STRESS AND COPING IN THE HIGH PEAKS WILDERNESS: AN EXPLORATORY ASSESSMENT OF VISITOR EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

This study is based on the premise that recreation experiences can produce stress, and that an ensuing coping process influences the outcome of the visitor experience. Qualitative interviews (η=30) were used to identify influencing factors, stressors, and coping responses among visitors in the eastern High Peaks Wilderness Area of upstate New York. Common stress sources included crowding, resource impacts, and managerial regulations. The most prevalent coping mechanisms were rationalization and displacement. Stress appraisal and coping were influenced by a variety of factors including previous experience, place of residence, motivations, and geographic features of the site. Results will be used as the basis for a quantitative investigation that will take place during the summer of 2004.

1.0 Introduction

An increasing number of visitors have ventured into the backcountry since the establishment of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) in 1964. Hendee and Dawson (2003, p. 389) note, "Recreational use in the original 54 USFS wilderness areas increased 86% from about 3 million RVD's in 1965 to 5.5 million RVD's in 1994." The intensity of wilderness visitation has also increased. Excluding expansive Alaskan wilderness areas that were added to the NWPS in 1980, the estimated number of RVD's per acre has risen from .24 in 1965, to .40 in 1994 (Hendee & Dawson, 2003). Furthermore, use is not evenly dispersed throughout the system. Certain areas are more popular than others, and therefore, are more dramatically impacted by the increasing popularity of wilderness recreation. Given the projected increases in wilderness visitation and the lack of additions to the NWPS it is likely that managers will face increasing difficulty as they attempt to balance the conflicting demands of public access and protection of wilderness values.

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between use densities and the quality of the visitor experience (Kuss et al. 990). Stewart and Cole (2001) emphasize that the results have been mixed and that considerable disagreement exists regarding the managerial implications of such work. They state: "In 24 of the 27 studies reported by Kuss et al. (1990), density or encounters had a stronger effect on perceived crowding than on experience quality" (p.107). Stewart and Cole also note that effect sizes have been marginal: "Where the effect of perceived crowding on experience quality has been assessed, the strength of association is generally weak" (p.106). While there have been numerous explanations for such findings, a particularly prevalent proposition is that visitors respond to wilderness conditions based upon a complex set of influencing characteristics. Stewart and Cole state: "One of the foremost explanations is that individuals vary greatly in their response to use density and encounters. They vary in motivations, expectations and preferences, as well as on their ability to cope with various encounter levels" (p.108.)

The proposition that visitors are able to cope with undesirable conditions has led to a recent interest in stress/coping theory as a means of investigating the quality of wilderness experiences. (Schneider 1995; Miller 1997; Schuster 2000). Stress/coping theory offers a unique approach for assessing the visitor experience in that multiple influencing factors are evaluated in relation to a combination of stressors, coping mechanisms, and outcomes. For example, a person with a high level of experience in a particular wilderness area may develop a sense of attachment that influences the stress coping process. Certain situations, such as crowding and the behavior of other visitors may be appraised as stressful by a visitor who is attached to the area. However, the manner in which the visitor copes (i.e. responds) to these situations ultimately determines the outcome of the wilderness experience.

The purpose of this study is to identify influencing factors, stressors, and coping responses among visitors in the eastern High Peaks Wilderness Area of upstate New York. This study adapts an existing theoretical framework as a means of assessing the visitor experience. It is based

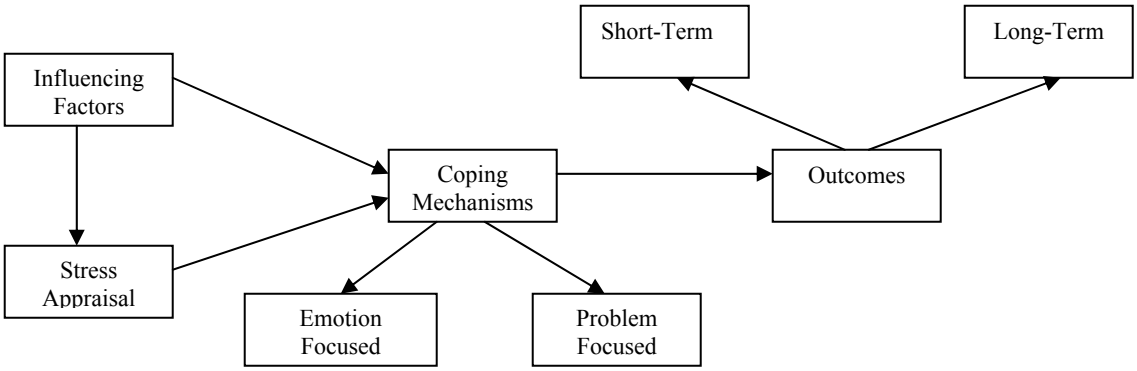

Figure 1.—Theoretical Stress/Coping Model (Adapted from Lazarus and Folkman 1984)

on the premise that recreational experiences can produce stress, and that an ensuing coping process influences the outcome of the visitor experience. It should be noted that the study was exploratory in nature and no attempt was made to specify causal relationships between elements of the stress/coping model. Results will be used as the basis for a quantitative investigation that will take place during the summer of 2004.

1.1 Stress/Coping Theory

Lazarus and Folkman (as cited in Schuster 2000) posit that the stress/coping process occurs in a three-stages. First, person and environmental factors influence the perception of stress. Second, an appraisal process mediates individual responses to existing stressors. Third, the appraisal process influences the individual's coping response, and indirectly, the outcome of the experience. Figure 1 illustrates the components of the stress/coping process.

Influencing factors are the personal and situational attributes that influence the perception of stressful conditions and associated coping responses (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). It is proposed that influencing factors have a direct effect upon both the appraisal of stress and the coping responses that follow. Lazarus and Folkman define appraisal as the personal evaluation of particular conditions as stressful (i.e., harmful, threatening, challenging, or benign). Appraisal acts as a mediating variable that is positioned between influencing factors and coping responses. Stressors are the specific person/environmental inputs that are evaluated during the appraisal process. Coping mechanisms are behavioral (i.e., problem-focused) or emotional (i.e., emotion-focused) responses that are enacted to mitigate sources of stress (Folkman & Lazarus 1980). Outcomes are the short-term and long-term effects of the stress/coping process (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). The following section provides an operational definition of stress and places the model within the context of outdoor recreation.

1.2 Stress/Coping Within the Context of Outdoor Recreation

We conceptualize stress as daily hassles: "The irritating, frustrating, distressing demands that to some degree characterize everyday transactions with the environment" (Kanner et al. 1981, p.3). Previous research in the field of psychology has demonstrated that increased exposure to daily hassles has resulted in pessimistic attitudes (Stone & Neale 1982), higher levels of psychological distress (Zautra et al. 1986), and physical health complications (Kubitz et al. 1986; Cox et al. 1984). The hassles construct is particularly relevant to outdoor recreation research because it allows for an identification of stressors that are common in wilderness environments. Schuster (2000) found that 87% of visitors experienced at least one hassle while hiking in the Shinning Rock Wilderness. Litter was the most common hassle, followed by noise from other people, damage to the resource, and crowded campsites. In a related study, Schuster and Hammitt (2000) found that 72% of private boaters on the Ocoee River in Tennessee experienced social conflicts with other river users. Miller and McCool's (2003) investigation of the stress/coping process in Glacier National Park revealed that over half (56%) of the visitors experienced a situation that "detracted" from their visit. Crowding was the most common source of stress, followed by access to facilities, the behavior of other visitors, and construction delays. In contrast to the previously mentioned studies, Schneider (2000) found that relatively few visitors (11.8%) experienced conflict when visiting an urban-

proximate wilderness in the southwestern United States. However, this study utilized an open-ended approach to identify stress (e.g. conflict) as opposed to a checklist of possible stressors/hassles. Thus, the latter approach may be more effective for identifying a range of conditions that have the potential to detract from the visitor experience.

A promising aspect of recreation stress/coping research lies in the potential to link hassles to specific emotional and/or behavioral coping mechanisms. Once a visitor experiences a hassle an appraisal process occurs in which the individual assigns meaning to the situation and evaluates potential responses. The appraisal process occurs in two stages (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). First, a primary appraisal allows the visitor to determine if a particular situation is stressful. If so, an evaluation of one's ability to cope with the situation occurs. This secondary appraisal may involve accepting responsibility, evaluating the appropriateness of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping responses, and an assessment of the potential efficacy of one's response (Smith & Lazarus 1990). Once the secondary appraisal is complete, an ensuing coping process is enacted in an attempt to mitigate the impacts of the stressor. Although numerous coping strategies have been identified (Folkman et al. 1986), the various responses can be summarized as being either emotion-focused or problem-focused. Emotion-focused coping is a psychological attempt to maintain congruence between perceived conditions and a desired state. Problem-focused coping is an active attempt to change a situation deemed as threatening (Taylor & Aspinwall 1996). Folkman and others (1986) identified eight specific coping mechanisms that can be classified according to this distinction. Emotion-focused strategies included self-control, distancing, positive reappraisal, accepting responsibility, and escape/avoidance. Problem-focused strategies included confrontive coping, seeking social support, and planful problem solving. These strategies represent domains that can be adapted to include coping strategies employed by wilderness visitors.

Previous recreation coping research has typically focused on three types of coping responses: product shift, rationalization, and displacement (Hoss & Brunson 2000; Johnson & Dawson 2004; Manning & Valliere 2001). Product shift is an emotion-focused response that occurs when the individual redefines their expectations for the experience based on actual on-site events (Shelby and others 1988). Johnson and Dawson (2004) found product shift to be the second most common coping response among hikers in Adirondack Park wilderness areas. Rationalization is an emotion-focused response based on the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957). Rationalization occurs when the individual's desire to maintain consistency between expectations and the actual experience leads to justifications for the existence of stressful conditions. In contrast to other studies, Hoss and Brunson (2000) found rationalization to be the most prevalent form of coping among visitors in nine western wilderness areas. Displacement is a problem-focused response that occurs when the individual attempts to avoid stressful situations (Anderson & Brown 1984). Displacement can be either spatial or temporal. Spatial displacement occurs when the individual moves to a different location within the wilderness (e.g. intra-site) or to a different area all together (e.g. inter-site). Temporal displacement occurs when the individual visits the same area at a different time of the day, week, or year (Manning & Valliere, 2001). Temporal displacement was the most common form of coping in Johnson and Dawson's study of hikers in Adirondack wilderness areas.

An emerging approach to recreation coping research has employed a modified Ways of Coping Checklist (Folkman & Lazarus 1980) as a means of expanding the sphere of possible responses to stress/hassles in recreation settings (Schneider 1995; Miller 1997; Schneider 2000; Schuster 2000; Schuster & Hammitt 2000; Miller 2003; Schuster et al. 2003). This approach operationalizes coping as a checklist that includes responses common in both the recreation and psychological literature. Schuster and others (2003) identified five distinct coping domains in their study of visitors to the Shinning Rock Wilderness in North Carolina. Emotion-focused domains included self-control and psychological distancing. Problem-focused domains included behavioral coping, confrontive coping, and planful problem solving. Following established trail etiquette, which was part of the self-control domain, was the most commonly reported coping response. This finding is supported by Schneider (2000), who found that adhering to established trail etiquette was the most common form of coping among visitors in an urban-proximate wilderness. Furthermore, Schuster and Hammitt (2000) found that exercising self-control and adhering to proper river etiquette were the most common coping responses among private boaters on the Ocoee River. The presence of five coping domains was

Table 1.—Frequencies for influencing factors, stressors, and coping mechanisms

Influencing Factors	Frequency[a] (η)	Stressors	Frequency (η)	Coping Responses	Frequency (η)
Experiential	**87%**	**Resource**	**87%**	**Emotion**	**77%**
Familiarity w/ HP	15	Impacts	20	Rationalization	14
Attachment to HP	07	Insects	12	Social Support	06
First Visit to HP	06	Bears	08	Re-appraisal	06
Other	07	Other	04	Humor	04
Total	35	Total	44	Product Shift	04
Demographic	**57%**	**Social**	**77%**	Restraint	02
Residence	11	Crowding	19	Distancing	02
Age	03	Behavior	07	Total	38
Other	07	Group Issue	03		
Total	21	Total	29		
Motivational	**30%**	**Managerial**	**63%**	**Problem**	**73%**
Challenge	09	Regulations	14	Displacement	10
Appreciate Nature	08	Communication	09	Problem Solve	09
Other	01	Maintenance	04	Etiquette	07
Total	18	Total	27	Ignore Rules	05
Geographic	**30%**	**Personal**	**50%**	Seek Info	04
Access/Destination	04	Intra-personal	06	Confrontation	02
Displaced	03	Inexperience	06	Other	02
Time of year	02	Health	05	Total	39
Total	09	Total	17		

[a]Percentages refer to the proportion of groups mentioning at least one item within the respective sub-domain. η = the number of times the item was mentioned by groups that reported at least one item within the respective sub-domain.

also reported by Miller and McCool (2003) in their study of Glacier National Park visitors. Three of the domains represented displacement-like behaviors. The remaining two consisted of cognitive adjustments and behavioral responses.

2.0 Research Methods

The High Peaks Wilderness is located in the Adirondack Park of upstate New York. The area consists of 192,685 acres of mountainous terrain that is popular with hikers and backpackers. The state's highest peak, Mt. Marcy, is included within the wilderness boundary. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (1999) estimates that use increased from 83,983 visitors days in 1988 to 139,663 visitor days in 1998. The managing agency notes that most visitors are attracted to the eastern portion of the wilderness due to the ease of access, the extensive network of recreational trails, and the outstanding alpine scenery. A majority of visitors access the wilderness through five access points, four of which are located in the eastern portion of the wilderness. The DEC states, "About 72 percent of all visitors access the unit through just five of the units twenty developed trailheads: Adirondack Loj, John's Brook, Cascade, South Meadows, and Ampersand" (1999).

Data were collected through 30 semi-structured group interviews with overnight wilderness visitors during the summer of 2003. A convenience sample was utilized to contact respondents at Marcy Dam, Lake Colden, the John's Brook Tail, and the summits of Mt. Marcy and Mt. Algonquin. A total of 31 groups were contacted with all but one agreeing to participate in the study. Respondents were asked a series of questions that related to four elements of the hypothetical stress/coping model. Responses were recorded in fieldnote form and entered into a database for coding and analysis.

Qualitative analysis of the data took place in five steps. First, a code list was generated by systematically reviewing the answers to each question. Second, the codes were grouped into domains that pertained to the first three elements of the stress/coping model: influencing factors, stressors and coping responses. Each of these domains

was then divided into a number of sub-domains. For example, stressors were divided into personal, resource, social, and managerial sub-domains, each of which consisted of multiple individual items (e.g. trail conditions, bear encounters, etc.). Fourth, each interview was systematically reviewed and coded with a label that allowed the researcher to identify specific items within each of the sub-domains. Fifth, a keyword search was conducted on each item in the data base to determine the number of interviews in which the item occurred. This allowed the researcher to rank the salience of each item with its respective sub-domain. Table 1 displays the frequencies for each sub-domain. The following section provides descriptive results and a detailed analysis of the data.

3.0 Results of the Study

Thirty groups were interviewed, accounting for a total of 79 visitors. The average group size was 2.6, which is consistent with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation estimates (NYSDEC 1999). The average trip length was 2.7 days, which is slightly higher than NYSDEC estimates. The 79 visitors accounted for a total of 232 RVD's. High Peaks visitors were primarily from Canada (39%) and New York (33%) with those from Montreal accounting for approximately 35% of the total visitor days. This number is higher than that reported by the NYSDEC, which estimates that approximately 18% of the visitors are Canadian. In terms of gender, there were more males (76%) than females (24%).

3.1 Influencing Factors

Influencing factors were divided into four sub-domains: experiential, demographic, motivational, and geographic. Experiential factors related to a hiker's familiarity with the High Peaks and their overall level of hiking experience. The most common experiential factor was familiarity with the site, followed by attachment to the resource. Hikers who were familiar with the area had a better idea of what to expect during their visit and were better prepared to cope with potentially stressful situations. A respondent with several years of hiking experience in the High Peaks stated:

> I came in from the Loj last time. I was hoping that Upper Works would be a less used entry point. Knowing that people would be here wouldn't necessarily deter me from coming though. At Indian Pass there were relatively few people. We saw two groups but no one was on the Cold Brook Trail.

This hiker was able to draw from previous experience to avoid undesirable situations. However, those familiar with the area were also more inclined to notice changes in use levels and related impacts. Another experienced High Peaks hiker stated: "There are more cars this summer - you can see more use in areas with lean-tos. The trails are pretty well maintained but there is erosion from use and water run-off." While this respondent noted increasing levels of use and resource impacts the overall intensity of these stressors was minimal and the individual was able to successfully cope with there presence.

The degree of attachment that visitors had for the resource also appeared to influence the stress/coping process. Visitors that displayed an attachment to the resource tended to be experienced hikers who acknowledged that the area was crowded. Rationalization was a common coping response among this group of users. The following quote is from a hiker that had commented on the number of people and the difficulty that his group had finding a place to camp: "We like this place because it is the closest high quality hiking area. It's only 2.5 hours from Montreal." Having acknowledged that the area was crowded, the visitor rationalized the existence of a potentially stressful situation in order to mitigate its effect.

Demographic influences related to personal characteristics such as age. When compared to other sub-domains, this was the second most common influencing factor. Place of residence was the most salient factor within this sub-domain, and appeared to be related to place attachment. In other words, those respondents that lived close to the High Peaks (e.g. within 2-3 hours.) seemed to be dependent upon the area as a place for hiking. As a result, they were more inclined to rationalize the existence stressful situations. At the same time, these groups visited the area frequently and were able to draw from their experience when attempting to cope with stress. A frequent High Peaks visitor from Montreal stated: "You learn with experience. We try to arrive on Friday instead of Saturday." Other demographic influences, including age, gender, and ethnicity, were less common.

Motivational influences addressed visitors' reasons for visiting the High Peaks. Challenge and nature appreciation were the most common motivational influences. The frequency of these factors was nearly equal and it appears that visitors may be motivated by both simultaneously. Analysis of the data revealed that motives influenced both the appraisal of stress and the manner in which visitors coped with stress. One visitor, a first-time backpacker who had never visited the High Peaks, camped in an undesignated spot when he failed to reach his destination: "I had to camp off the side of the trail because it was getting dark. I realized I wasn't going to make it so I found a flat spot with a view." When asked why he had decided to visit the High Peaks the hiker replied, "I heard it was a beautiful place and I wanted to see it for myself. I was looking for a challenge."

Geographic influences included features of the site and seasonal influences such as time of year. When compared to the other sub-domains, this was the least common influencing factor. Point of access/destination within the wilderness was the most common geographic influence. One group asked, "Is it safe to leave your car at South Meadows? The parking lot at the Loj was full." When asked if they would do anything different on their next visit one group member responded, "We'll arrive earlier - before 8am - so we can park at the Loj. We feel comfortable leaving the car there because you have to pay and you know someone watches it." Inter-site and temporal displacement were also mentioned, as was time of year. These factors appeared to be inter-related, with experienced visitors using different access points, avoiding certain parts of the wilderness, or visiting the High Peaks at specific times of the week.

3.2 Stressors

Stressors were sub-divided into four domains: resource, social, managerial, and personal. When compared to other sub-domains, resource stressors were the most common form. Resource stressors included those situations that were related to the natural environment. Multiple resource stressors were mentioned by individual groups, which suggested that visitors experienced a variety of stressors on a given trip. Resource impacts were the most common source of stress within this domain and across all four in general. Other salient resource stressors included insects, trail conditions, and bear encounters. The latter occurred less frequently than the previously mentioned stressors but special attention is warranted. Bear encounters were mentioned by eight out of thirty groups, and often resulted in additional stress such as the loss of food and safety concerns. One group member stated: "Last night some people lost their food to a bear. We had a problem last year too." When asked how the presence of the bear affected their trip another group member replied, "The bear was walking around our camp at night. We stayed in the tent and tried to ignore it but it took a while to go back to sleep." Bear encounters occurred primarily at Lake Colden, which suggests that choosing this area as a destination within the wilderness may increase the likelihood of bear incidents and related hassles.

Social stressors were the second most common form of stress. Social stressors included any situation that resulted from interaction with other visitors, including those within the same group. Crowding was the most common source of stress within this domain and the second most common overall. While crowding was frequently reported, visitors seemed to rationalize its existence as the inevitable result of the High Peak's popularity: "It's a little crowded but that's to be expected on a summer weekend." Less common were complaints about the behavior of other visitors. These complaints tended to be associated with noise and improper food storage: "People are really sloppy at Marcy. They're camping in undesignated spots and there's a lot of trash laying around." Group dynamics were an issue in small number of groups. However, visitors may be unlikely to discuss such issues in a group interview setting. Thus, it is possible that this source of stress is more salient that it appears.

Managerial stressors were the third most common form of stress. This sub-domain included those stressors that were related to the management of recreational use within the High Peaks. Complaints about rules and regulations were the most common form of managerial stress and were the third most common overall. Comments were related to designated camping sites, the prohibition of fires, and parking fees. Complaints about fees were most prevalent among Canad.ians, who mentioned the exchange rate between U.S. and Canadian currency: "$18 for parking is a big deal. If it was a week long trip I don't know what I would do." Communication issues, such as confusing signs and negative interactions with park personnel were another salient form of managerial stress. A group that camped in an undesignated spot

was asked to move by park personnel. While they agreed to move, they seemed to feel that the problem was attributable to poorly marked sites. One group member stated: "It's not clear where you're supposed to camp. We stayed in an illegal site because we got in when it was dark and couldn't figure out where we were supposed to be." Other concerns related to maintenance issues and a lack of infrastructure. These comments were related mostly to the condition of existing food storage facilities. Interestingly, none of the groups mentioned a lack of regulation as a problem despite the high frequency of resource, social, and managerial stressors.

Personal stressors were the least common form of stress. Intra-personal constraints such as fear of bears were the most salient, followed by experience-related stressors (e.g. difficulty hanging food from bears), health concerns, and benign stressors (e.g. not seeing enough people, not making it to an intended destination, etc.). A visitor originally from Rawanda stated: "There was [sic] not enough people. Today I met a lot and it gives me energy. Yesterday we didn't see a lot of people and I felt very alone. It's good to see people but the experienced people don't like it." This respondent was on his first backpacking trip and had a different cultural background than most High Peaks visitors. His comments support the notion that experience levels and cultural backgrounds may influence the appraisal of stress in wilderness settings.

3.3 Coping Responses

Coping responses were sub-divided into two domains: emotion-focused and problem focused. The frequency of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping was approximately equal. Analysis of the data revealed that visitors utilized both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms simultaneously. Rationalization was the most common, occurring in nearly half of the interviews. This was also the most common coping mechanism across the two sub-domains. Other salient emotion-focused mechanisms included seeking social support, positive re-appraisal, the use of humor, and product shift. The following quote provides an example of product shift as a means of coping with crowding: “It’s Saturday night so I guess its normal.” While this may sound like rationalization, the visitor did not expect that crowding would be as bad as it was. Once on site, the visitor re-defined his expectation for the experience by stating “I guess it’s normal.” Rationalization, on the other hand, does not imply that the condition was unexpected. A visitor who rationalized the presence of blackflies stated: “The bugs were bad. I got bitten everywhere but that’s part of it.”

Displacement, planned decision-making, and practicing established etiquette were the most common problem-focused coping methods. A behavior was only coded as displacement if it occurred on-site. This allowed the researcher to distinguish between influencing factors, coping responses, and potential outcomes of the experience. Intra-site displacement was the most common form, with many visitors indicating that they avoided particular areas within the High Peaks: “We avoid certain areas like Marcy. That’s why we come here. We did Big Slide this time and we only saw five tents and eight people.” Other problem-focused mechanisms included ignoring the rules, information seeking, confronting other visitors, and reporting concerns to park authorities. As mentioned earlier, those who chose to ignore rules/regulations in response to a particular source of stress often rationalized their actions. This finding is further supported by a group of hikers that had complained about the regulation prohibiting fires: “We made a fire to cook on after our stove malfunctioned.” Rather than borrowing a stove from one of the many groups camped around them, they choose to make a fire and rationalized their behavior as a necessary response to the situation.

4.0 Discussion

Recreation stress/coping research provides a theoretical foundation for identifying emotional and behavioral responses to situations that have the potential to negatively detract from the visitor experience. This approach is particularly useful because it allows managers to focus their efforts on conditions that visitors are unable to reconcile without placing additional strain on resource, social, and managerial capacities. The purpose of this study was to identify influencing factors, stressors, and coping responses among visitors in the eastern High Peaks Wilderness Area of upstate New York. The results indicated that at least one hassle was experienced by all groups and that most experienced multiple hassles. Reports of stress in previous studies have ranged from 12%-87%. However, it should be pointed out that the presence of stress in this study was based on the researchers’ interpretation of interview notes. In contrast, previous studies have utilized open-ended

response formats or hassles checklists that allow the respondents to specify when stress had occurred. Many of those interviewed in this study initially stated that they had not experienced hassles during their visit. However, additional questioning resulted in the identification of four stress domains: resource, social, managerial, and personal. Many stressors were revealed only after asking the respondents if they would do anything differently on their next visit. Thus, it appears that the efficacy of one's coping efforts may influence responses to open-ended questions. In other words, visitors who have successfully coped with stress/conflict in the field are not likely to report the presence of stress/conflict. Therefore, future quantitative studies should consider the use of scales that present respondents with a range of potential stressors along with corresponding intensity measures. This will allow for a determination of the type/intensity of specific stressors, as well as the overall level of stress/conflict experienced by the individual.

The most common stressors within the High Peaks were resource impacts, crowding, and rules/regulations. Personal hassles such as intra-personal constraints were less common but still a concern for some visitors. The emergence of the latter two have not figured prominently in previous research and deserve further investigation. Interestingly, none of the respondents reported a lack of regulation as a concern despite the prominence of resource impacts and crowding. Future research should attempt to substantiate this finding quantitatively. It may be that visitors find ways to cope with the presence of impacts and crowds rather than pushing for more regulation and potentially facing a tradeoff between access and preservation. The presence of personal factors also deserves further attention. While many of these factors may appear beyond the control of managers (e.g. fear of bears), they may be related to the presence of other stressors that are within management control. By further examining an expanded range of stressors, influencing factors, and coping responses, researchers will be able to provide managers with a more complete perspective on the recreation experience.

This study identified a number of influencing factors that appear to be operational within the High Peaks. Experiential factors, including familiarity with the site and attachment to the resource were most common. Other domains included demographic characteristics, motivational influences, and geographic features of the High Peaks Wilderness. Influencing factors appeared to be associated with both the appraisal of stress and the coping responses of visitors. This was particularly evident among more experienced users, who were more likely to report hassles but better able to cope with potentially detracting situations. Coping strategies included both emotion-focused responses and problem-focused responses. The most common emotion-focused response was rationalization. This finding was consistent with that of Hoss and Brunson (2000). Salient problem-focused responses included displacement, planful problem solving, and adhering to established etiquette. Similar results have been reported in previous research (Schneider 2000; Schuster 2000; Miller & McCool 2003; Schuster et al. 2003).

The results of this study have shed new light on visitor experiences within the eastern High Peaks Wilderness Area. The results are useful not only to managers, but to researchers that are interested in further examining the stress/coping process in outdoor recreation environments. While crowding is often thought to be the primary concern of visitors and managers alike, this study suggests that there are other conditions that have the potential to influence the visitor experience within the High Peaks Wilderness. Particularly relevant were management regulations and bear encounters, both of which are within management control. Of concern to researchers is whether or not the relationships suggested in this exploratory study can be further substantiated through additional studies. Potential research questions include: (1) How do previous experience and attachment to the resource influence the appraisal of stress within wilderness environments? (2) How does previous experience, place attachment, and stress appraisal influence the choice of coping mechanisms within wilderness environments? Answering these questions will expanding upon previous stress/coping research and provide managers with informed knowledge to improve visitor experiences while protecting the integrity of wilderness resources.

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