

10-1973

## Backpacking: A Pilot Study of Hikers

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Bolduc, Vincent, "Backpacking: A Pilot Study of Hikers" (1973). *Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station*. 13.  
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# BACKPACKING: A Pilot Study of Hikers

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
IMPORTANCE OF BACKPACKING.....	2
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS.....	7
Sex and Area of Residence.....	7
Age.....	7
Marital Status.....	8
Residence.....	9
Education.....	11
Income.....	12
Occupation.....	13
HIKING EXPERIENCE.....	14
THE APPEALS OF HIKING.....	15
CONCLUSIONS.....	20
REFERENCES.....	22

This research was conducted as a part of Regional Project NEM-35, "Consumer Analysis for Specific Forest-Orientated Recreational Activities in the Northeast," a cooperative venture of agricultural experiment station scientists in the northeastern United States. The author is deeply indebted to Professor Walter C. McKain for his very valuable contributions. Special thanks also go to Doris Lund and Wendy West for their patient typing and proofreading.

The research reported in this publication was supported in part by Federal funds made available through the provisions of the Hatch Act.

Received for publication July 5, 1973.

## BACKPACKING: A PILOT STUDY OF HIKERS

By Vincent Bolduc\*

### INTRODUCTION

In the world's wealthiest country during a time of unrivaled prosperity and availability of amenities, millions of Americans regularly undergo considerable expense and effort to take part in what appears to be the undisguised masochism of backpacking. With the religious dedication and sense of purpose of men and women being called into a holy order, these hikers walk away from the comforts of western living and enter the most primitive forests they can find - just to walk - hour after hour, day after day. Like stone age men, they sleep on the ground where fatigue and darkness find them, and carry on their backs only the barest essentials needed to sustain life. Who are these people, and why do they do it?

In order to provide answers to these deceptively simple questions, a pilot study of the membership of the Green Mountain Club (GMC), a Vermont-based hiking club, was undertaken. The study was designed to generate hypotheses for further research and to provide a tentative profile of one kind of wilderness enthusiast: the backpacker (hereafter used interchangeably with hiker). An obvious limitation of the study of such a voluntary association is its potential for generalizability. For example, according to Hendee (7) and Hendee (8) only between 20 and 30 percent of all outdoor recreationalists are members of clubs; other sociological research has demonstrated that persons who answer mail questionnaires are significantly different (on a number of criteria) from those who don't. For these reasons, the results of this survey were never subjected to statistical tests. Strictly speaking, this paper reports on the characteristics and values of the 849 GMC members who answered our questionnaire.

One thousand two hundred questionnaires were mailed to the entire club membership in September, 1967 and 85% of them were returned; no follow-up questionnaires were sent. Of these 1,019, one hundred and seventy were from persons under age 25, and were not tabulated. We assumed that young persons would not have the degree of uninfluenced commitment to hiking that older persons did. Our base of analysis then became the remaining 849 GMC members over that age - 71% of the 1,200 members.

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## IMPORTANCE OF BACKPACKING

It is estimated that 10 million Americans over age 12 backpack. This is about 7 percent of the population in that age category (23). This is about the same proportion of Americans that water ski or attend outdoor concerts (15, p. 34). Another source suggests that the number of backpackers has increased fourfold over the last decade (14, p. 47). Besides their sheer numbers, there are two reasons why we considered backpacking important enough to warrant investigation. The first one is resource planning both for present hikers and for prediction of demands that future trends will create. But prediction of future demands usually requires a firm understanding that environmental planners do not yet have. While there are reasonably accurate figures on the number of wilderness enthusiasts (hunters, canoists, mountain climbers and backpackers, for example) that use the various forest resources for outdoor recreation, strikingly little is known about who they are and what motivates them. It is necessary that this information be known before predictions about future use becomes reliable, and wilderness management feasible.

William R. Burch argues that the study of leisure is as important an inquiry as the study of work; man "the player" must be taken seriously (1). The popularity of backpacking as a form of play is not historically unprecedented when compared to other forms of recreation, nor is it unique in the physical stamina it requires. It does appear to be unusual, however, in two ways: 1) it takes place in an environment of primitive nature with deliberate avoidance of intrusions of modern technology, and 2) it challenges the whole person. [Its winter equivalents - snowshoeing and cross-country skiing would also fit these generalizations.]

Looking carefully at these two components we see that they are the antithesis of the very qualities that are the essence of modern life: elaborate technology and a high segmentalization and interdependence of behavior.

Few would question that modern life is characterized by sophisticated technology -- man's dominance over nature. Generally, technology sets the broad parameters of human behavior, including economic behavior and forms of social organization. Gideon Sjoberg suggests that a prevalence of inanimate sources of power is the major defining feature of modern industrial society (18, p. 169), and one that backpackers blatantly scorn. For example, few things annoy the serious hiker more than trailbikes or snowmobiles on the trail. Where such vehicles are not prohibited by law, many backpackers take it upon themselves to discourage their use by moving boulders and logs into the trails. Scorn for gadget filled camper-trailers also runs high among backpackers. One hiker, when asked why he hiked, responded, "It is an escape from the 'American way of the wilderness', in which one brings as much as possible - station wagon preferred - to duplicate as nearly as possible the way of life originally left behind". Another hiker told us that backpacking was very unlike family camping which, he said, merely "transfers the conditions of a housing development to an overcrowded campground".

We must be careful not to overstate unnecessarily the hiker's avoidance of modern technology. After all, the hiker is a product of modern

society, is employed by it, and undoubtedly enjoys its luxuries in his home. Even when hiking, he probably uses a modern aluminum or magnesium pack frame and eats freeze-dried foods. But the difference between the backpacker and other outdoor recreationalists can be illustrated in a comparison between hikers and snowmobilers: for the latter, technology (the machine in this case) is the raison d'etre of the sport; for the other, it is the absence of this manifestation of modernity (and its correlate in life style) that gives backpacking its reason for being.

Modern life is also characterized by segmentalization and the complex interdependence of both work tasks and behavior in general. Religious behavior is allocated to half a day a week. Youth is educated in distant schools and taught subjects foreign to their parents; they are socialized into manners of behavior equally incomprehensible. Social control and mutual support functions are cared for by formally organized impersonal organizations where most of the human contacts are superficial, anonymous and transitory. Family and personal life are sharply separated from one's occupation; the individual's job lacks variety and is only a segment of a larger job, the product of which is seldom seen by the worker.

Given the nature of modern life, most of life's basic needs must be filled in this segmentalized way by people the consumer does not know; except under very exceptional circumstances, the consumer has no choice. The government and the plumber bring water; the bank and the building contractor, the shelter; the grocer and agri-businessman, the food; and a combination of corporate giants supply our communication and transportation. The interdependence of these segmentalized tasks is so complex that a city of 12 million people can be brought to a halt by a small minority of its workers - such as the garbage collectors.

Backpacking seems to be a reaction to this segmentalization and interdependence; a reaction to modern life in precisely the same way that romanticism was a response to the industrial revolution. In Marxian terminology, the backpacker is minimizing modern man's alienation from "nature." Life on the trail is simple; the hiker does not act as a segment but as a whole person. He is generally self sufficient; he interacts with nature in a holistic manner and his every sense participates in the experience. The hiker depends only on himself, his skills, and what he carries on his back. His job for the many-day hike is simple: to walk a considerable distance through forests, over mountains, and through streams. He eats when he's hungry, sleeps when tired, and above all is wholly responsible to survive in the elements.

One hiker, when asked why he hiked, quoted Thoreau: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life....." Another answered: "When hiking, all you own you are carrying on your back. You become a self-sufficient person...you realize that there are so many things you don't really need (and) just what things are really basic....."

The implication of the above theory is that the segmentalization and interdependence of modern life create a propensity to hiking (and wilderness use in general) that was not present 200 years ago in the western world, and which still is not present in the less developed countries. But the exact nature of the relationship between modern life and wilderness use is difficult to specify; to say that backpacking is

a "reaction to" modern life is undocumented speculation. Does man feel that modern living necessarily has negative effects on him and he therefore flees to the indifferent woods where he may restore his sensibilities? Or perhaps he simply believes that the modern world is indifferent towards him, and that there is something essentially restorative about the wilderness. There are a large number of different possible relationships between the two. The logical combinations may be schematically represented as follows:

Figure 1

Perceptions of the Values of  
Modern Living and the Wilderness

Perception of  
the Values  
of the Wilderness  
Pos. Indif. Neg.

		+	$\pm$	-
Perception of the Values of Modern Living	Pos. +	A	B	B
	Indif. $\pm$	C <sub>2</sub>	A	B
	Neg. -	C <sub>1</sub>	C <sub>3</sub>	A

As is suggested in the scheme in Figure 1 above, man may believe that the personal impact of modern segmentalization and interdependence (a) is generally beneficial to his existence (+); (b) generally has a negative impact on his existence (-) or (c) of no importance to his existence one way or the other ( $\pm$ ). Similarly, he may believe that the values of the wilderness have positive (+), negative (-), or no effects ( $\pm$ ) on his life.

Persons in belief category "A" may or may not hike and a certain number of hikers in this category would be expected by chance alone. Persons in this belief category may also hike strictly for the exercise (even if they get regular exercise on their job) or to "meet people" for example, but they would not hike in reaction to "modern life." Neither the values of the wilderness (qua wilderness) nor the values of modern life has any effect on the individual's decision to hike or not to hike.

Persons in belief category "B" simply would not be hikers. The values of modern life (even if sheer indifference) outweigh the overall values of the wilderness.

Persons in belief situation "C" are the most likely to be hikers,

with sub-category "C<sub>1</sub>" probably containing the largest number and the most enthusiastic of them. For these hikers, modern living (as we have characterized it) has sufficient negative attributes to "push" an individual out of his confines and the wilderness enough positive value to "pull" the person into it; both "push" and "pull" factors operate simultaneously to create a very strong propensity among these persons to wilderness use. Below are examples of reasons that some hikers in our sample gave for hiking that might be classified as "C<sub>1</sub>":

"Closeness to nature and wildlife, opportunity to relax from modern pressures and the rapid pace of modern living."

"A chance to be close to nature and away from 'civilization'."

"To get out where Nature is more powerful than man - to get away from the mess we make."

"I love the outdoors and nature and need hiking as a counter balance to city life."

"I like to get away from the fast speed we live in today - next to nature and wildlife."

"A chance to get away from the frustrations that unfortunately accompany life in suburbia, and unwind in peaceful and pleasant surroundings."

There is one thread of thought that runs through the reasoning of all of the above justifications for hiking: that which is "natural" is qualitatively better than that which is not. Leather is better than vinyl; wood is better than plastic; meadows are better than city lots; forests are better than streets and the country is better than the city. American sociologists have long ago identified a strong bias in their own work that constantly favors rural characteristics and denigrates city characteristics (13). White and White, in their book The Intellectual Versus The City, similarly identify a sense of hostility towards the city and its modern ways that they trace throughout American thought; Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Henry Adams and Frank Lloyd Wright are among those discussed as having such a bias (24). The French romanticize about their Paris, White and White tell us, while the Americans romanticize about their forests and ponds. Somehow a person is "better" and nearer to God if he is close to what is natural. "Cities", according to Emerson, "force growth and make men talkative, but they make them artificial."

We have reason to believe that hikers are more prone to have this bias and that it may be one of the key variables explaining why some people hike and others do not. From our experience, it appears that most hikers have such a "naturalist bias" and therefore fall into the belief situation most congruent with such an attitude - "C<sub>1</sub>."

Such attitudes were common among our respondents, as is illustrated in their expressions for why they hike:

"Hiking has the quality of a religious experience; a forest in which man's activities have not upset the natural

balances is beautiful and orderly in a way no city is, inspiring a sense of peace and acceptance."

"'In the woods we return to reason and faith' - Emerson."

"I think you will find most hikers are very moral people which I think is logical because hiking you are surrounded by God made things while at home you are surrounded by man made things."

"Nature and the elements bring man closer to the total sense of life; it is a mind and sense refreshener."

"The combination of being outdoors and a quick pace makes me feel that all is well with the world. As a Christian person I feel that God is very near to me when I am surrounded by Nature."

Situations  $C_2$  and  $C_3$  each represent beliefs that, in a manner of speaking, have half the strength of attraction of belief situation  $C_1$ . According to our scheme,  $C_2$  would be the second most popular belief category of wilderness user. The user in this belief situation believes that the wilderness has some intrinsic positive values that he is being drawn towards, but does not feel (as a person in  $C_1$  does) that modern life has negative values that must be compensated for; he believes that modern life is neutral in its effects. The wilderness users in situation  $C_2$  then, are only being pulled into the wilderness and not simultaneously being pushed out of modernity.

Many of our hikers reflected this belief system when they explained why they hiked. Typically these backpackers would mention only the positive values of the wilderness and make no mention of the positive or negative effects of the modern world. Some examples are:

"I love the outdoors, to walk through the fields, woods, along the streams, climb the mountains, note the flora and fauna, feel 'my oneness with nature' and marvel at the many wonders and beauties."

"I love the outdoors and find it a special pleasure to hike the countryside, woods, seeing the growth of nature's wonders first hand, trees, plants, wild flowers."

"To be outdoors, close to nature, for its healing influence upon the spirits and body, renewing oneself...."

"I love the exercise, open spaces, fresh air - the challenge of a mountain. I want to give my children an appreciation of the non-material world."

Situation  $C_3$  is the converse of  $C_2$ , consisting primarily of wilderness users seeking escape from the deleterious effects of modern life. We would suggest that this is the third but one of the least popular belief situations among wilderness users. Wilderness users in this category have neither positive nor negative feelings about the wilderness, but see it simply as the absence of that which is negative. Here the users are free to personally offset what they perceive to be the negative

aspects of modernity. These hikers hike strictly to escape from the modern world. Presumably persons with such a disposition would be equally likely to employ a number of alternative non-wilderness mechanisms of escape as well. Unlike the naturalistic perspectives of C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>2</sub> it is not wilderness per se that provides the "plus" value.

One of our respondents who would fall in this belief category for example, explained that she hiked simply because she liked to walk but the "cars and so forth" of the suburbs presented a problem. She therefore resorted to walking in the woods where there is the absence of "cars and so forth." No mention was made of the positive values of the wilderness, only that it does not have the same negative values that modern life does. As could be imagined, there are very few backpackers in this category.

## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Sex and Area of Residence

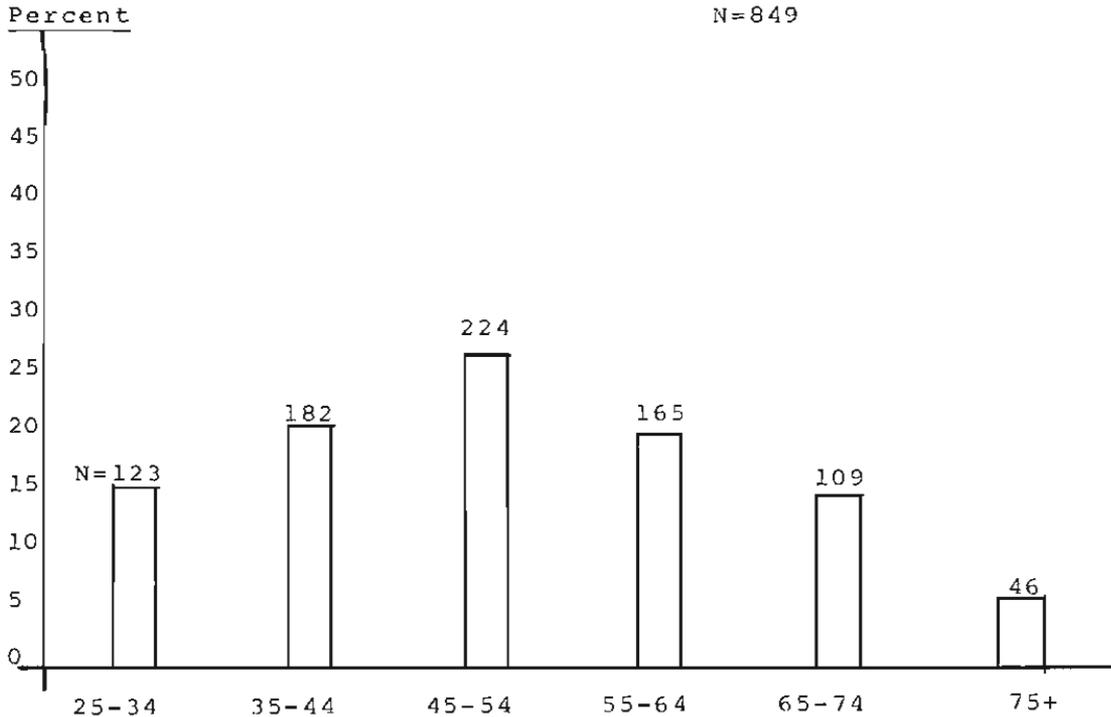
Of the 849 members responding to the Green Mountain Club questionnaire, 61% were male and 39% were female. Such an imbalanced sex ratio is not at all surprising given both world history and the division of labor in contemporary society. According to anthropologist Margaret Mead, the early American pioneers sent the men into the wilderness and left the women home to tend the home fires. This sex division, she contends, has carried over into present wilderness use patterns: "Even in our contemporary view, campcraft - the art of building fires, preparing outdoor meals, providing for shelter and storage, the knowledge of woods and fields and streams necessary for safe outdoor living - is primarily associated with men and boys" (11, p. 4). A complementary explanation for this sex imbalance is elaborated upon when we discuss the marital status of hikers.

Although the Green Mountain Club is a Vermont based operation, only 27% of its respondents were from Vermont. Twenty-five percent were from other New England states and 36% from the Mid-Atlantic states.

### Age

As can be seen from Figure 2, the category containing the largest number of respondents was the 45-54 age group, with one quarter of the total. For a broader profile of all hikers it must be kept in mind that one source reports that half of all backpackers are between the ages of 12 and 17, (15, p. 34) and another study of hikers on Camels Hump, Vermont (17) reports that its largest age group (27% of its total) is the 20-30 one, which they found included many students. Similarly, in a survey of wilderness users in the Pacific Northwest, Hendee reports that 22% of his respondents were under age 25 (8). Among the GMC membership we recall, we deleted the 170 responses that we received from persons under age 25; this was 17% of our total responses.

Figure 2

Age of GMC Respondents, 1967Marital Status

There is surprising imbalance between the marital status of the two sexes. Seventy-eight percent of the males are married, compared to only 48% of the females. This proportion of married males is unusually high compared to New England at large, while the percentage of married females is unusually low compared to the New England average. The combined percentage for both sexes, however, is 66% married, slightly higher than the proportion of married persons in New England. But since the New England figures are for all persons over age 14, and our sample is only for persons over age 25, we would naturally expect a higher proportion of married persons in our figures. But taking this into account, the low proportion of married females among the GMC respondents becomes even more dramatically disproportionate.

One possible explanation of this relationship might be that the time-consuming responsibilities of marriage and parenthood weigh more heavily on the females. Given the traditional division of labor in the family structure, the female is expected to stay home with the children while the male is allowed more freedom - either to pursue his own interests or to "unwind" from his task as breadwinner; the woman and mother, history has it, has fewer such needs and fewer such privileges. This situation of the under-representation of married women is probably not unique to hiking but could be pursued in a variety of other recreational contexts as well.

Table 1

Marital Status and Sex, GMC Respondents, 1967  
and New England, 1970 (11)

Marital Status	MALES		FEMALES		BOTH SEXES	
	GMC (%)	N.E. (%)	GMC (%)	N.E. (%)	GMC (%)	N.E. (%)
Married	78	64	48	59	66	61
Single	15	30	39	26	25	28
Widowed	4	3	8	13	5	8
Divorced	2	2	5	3	3	3
Totals	99 (N=513)	99 (N=4145491)	100 (N=333)	100 (N=4621837)	99 (N=846)	100 (N=8767328)

A second potential explanation for the low proportion of married females may have its source in methodology. Questionnaires were sent out to all registered members of the hiking club. But since a membership fee is involved it is possible that frugal couples wishing to take part in the organized hiking activities had only one of the two join the club and pay the dues - probably the husband. Thus, even though both husband and wife were hikers, only the male was sent the questionnaire. We do not know how much this effects our figures, but believe distortion to be slight.

The above table also points out the large number of single females who hike. Not only are single females over-represented as a proportion of the sample (which could be partially explained by the above) but in absolute numbers, single females greatly outnumber single males 131 to 79. A partial explanation of this imbalance may be found outside the context of hiking and within the social nature of the Green Mountain Club itself. Judging from the past activities of the club, interest in backpacking is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for membership. The club sponsors social activities - such as cookouts, picnics and lectures - which females may consider more appealing opportunities for social activity than males. A survey of a similar wilderness recreation club in Oregon found club sociability to be a primary incentive for membership; it is reported to serve as a "marriage market" for about one-third of its unmarried adult members (5).

### Residence

In the initial stages of planning the survey of the GMC it was hypothesized that type of residence would largely explain why hikers hiked. Life was most segmentalized, interdependent and dominated by technology in the cities, according to the classical urban sociology literature; the suburbs were not as thoroughly modern and the country, of course, the least modern. If wilderness use is a reaction to modernism, then the cities would produce disproportionately large numbers of backpackers. Our data, however, did not support such a hypothesis. Roughly an equal proportion of GMC members have their homes in cities (35%), suburbs (34%),

and non-metropolitan areas (30%). This is remarkably similar to the residential distribution of the nation at large (20), and conforms to the findings of Hendee (8, p. 16). The type of residence of the respondents as children similarly shows no clear tie to propensity to hike.

Table 2

Type of Residence\* of GMC Respondents, 1967

Type of Residence	Number	Percent
City	302	35
Suburb	289	34
Non-metropolitan <sup>†</sup>	251	30
No answer	7	1
<u>Totals</u>	<u>849</u>	<u>100</u>

\* Type of residence was self-classified by the respondents.

† Non-metropolitan consists of open country, farm and small village.

One of the reasons for the failure of our hypothesis may be that living in the country (or suburbs) could be a reaction to modern urban life in much the same way that backpacking is hypothesized to be; i.e., the non-urban resident lives in the country because he dislikes the modernism of the city. To the extent that this is true, area of residence is a result of the same variable that creates the propensity to hike, and not a cause.

A second issue that must be considered is our assumption that the larger the size of the community the more its inhabitants are subject to patterns of living that are segmentalized, highly interdependent and dominated by modern technology. One aspect of this modern way of life is what Louis Wirth termed "urbanism." Since he wrote his classic article on the subject in 1938, a great deal has changed in America. Cities and suburbs have mushroomed and revolutionary changes in transportation and communication have brought industry, bureaucracy and modernity to everyone's doorstep. In short, urbanism as a way of life is no longer just a quality of cities but is characteristic of the entire country, suburbs and villages alike. Modern life styles are as common in the country and the suburbs as they are in the city.\*

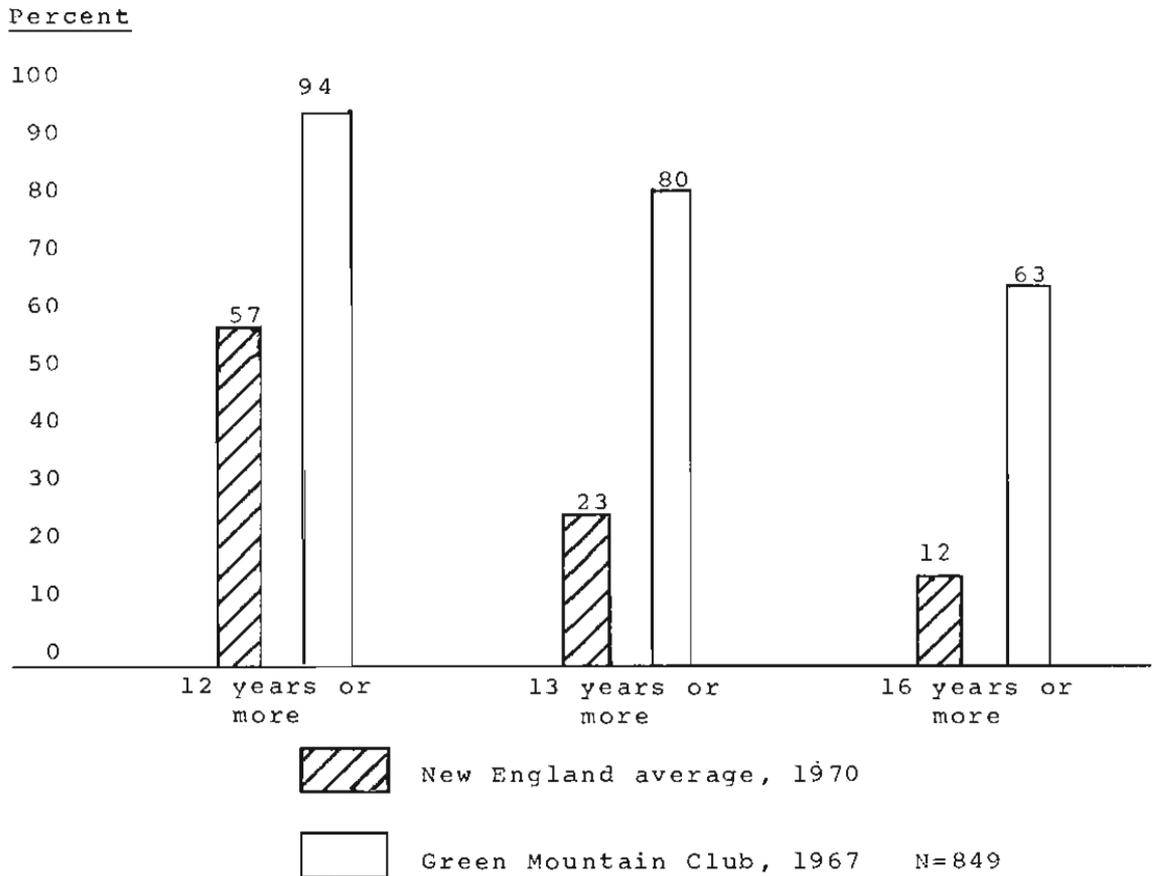
Given this proposition, our hypothesis of backpacking as a reaction to modernity need not be discarded, but support for it must be sought in indicators of modernism other than area of residence.

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\* For an excellent discussion of this see the Introduction to Neighborhoods, City and Metropolis, Edited by Robert Gutman and David Popenoe.

Education

Figure 3

Education of GMC Respondents, 1967 with New England Comparison\*

The present study reinforces other findings that backpackers typically have very high educational levels. Hendee (8) found that more than 60 percent of the respondents included in his wilderness-user studies come from less than the top 10 percent of the U.S. population in terms of educational attainment and Stankey (19, p. 185) contends that high education is a more important variable than income in determining recreational preferences. In our sample, the median number of years of

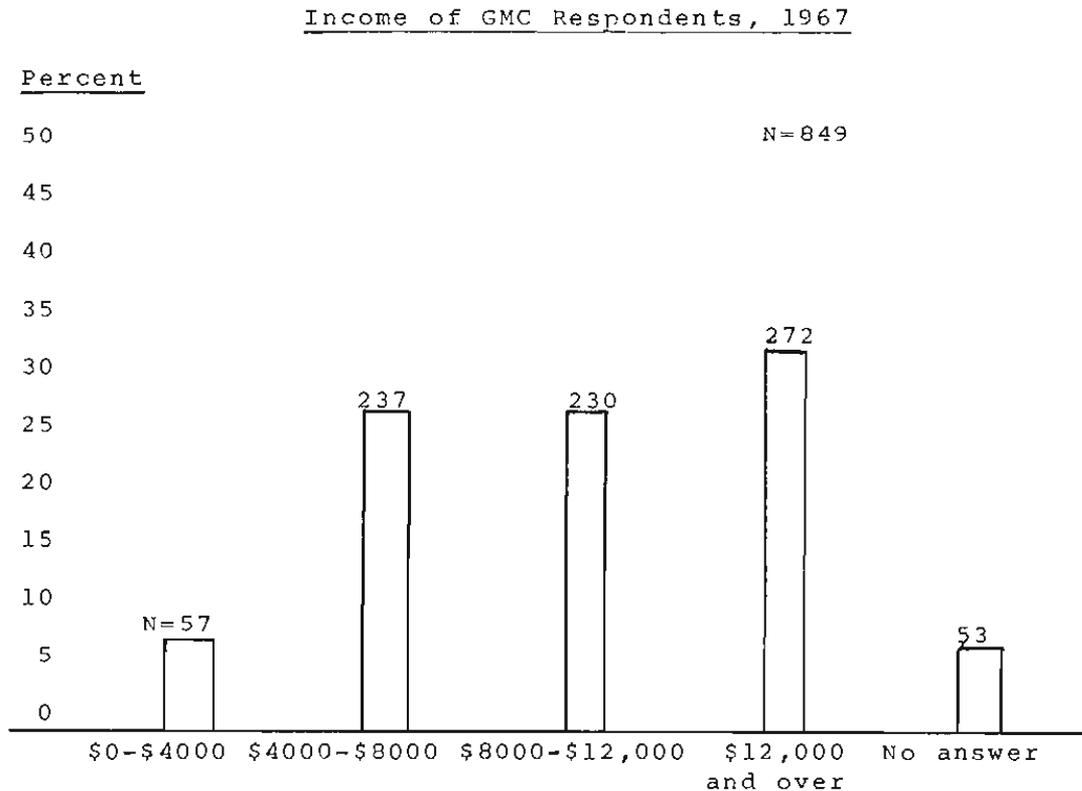
\* U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1970, General Social and Economic Characteristics, PC(1)-C for each of the New England States. It was assumed that the Bureau's definition of "4 years high school or more" was equivalent to 12 years education; that "1 year of college or more" was equivalent to 13 years of education or more and that "4 years of college or more" was equivalent to 16 years of education or more.

education is 15.5, compared to the New England median of 12.1 for persons over 25. Sixty-three percent of the respondents had 16 years of education or more and 36% had some post-graduate study behind them. As Figure 3 indicates, these figures are considerably higher than the New England average. Sex differences are slight.

### Income

The median incomes of the 849 GMC backpackers is \$9,810\*. Only 7% of the hikers fell below \$4,000 annually, while 32% were above \$12,000. Females averaged slightly lower than males, probably because of their predominantly unmarried status. The limitations of the data prohibit accurate comparison but it would seem that the backpackers in our sample would have higher than average incomes due to their high educational and occupational characteristics. Studies of other wilderness users (3), (10), (12) and (15) similarly report upon their unusually high economic status. Since backpacking is a relatively inexpensive sport (19), the small representation of low income persons in hiking is probably not a function of inability to "afford it" but must be attributable to other factors - such as education or life style. Figure 4 depicts the actual distribution.

Figure 4



\* It is expected that this figure reflects a mixture of both individual and family incomes, but exactly what that consists of is unfortunately unknown.

Occupation

The occupational status of the Green Mountain Club respondents reflect their unusually high educational levels and suggests similarity with the upper-middle-class conservationists that Harry et al describe (6). In order of their frequency, the leading occupations for males are teachers, managers, skilled workers, proprietors and researchers. For females, the leading occupations are teachers, housewives, secretaries, librarians and nurses. Employing the U.S. Bureau of the Census' classification, 384 of the 849 respondents - or 45% - were professional, technical, and kindred workers. The 1970 New England average for this category is only 17% (21).

Table 3

Occupation & Sex, GMC Respondents, 1967

	<u>Males</u>		<u>Females</u>		<u>Both Sexes</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Professional, Technical and kindred workers	254	49	130	39	384	45
Managers and Administrators except Farm	75	15	16	5	91	11
Craftsmen and kindred workers	61	10	9	3	70	8
Clerical and kindred workers	52	10	59	18	111	13
Service workers	5	1	1	0	6	1
Agricultural	8	1	0	0	8	1
Unskilled	5	1	0	0	5	1
Student	2	0	3	1	5	1
Housewife	0	0	69	21	69	8
Retired and No answer	<u>54</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>12</u>
	516	100	333	100	849	100

One possible explanation for the disproportionate number of professionals among the GMC respondents - teachers in particular - is the availability of paid vacations; while not a necessary prerequisite, it does provide greater opportunity. Unfortunately, our data do not allow

us to pursue adequately this line of inquiry.

For the most part the jobs of our respondents were distinctly modern in the sense that 88% of their work was indoors and 88% of it was non-physical. These percentages, of course, are considerably higher than the United States average. Thus, we see that most of the respondents are necessarily dependent upon advanced technology for their livelihood and intimately involved in the segmentalization and interdependence of modern industrial society.

#### HIKING EXPERIENCE

About one-half of the 849 respondents have been hiking since they were teenagers, and another 29% began to hike between 29 and 34. When we account for the age composition of the respondents the figures indicate that 32% of the hikers have been hiking for 40 or more years; 66% for 20 or more years, and 81% for 10 or more years. Eighty-one percent of the Green Mountain Club backpackers always hike with someone. Of these, 33% hike with family and friends; 15% hike only with organized groups; 3% with their children and 39% hike with some combination of the above.

#### THE APPEALS OF HIKING

The open-ended question "What special appeal does hiking have for you?" was asked to the members of the Green Mountain Club and the content of their responses analyzed. Intended only to suggest patterns of motivation it was modestly hoped that a few major categories of motivation could be identified and subjected to closer scrutiny in later research. Needless to say, separating out clear sources of motivation in every case was exceedingly difficult but every effort was made to guarantee uniformity of categorization.

An underlying assumption of all motivational questions, of course, is that the subject both knows and can articulate his motivation. While we have no way of verifying the validity of the responses we received, the very careful wording and thoughtful content of most answers leads us to believe that our subjects were giving us the most accurate responses possible.

The analysis found nine types of appeals mentioned, but only about 15% of all responses were limited to a single category; most hikers cited more than one appeal of hiking. Table 4 depicts the categories in order of overall frequency mentioned and tables 5 and 6 provide a sex breakdown as well as indicating the frequency with which a particular appeal was mentioned as the only motivating factor.

For each of the appeal categories, cross tabulations were run with the social and economic characteristics delineated in the preceding section. The significant relationships detected are reported within the ensuing tables and text. We found no significant variance in the motivational patterns with the relatively homogeneous variables of education and occupation, and differences within residential groupings were also insignificant.

Table 4

Percent of GMC Respondents Mentioning  
Various Appeals of Hiking, 1967

<u>Appeals Category</u>	<u>Mention Category (N=849) Percent</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Aesthetic	65	1
Physical	52	2
Escape	30	3
Sociability	25	4
Self-esteem	19	5
Emotional and Spiritual	18	6
Educational	9	7
Good for Family	3	8
Health	1	9

The aesthetic appeal of the wilderness was cited most frequently, consisting usually of some variation of "to see the beauty of nature." This category also contains the greatest sex difference: 74% of the females mentioned this appeal as opposed to only 59% of the males. The sex difference is even more pronounced when marital status is controlled for. Only 52% of the single males mentioned the aesthetic aspect of hiking as opposed to 86% of the single females! Married females similarly were higher than married males but only by 11%.

The sixth ranked category, "emotional and spiritual" motivation, was mentioned by 18% of the GMC members and is closely related to the aesthetic appeal, but is one that we attempted to keep separate. Only responses specifically mentioning spiritual factors or emotional factors were classified under this category. For a large number of the persons in this category, backpacking seems to be a substitute for formal religious activity and church affiliation. Some of the religious responses appear below. Note that many of these suggest resistance to, or at least independence from, organized religion.

"I like to get out into the peace and quiet of the woods. It is the only way I know to restore your soul and put the world in perspective."

"When in the mountains I enter my world and no one can reach me. I become myself and I know God isn't a big candy machine; he's the perfect world of the mountain."

Table 5

Appeals of Hiking for Percent of Male GMC Respondents  
by Priority of Those Appeals

Appeals Category	Given First Priority*	Given Second Priority*	Given Third Priority*	(N=516) Overall Priority*
Aesthetic	7	22	30	59
Physical	4	20	26	50
Escape	-	-	-	33
Sociability	1	1	19	21
Self-esteem	1	4	16	21
Emotional and Spiritual	2	6	11	19
Educational	0	1	8	9
Good for Family	0	1	1	2
Health	0	0	2	2

"Hiking seems to give one an elevated view of the world; it seems to allow one to see through the hollow ornaments which adorn society - such as religion, front lawns and neckties."

"I find hiking a substitute for religion. I am irreligious, in the usual sense. But to me there is a kind of mystic communion, even a ritual to walking up a mountain...."

"The closeness to nature has a very refreshing spiritual aspect about it which is not present in the current church structure."

\* Priority of appeal was judged by its position in the response to the open-ended question: "What special appeal does hiking have for you?" If a particular appeal was the only appeal mentioned by a respondent, it was said to be "Given First Priority"; if a particular appeal was mentioned as the first of several appeals, it was said to be "Given Second Priority"; if a particular appeal was mentioned not as the only appeal, nor as the first of several appeals, it was said to be "Given Third Priority." "Overall Priority" consists of the sum of the three categories, or the percent of the respondents who mentioned a particular appeal at all.

Table 6

Appeals of Hiking for Percent of Female GMC Respondents  
by Priority of Those Appeals

Appeals Category	Given First Priority	Given Second Priority	Given Third Priority	(N=333) Overall Priority
Aesthetic	9	35	30	74
Physical	2	20	34	56
Escape	-	-	-	26
Sociability	0	3	27	30
Self-esteem	1	3	11	15
Emotional and Spiritual	1	7	9	16
Educational	1	2	7	10
Good for Family	0	0	4	4
Health	0	0	0	0

"I like the beauties of nature; I like to feel it with my body and soul and being close to the Creator."

"Hiking does for me what church does for other people. I come out with my values and beliefs strengthened."

Were we to combine this "emotional and spiritual" category with the closely related appeal of aesthetics, we would have a new category that would comprise the "pull" factors of the wilderness. If each of the appeals categories excluded the other, we could add 18% and 65% and say that 83% of the membership mentioned the positive values of the wilderness. Since the same respondents could have mentioned both aesthetic and religious reasons, however, we can only conclude from our limited tabulations that somewhere between 65% and 83% of the respondents mentioned the "pull" values of the wilderness.

A comparison to a similar study of appeals of the wilderness for wilderness users offers some complementary data. In 1962, an Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission research group asked 367 wilderness users from different parts of the country to rank 21 reasons for wanting to be in the wilderness (16, p. 147). The number one reason (mentioned by 81% of the users as being most important) was "to observe the beauty of nature"; the number seven reason (mentioned by 38%) was "to find harmony with nature" and the 12th rank (mentioned by 32% was

"to gain a sense of communion with God"). All three of these reasons were classified under the same category which they termed "aesthetic-religious", and parallels our two categories described above.

Escape from civilization and the work-a-day world was mentioned by 30% of our respondents and was the third most frequently cited reason for hiking. Because this motivation category constituted the "push" out of modernism, we had expected that it would have been mentioned by approximately the same proportion as had mentioned "pull" of the wilderness factors. Had such been the case, our hypothesis that belief situation C<sub>1</sub> accounted for most of the motivation for wilderness use would have been put in a very favorable light. But according to our data, 65% to 83% of the hikers mention the pull of the wilderness compared to only 30% mentioning the "push" out of modernism. Thus it appears that belief situation C<sub>1</sub> is an important consideration in explaining propensity to hike, but belief situation C<sub>2</sub> may be more important. C<sub>2</sub>, we recall, consists primarily of persons who believe that the effects of modernism are neutral but that the wilderness has a distinctly positive value to it.

The afore-mentioned ORRRC study (16) of the appeals of the wilderness found that the escapism motivation had an even "more pervasive and broader impact" on propensity to hike than did the aesthetic-religious factor. In that study, hikers had before them a list of 21 possible reasons that they were asked to rank in order of importance. Of those 21 reasons the five pertaining to escapism were ranked 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 11th. Consistent with that research, a similar study by Hendee et al (8) found that "wildernists are best differentiated from urbanists in terms of their more positive affinity for natural environments devoid of human influence"; the authors also point out how strongly the escapism motif underlies many of the wilderness appeals.

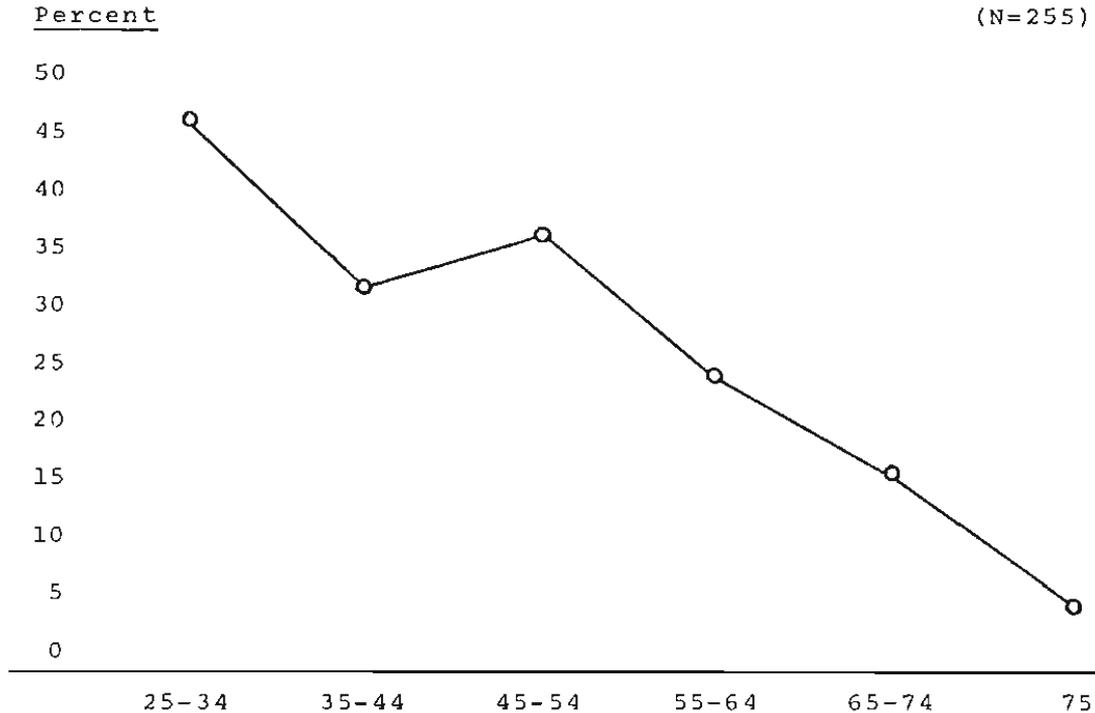
Before leaving escapism as one of the appeals of hiking, two relationships should be noted. The first one is depicted in Figure 5, and is simply that as age increases, overall disposition to cite escapism as a motivational factor decreases. This could be due to three factors: (1) the maturation of the hikers and their increasing ability to cope with life's problems without resorting to escapism; or (2) as age increases, demands on the individual actually decrease; or (3) hiking is not an effective mechanism of escape, and with time, hikers hiking for that reason quit.

It was also found that while females less frequently mention hiking out of escapism, the difference is most acute among single females, 21% of whom mention escapism to 40% of the single males.

The second most frequently mentioned appeal of hiking was the physical reason; i.e., people hike for the exercise. Persons hiking on physicians' orders or for a specific health reason were categorized separately and were the least frequently cited. While physical appeal was mentioned by 52% of the respondents, we do not necessarily believe that it is in reality a significant motivational factor. If Margaret Mead is correct and Americans go out of their way to justify their leisure activities (11 p. 7), then "exercise" would probably be cited often simply as a rationalization rather than a source of motivation. Also, if our earlier argument is true that the subtlety of a motivation is an important consideration in weighing responses to our open-ended question, then the obviousness is also a consideration. Virtually every hiker gets

Figure 5

Age of GMC Respondents Who Mention Escape  
by Percent of Their Age Group, 1967



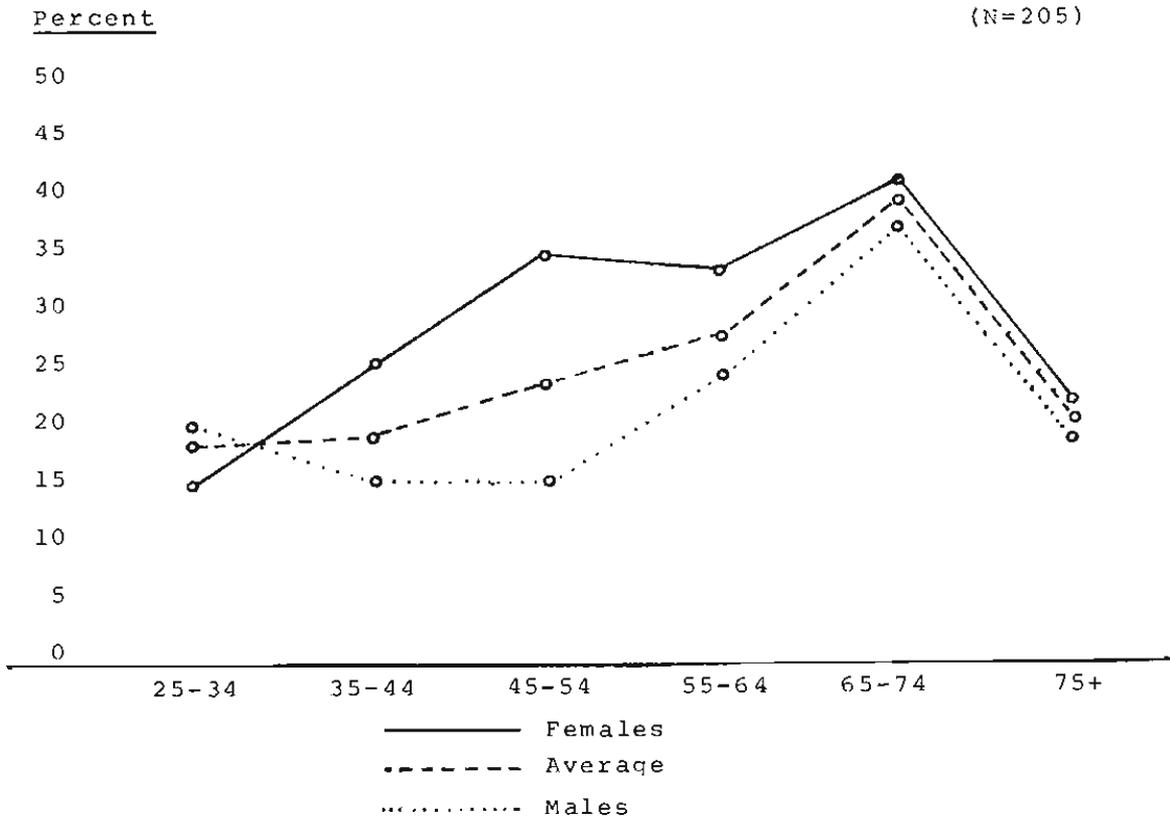
exercise, and while it may be an obvious reason to give, it is not necessarily an important one. If all the hikers are seeking is exercise, why don't they do calisthenics in their basement instead?

One quarter of the respondents mentioned reasons of sociability for hiking such as "it's a good way to meet people" or "I can't think of a better way to get to know someone." This category ranked fourth most popular among the nine appeals categories but is also one that is most susceptible to contamination from the non-hiking activities of the Green Mountain Club.

Clear age and sex trends emerge in this category as can be seen in Figure 6. With the exception of the 25-34 year old group, females consistently mentioned the sociability factor with greater frequency than the males. Both sexes show a general increase in proportion mentioning this factor as age increases up to the age of 75 when the proportion drops off dramatically. We also found that unmarried women were much more prone to cite sociability than any other marital group. Of the 100 women who cited sociability as one of their reasons for hiking, 70% are unmarried, yet unmarried women, we recall, represent only 52% of the female population. Of the males citing sociability, on the other hand, only 26% were unmarried, roughly the same proportion as in the club at large.

Figure 6

Age of GMC Respondents Who Mention Sociability  
as a Percent of Their Age Group, 1967



The fifth ranked category - that which we called "self-esteem" - was mentioned by 19% of the respondents. Persons mentioning achievement of a hiking goal or making egocentric comments were classified under this category. A slight trend was detected here, suggesting that as income increased, propensity to mention self esteem as a motivational factor also increased. The proportion of hikers in the under \$4,000 bracket mentioning self esteem was 14%; it rose to 18% for the next income category, then to 19% for the \$8,000 to \$12,000 group, and finally to 23% for all those earning over \$12,000 per year.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Our pilot study suggests that backpackers are typically highly educated upper-middle class professionals that have been equally drawn from the various sized communities. Most of them say they hike to enjoy the beauty of nature and while escapism is seen to be a significant motivational factor, it is not as strong as our scheme leads us to expect. Had a more sensitive methodology been utilized, the schema may have been

more useful; it nevertheless provided a useful frame of reference for considering motivation not just for backpacking, but for wilderness use in general. Further research on self-propelled wilderness enthusiasts would probably profit from a social-movements perspective, tying into either the anti-modernism movements or the environmentalist-conservationist movements - ideally both.

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