

Going to wild places I could only dream about

John Kenwright, Parks Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (Presenter)

Situation/Purpose of Study

Almost one in five Australians have a disability, 90% take a holiday each year. They spend 8 billion dollars annually on Australian tourism, accounting for 11% of total tourism expenditure. Australia's population is ageing, with a growing market for travellers with accessibility needs. (*ABS Survey of Disability, Aging & Carers 2009 & National Visitor Survey (2003) as analysed by Darcy & Dwyer (2008)*)

Parks Victoria is implementing a range of projects to make its parks more accessible and inclusive for all visitors. People with disabilities have historically experienced many barriers in accessing Victoria's parks, and significant steps have been undertaken by Parks Victoria to address these.

Approach

Parks Victoria engaged with visitors with physical disabilities and carers to obtain a better understanding of their needs and experiences when visiting parks. From this community engagement, the major needs identified by Parks Victoria were for all-terrain wheelchairs and readily available accommodation equipment. Access to good information about accessible visitor sites was also identified as an issue. In consultation with the disability community and equipment specialists, Parks Victoria conducted trials of a variety of all-terrain wheelchairs in parks. Three models were selected to best cater for the different physical requirements of visitors, and for use in various park environments/terrain. Special equipment such as electric high low beds, mobile personal hoists and bathroom equipment were introduced to existing accessible park accommodation. The all-terrain wheelchairs and accommodation equipment were made available to park visitors for free, and based at individual park locations for easy visitor access.

Comprehensive park access information was collated and made available on 35 of the most visited parks. A resource guide was developed to enable park staff to compile further access information.

Results/Conclusions

All-terrain wheelchairs and accommodation equipment have been available in Victoria's iconic parks for two years. They have proven to be extremely beneficial for visitors with mobility limitations wishing to holiday in parks and explore the more rugged park trails. Feedback from visitors has been very positive and uptake of the equipment has increased steadily over time. Comprehensive visitor information about the equipment available and access information for park visitor sites has been integral to their success. Regular diverse promotion of this equipment through tourism and community networks has been vital in raising awareness about their availability.

