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## **Brand Positioning Focus Groups** **Parks Canada** Key Findings April 2008

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Prepared by: Ipsos Reid

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Ipsos Reid Public Affairs  
One Nicholas Street,  
Suite 1400  
Ottawa ON K1N 7B7  
Tel: 613.241.5802  
Fax: 613.241.5460  
[www.ipsos.ca](http://www.ipsos.ca)

# Key Findings

## Visiting Parks and Historic Sites

When asked why they visit parks and historic sites, most park visitors provided reasons that fell into four categories. Parks offer escape from the urban environment, giving a sense of peace and solitude away from the city; they offer opportunities for spending time with family and friends; enjoyable activities, such as sports, photography and bird watching; and learning opportunities. Non-visitors to parks suggested very similar reasons that others might have for visiting these places; very few non-visitors expressed a total lack of interest in visiting parks or historic sites.

When asked what kind of barriers exist to visiting parks and historic sites, non-visitors suggested both practical difficulties, such as lack of public transit to the sites, perceived high entry fees and limited recreational time; and also more attitudinal obstacles, such as low awareness of the existence of the sites and of what the sites have to offer, and low motivation due to limited family experience with the parks, an expectation of discomfort with outdoor facilities, and simply greater interest in other activities.

## Parks Canada Brand

Parks Canada did not evoke clear brand recognition among participants, who often initially assumed that it referred exclusively to parks, rather than to historic sites, and failed to differentiate between Parks Canada parks and those managed by provincial governments. Despite this lack of clarity, many respondents expressed highly positive regard for the experience offered by Parks Canada. One finding that should be noted here is that participants generally had national parks in mind rather than historic sites when thinking about Parks Canada; indeed, in the course of the discussions they often made this association without considering the organization's wider remit unless specifically reminded by moderators to do so.

Although most participants had heard of Parks Canada, and were generally aware it is part of the federal government, few had seen advertising or information recently from Parks Canada, and those who had were more likely to have sought it out themselves in preparation for a visit. Perceptions of Parks Canada were primarily based on participants' own experience at parks, rather than information provided by the organization.

When asked what words they would use to describe Parks Canada, participants generally listed experiential attributes of sites, and activities to be enjoyed in the parks, rather than aspects of the organization. Most words were positive; *“relaxing”*, *“awesome”*, *“nature untouched”*, *“generally well-kept”*; however, a few, non-visitors, suggested less positive terms such as *“antiquated”*, *“expensive”*, and *“poorly managed”*.

More specifically, most park visitors expressed a belief that Parks Canada parks are well maintained, safe and clean, with rangers to assist if necessary. Although this was an attraction for some, there were a few who felt that the parks are sometimes excessively well cared for and thus insufficiently 'wild'; that they are designed more as monuments, and less for fun. Parks Canada's role as guardians of the country's nature, heritage and history also emerged for some participants. Finally, it should be noted that, among non-visitors to parks who held any impressions of Parks Canada, these were more likely to

relate to the organization itself, probably due to lack of experience with the parks and historical sites.

### **Video Evaluation**

Current park visitors expressed positive reactions to the video, including inspiration to go and visit Canada's parks; pride in a beautiful country with rich heritage; awe at the scenes of beauty; surprise at the variety and diversity of what Parks Canada has to offer; a sense of 'something for everyone'; and overall enjoyment, relaxation and peace. Although many non-visitors also shared these impressions, they were more likely than visitors to mention perceptions of a lack of ethnic diversity depicted in the video, a disproportionate focus on nature rather than culture and history, and a message that parks are primarily for families and children.

The video text was generally thought to be too long, and although some participants thought the message was memorable and evocative, others were critical of its emotional tone and felt it failed to effectively communicate Parks Canada's role. The theme line "Freedom to Explore" used as part of the video text did not induce discussion in evaluating the video, despite its popularity when raised as a theme line. The musical soundtrack, Green Days' *Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)* was thought by some to be fitting, and by others to be boring and even inappropriate, particularly given its US progenitor.

Two central points of dissatisfaction, primarily among non-visitors involved, first, the disproportionate focus on nature rather than on culture and history; and second, the demographic characteristics of park visitors portrayed in the video. Participants felt more images of the cultural and historical sites would be welcome, as would the inclusion of individuals who are visible minorities and a less predominantly family-oriented focus.

Low initial awareness of the Parks Canada brand led to difficulty in determining whether the video was a good fit with the brand. Although a few participants suggested that the range of experiences depicted in the video was a good representation of the diversity of activities provided by the organization, others thought that the video was "typical" of those produced by other government and tourist organizations. They noted that the video could equally be used by travel agencies, mountain equipment and sports stores, among others.

To improve the video, participants suggested:

- A more coherent ordering of the images;
- Shortened use of static images;
- Less tight shots, or more footage of the full grandeur of scenes;
- Information on the location of the images;
- Inclusion of animals and Parks Canada rangers; and,
- Less sentimental tone.

## Mood Board Evaluation

### **Overall Reactions**

Similar to the video evaluation, visitors were more positive regarding the mood boards than were non-visitors. Visitors tended to say that the boards, particularly those with first person perspective photography, captured the diversity and the sense of peace, discovery and adventure in the Parks Canada experience; they used words such as “*serenity*”, “*passion*”, “*introspection*”, “*adventure*”, “*invitation to discover*”. By contrast, non-visitors were more likely to say that such imagery was repetitive and unoriginal, and that nothing linked it directly with Parks Canada; examples included; “*looks like a tent commercial*”, “*boring*”, “*same, same, same.*”

The two historical images were widely seen as the weakest of the five boards; they suggested that more effective images – such as the Citadel in Halifax – could easily replace the tour guide and dancing images. Most popular were the canoe moving through the mist and the tent with the aurora borealis.

### **Reactions to specific mood boards**

Canoe moving through the mist: the most popular image among visitors and non-visitors, suggesting adventure and exploration for you personally. The image and text evoked positive emotional reactions.

Tent with the aurora borealis: also a popular image, suggesting fun and exciting possibilities for adventure. The image was seen as contemporary, evoking a positive emotional response, but the text was not felt to be particularly appropriate.

Mix of images including canoe and polar bears: less liked, but some felt it conveyed a range of activities offered by Parks Canada. Others saw a lack of coherence in the imagery, and some thought it was less dramatic or overly “*staged*”.

Dancing (story of our nation): less popular than the three previous boards, although Quebec participants were more likely to be positive about it. The key message was thought to be that history can be fun, although some thought the image was confusing and reminded them of “*boring school visits*”; visible minority participants in Toronto wondered how it related to them.

Tour guide (story of our nation): least popular of all the boards; no participants saw it as effective or evocative. The image was thought to be staged and confusing, and participants were unsure whether the building was a Parks Canada site or not; many did not realize the woman shown was a Parks Canada employee.

## **Theme Lines**

### **English**

Participants were generally positive about the theme lines, and felt that one or more of the lines captured key elements of the Parks Canada experience.

Experience the wonder: Most popular of the English theme lines; the word “*experience*” was particularly well received. Participants felt that the theme related most effectively to the natural setting of Parks Canada parks, rather than to cultural and historic sites.

However, others thought “wonder” was an inappropriate term, suggestive of a “Disney feel”.

Real. Inspiring: This was the least popular of the three lines; the period between the words was particularly poorly received, with some participants noting the “fractured” feel induced by the period. Other participants pointed to a perceived “corporate feel” to the line and felt that this might be the type of tag-line used by a private sector corporation to advertise a product rather than the type of experience offered by Parks Canada. Although most participants liked the word “inspiring”, the word “real” was felt by some to be redundant and possibly even somewhat patronizing.

Freedom to explore: Current park visitors were much more positive about this line than non-visitors. Visitors liked “freedom” and “explore”, suggesting that it captured the size of Canada and the desire to find out more and to choose how they want to explore; they also found it to be a good fit with Parks Canada. However, they also recommended caution in stressing “freedom”, pointing to the dangers inherent in treating the parks’ wild setting with disrespect. By contrast, non-visitors pointed to the barriers to visiting parks that in fact limit their freedom to explore, although some also conceded that the line might inspire people to visit parks they had not experienced previously.

### ***French***

Only one of the French language lines was well received, with the others much less well received.

Des trésors à votre portée : Park visitors felt this line was well-suited to Parks Canada, calling up images of heritage and history and emphasizing the value of these “cultural riches”. They thought the theme line was appropriate for nature *and* culture, although some felt that they might have seen the line before.

En toute liberté : As in the Anglophone groups, participants liked the inspirational message of this line, but stressed the need to limit freedom, and noted the disconnect between this line and the reality of park regulations. It was also seen as more appropriate for natural sites than for history and culture.

Sources d’inspirations : The least popular of the three lines and again, more relevant to nature than to Parks Canada’s cultural activities.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The primary focus of the research is brand positioning, and our conclusions and recommendations are therefore related to this rather than wider perceptions of Parks Canada. The overall brand positioning exercise is intended to cover corporate objectives as well as the external image of the organization. It should therefore be noted that a limitation of the research is that it includes the views of park users and non-users from the general public but not the opinions of stakeholders or Parks Canada personnel.

The materials presented during the groups were not finished advertising products. They were designed, as a preliminary step towards advertising, to evoke the brand positioning that Parks Canada is seeking to communicate to the public. That said, reactions of the participants were, naturally, based on the aspects of the execution that appealed or did not appeal. Ultimately, even though the materials that were being assessed are not intended as final, the execution does have an impact upon the mood evoked. Our conclusions therefore address both the reactions of participants to the executions in terms of the brand essence being communicated and practical suggestions to keep in mind when developing future advertising or communications materials based upon these materials

Although the video was generally well received among park visitors, this was less the case for non-visitors. Participants mentioned a lack of demographic diversity and a greater emphasis on nature rather than culture and history. The text and to a lesser extent the soundtrack were also unpopular with some participants.

- The video should incorporate images of visible minorities, and a greater diversity individuals enjoying the parks
- More footage of cultural and historic sites should be incorporated into the video
- The text should be divided across screens and presented for a shorter period
- Could consider changing the musical soundtrack
- Could consider reviewing the perceived sentimentality of the text
- While not the target of this exercise, it would be very important to identify the locations being shown when considering future brand positioning or campaigns

The mood boards depicting the canoe moving through the mist and the tent with the aurora borealis are most popular, but the text does not necessarily maximize the message or the connection with Parks Canada. The mixed image mood board, although it successfully depicts a range of experiences possible with Parks Canada, is considered to be somewhat incoherent and staged. The dancing mood board highlights the fun of historical sites and balances the nature boards, but was excessively family-oriented and exclusive of visible minorities. Finally, the tour guide mood board was universally unsuccessful.

- Consider alternative text for the tent image
- Consider using more recognizable images of historic sites rather than people or use less “staged” images of children involved in cultural and historical activities for both the mixed image and the dancing boards
- Include images of visible minorities where there are people depicted in the boards

The English theme lines were generally well received, particularly “Experience the wonder”. “Freedom to explore” is popular with visitors, but they express caution about the limits on freedom in the parks. “Real. Inspiring” is less successful.

- Consider using either “Experience the wonder” or “Freedom to Explore” rather than “Real. Inspiring”.
- Consider the use of the word “freedom” within the context of the park regulations if using this.

Only one of the French theme lines was well received, « Des trésors à votre portée »; this was thought to be most appropriate to Parks Canada natural and cultural sites. « En toute liberté » was not disliked, but again caution was expressed about the regulatory realities of the parks. « Sources d’inspirations » was unsuccessful.