

Review: Parks and People: Managing Outdoor Recreation at Acadia National Park

Robert E. Manning (Ed.)

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller

Manning, Robert E. (Ed.). *Parks and People: Managing Outdoor Recreation at Acadia National Park*. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2009. 352pp. ISBN 9781584657910. US\$49.95, paper. Alkaline paper.

The only United States National Park in New England, Maine's Acadia National Park boasts mountain views, wildlife, diverse ecosystems, scenic roads, and seashore vistas. Acadia's Mount Desert Island and a few other associated islands jut out of the ocean to astound and attract many visitors every year. Naturalist Freeman Tilden called it a "rock-built natural fortress which thrusts forward into the Atlantic and challenges its power," (p.194 in Runte, Alfred. *National Parks: The American Experience*. Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2010) with a sweep of rugged coastline that has no parallel from Florida to the Canadian provinces. It is also one of the most studied National Parks due to the efforts of Professor Robert E. Manning, Director of the Parks Studies Laboratory at the University of Vermont.

Manning collects in this volume over twenty-five research studies on visitorship and transportation at Acadia National Park, which inspires a message and conclusions on how to manage park use for the entire National Park system. Manning concludes from this lengthy body of research simplified into common language, "This body of knowledge can be organized and presented in a series of emerging principles that can be used to guide planning and management of outdoor recreation at Acadia and related parks and outdoor recreation areas" (p.292).

One may think the conclusions are just common sense, but the research presented makes sense of and finds inroads to understand the chaos of visitor engagement with national parks. Manning attempts here to move park management from being an art to a science, making this book useful for park managers, transportation specialists, park planners and those who study park use for other reasons.

The book is divided into three sections. The first explores park use indicator variables and park standards. Most of these initial studies concern the effects of excessive visitorship. Part two focuses on the monitoring of these indicator variables. Part three explores management actions needed to preserve standards of visitorship quality.

Much of the the research shows that visitors prefer less restrictions and people, conclusions gained here also by the reaction of visitors to park photographs used as a survey tool. The research details the coping strategies used to supply visitor recreation despite the overcrowding of the park resources. This is a problem that is not likely to be solved because it is antithetical to the mission of making parks more available to the public. Even in this light, Acadia's public bus systems have been proven to be beneficial.

The findings are relevant to the whole national park system which struggles to accommodate millions of park visitors every year. The focus seems narrow at times, but the work is well researched and shows that Acadia has a tale to tell.

Missing are some of the other subjects that could have been explored, including the educational success of interpretive signage, communications to the general public about park changes, and attempts to involve the public in park activities like ecological restoration. Such subjects and issues are more pressing for National Recreation Areas and/or National Seashores which are closer to urban centers. One solution for Acadia National Park may be more National Parks for the northeast.

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