative of population numbers (Chart M). Most nonresidents (59%) came from the surrounding four states and Canada.

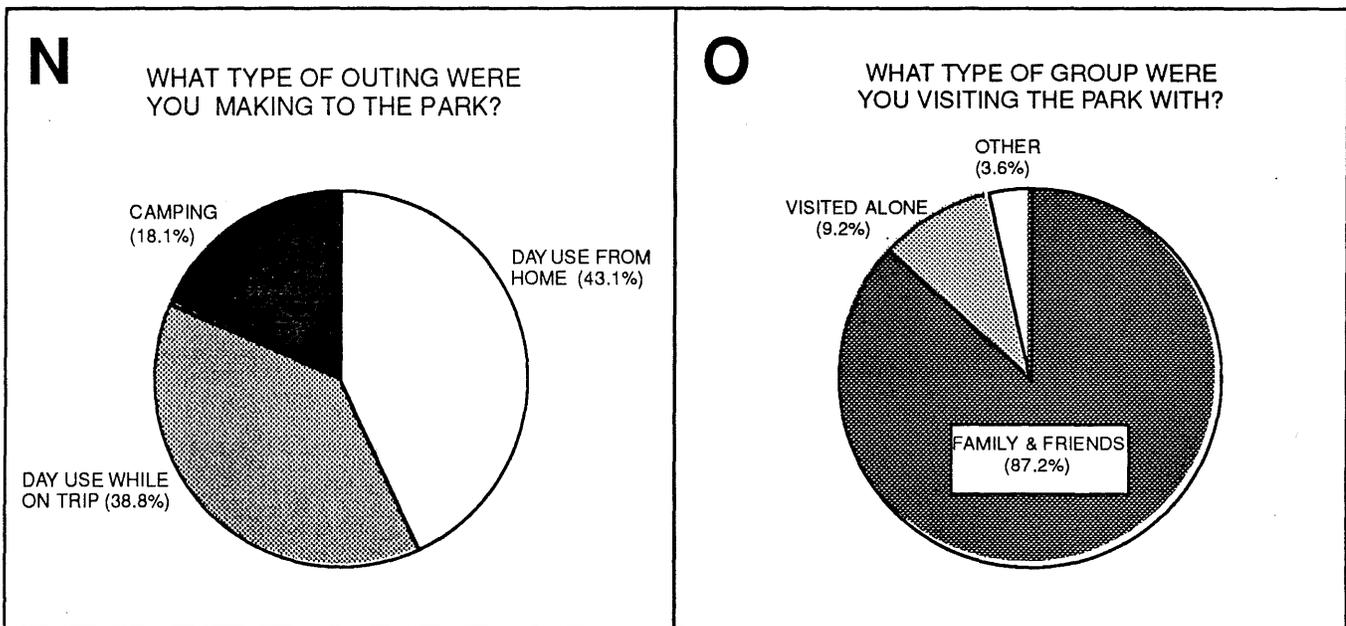
Nearly 40 percent of visitors were within a one-hour drive of home (less than 50 miles), while nearly half were over two hours from home (100 miles or more) (see Chart L). The high frequency of long travel distances means that many Minnesotans were not visiting their nearest park, because all Minnesotans live within 30 miles of a state park.



## THE PARK OUTING: TYPE OF USER AND VISITOR GROUP

Day users accounted for 82 percent of visitors, campers 18 percent (Chart N). Of the day users, about half came to the park directly from home and about half spent the night before the park visit away from home. Resorts and hotels/motels were the most common type of overnight accommodations for the day users away from home. Most campers (77%) came to the park directly from home.

The large majority of visitors were traveling with family and friends (Chart O). Few visitors came alone. Close to half (45%) of visitor groups contained children below the age of 13, and 21 percent contained teenagers.

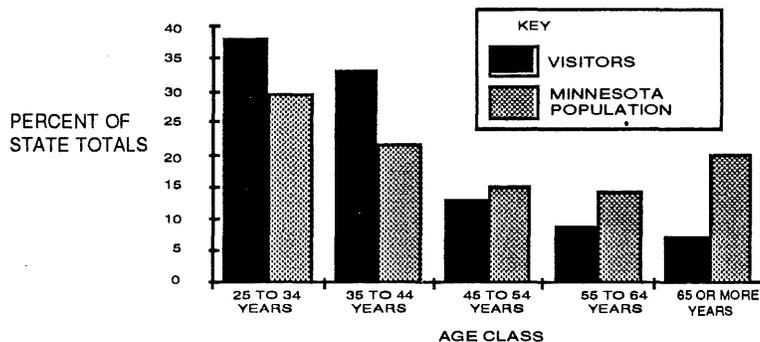


## VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic patterns of park visitors were consistent with the demographic patterns of outdoor recreators in general. Park visitors from Minnesota were younger, had more formal education and were more 'middle income' than the general Minnesota population (Charts P, Q and R). Similarly, outdoor-recreation involvement decreases with age, and increases with both formal education and income, especially from the lowest to middle education and income groups (for U.S. data on demographic patterns of outdoor recreators, see: U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service. 1986. 1982-1983 Nationwide Recreation Survey).

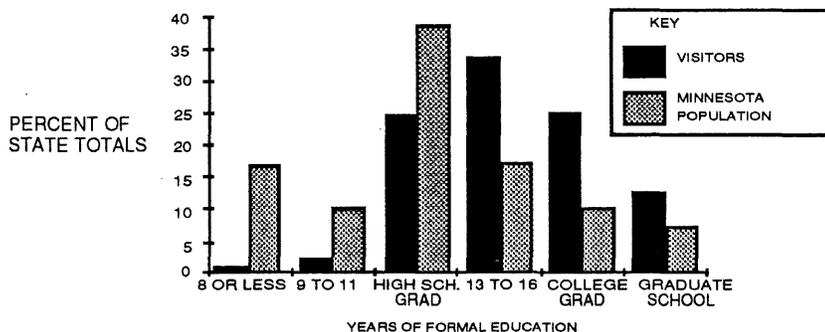
**P**

ADULT PARK VISITORS ARE YOUNGER THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION



**Q**

ADULT PARK VISITORS HAVE MORE FORMAL EDUCATION THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION



**R**

PARK VISITORS ARE MORE 'MIDDLE INCOME' THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION

