Mule riders and guests at Phantom Ranch

Park Planning and Policy Lab
University of Illinois
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Mules and Phantom Ranch at Grand Canyon

- History of burros and mules
- Visibility of riding a mule into the Canyon
- Mary Jane Colter designed Ranch, built in 1920s
- CCC added facilities in 1930s
Objectives of presentation

- Identify characteristics of mule riders and Phantom Ranch guests
- Describe experiences and satisfactions
Methods

- Sampled Xanterra’s advanced reservation list July-Aug and Oct-Nov, 2004

- Stratified random sample
  - Day mule rider (n=161)
  - Mule rider with overnight stay at Ranch (n=125)
  - Hiker with overnight stay at Ranch (n=310)

- Response rate 73%
Socio-demographic characteristics

- Average education level was 5 years of college or university
- Average age: summer 47, fall 53
- Median income $95,000
- 92% from U.S. (11% from AZ)
Trip characteristics

- 82% mule riders on 1st trip to Canyon, 48% hikers on 1st trip

- Planned trip more than 6 months in advance:
  - 33% day mule riders
  - 65% overnight mule riders
  - 74% hikers to Phantom Ranch

- 81% used park website

- Average length of stay was 4 days
Reasons for visit, % reporting important

- Learning about the park, 93
- Appreciating nature, 91
- Being together with family, 80
- Experiencing solitude, 73
Reaction to impacts

- 14% disturbed by litter along trail
- 11% hikers disturbed by trail etiquette of others
- 11% disturbed by toilet paper along trail
- 10% disturbed by aircraft overhead

Disturbed by trail erosion:
  - 6% summer
  - 13% fall
Satisfaction with services

- 97% mule riders satisfied with guide
- 96% Phantom Ranch guests satisfied with interaction with Ranch employees
- 94% take another trip to GC backcountry
- 83% mule riders desire another GC mule ride
- 98% Phantom Ranch guests desire another stay at Ranch
Developing recommendations

- Mule rides and Phantom Ranch serve important niches in the spectrum of opportunities offered
  - Historic presence
  - Enhanced accessibility of backcountry
  - Experiences achieved by visitors
Developing recommendations

- If necessary to enhance visitor experiences, consider:
  - Litter along trail
  - Hiking etiquette of others
  - Toilet paper along trail
  - Aircraft overhead
  - Trail erosion

- Park’s website should continue to evolve to reach various segments of park visitors