



**LINCOLN
UNIVERSITY**
Centre for Land,
Environment
& People

LEAP Research Report
No. 56

Exploring the impacts of the Covid-19 national lockdown on outdoor recreationists' activity and perceptions of tourism

Niamh Espiner
Emma J. Stewart
Stephen Espiner
Gebeyaw Degarege

March 2021

Centre of Excellence: Sustainable Tourism
for Regions, Landscapes and Communities

LEAP



Exploring the impacts of the Covid-19 national lockdown on outdoor recreationists' activity and perceptions of tourism

Niamh Espiner
Emma J. Stewart
Stephen Espiner
Gebeyaw Degarege

Land Environment and People Research Report
No. 56
2021

ISSN: 1172-0859 (Print)
ISSN: 1172-0891 (Online)
ISBN: 978-0-86476-462-1 (Print)
ISBN: 978-0-86476-463-8 (PDF)

Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the outdoor recreationists who volunteered their time to participate in this research project, and the administrators of the online recreation groups in which this research was advertised. We are also grateful for the support of the Lincoln University Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Tourism for Regions, Landscapes and Communities.

Note

This publication is the first of two reports that explore the impacts of the 2020 Covid-19 national lockdown on outdoor recreationists' activity and perceptions of tourism in New Zealand. This first report explores the results of 20 qualitative interviews which were conducted with a small group of outdoor recreationists, while the second report examines the results of a larger survey (n=599) which was conducted in parallel with the interviews.

Recommended citation:

Espiner, N., Stewart, E.J., Espiner, S., Degarege, G. (2021). *Exploring the impacts of the Covid-19 national lockdown on outdoor recreationists' activity and perceptions of tourism*. (LEAP Research Report No. 56), New Zealand, Lincoln University.

Contact details:

Niamh Espiner: Niamh.Espiner@lincolnuni.ac.nz
Emma J. Stewart: Emma.Stewart@lincoln.ac.nz
Stephen Espiner: Stephen.Espiner@lincoln.ac.nz
Gebeyaw Degarege" Gebeyaw.Degarege@lincoln.ac.nz

Cover image: A group of trampers ascends Avalanche Peak in Arthurs Pass National Park, New Zealand – N. Espiner (2020)

Contents

Contents.....	4
Figures	5
Executive summary	6
1. Introduction	7
New Zealand Government Alert Levels.....	7
Impact of Covid-19 on tourism and outdoor recreation.....	8
2. Project objectives	10
4. Method	11
5. Findings.....	15
Activity during the lockdown period	15
Activity after the lockdown period.....	22
Perspectives on travel.....	27
6. Concluding discussion.....	35
7. Appendices	39
Appendix A	39
Appendix B	41
8. References.....	44

Figures

Figure 1: Monthly count of visitor numbers at Christchurch's Godley Head walking track, Jan-Nov 2020 (Department of Conservation, 2020).....

Figure 2: Survey recruitment reach..... 12

Figure 3: Roads felt safer for walking and cycling due to the lack of traffic (Image by N. Espiner, 2020)

Figure 4: Cars parked at a remote trailhead following the lockdown (Image by N. Espiner, 2020)

Figure 5: Day-walkers observe the view from Banks Peninsula following the lockdown (Image by N. Espiner, 2020)

Figure 6: Freedom campers crowd a carpark in Golden Bay prior to the pandemic (Image by N. Espiner, 2019)

Figure 6: Freedom campers crowd a carpark in Golden Bay prior to the pandemic (Image by N. Espiner, 2019)

Figure 7: Tourists by Lake Pukaki prior to the pandemic (Image by N. Espiner, 2019).....

Executive summary

In March of 2020, a national lockdown confined New Zealanders to their local neighbourhoods and significantly limited participation in outdoor recreation and tourism for a period of 5 weeks (25 March 2020 – 27 April 2020)¹. The research project reported here aimed to investigate the impacts of this lockdown period on outdoor recreationists' participation as well as their perceptions of outdoor recreation and tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The research involved 20 interviews exploring outdoor recreation and tourism activity with outdoor recreationists in New Zealand. These qualitative interviews explored participants' recollections of their outdoor recreation activity prior to the pandemic, during the Level 4 lockdown, and in the six months after the Level 4 lockdown ended. The interviews also explored participants' perceptions of tourism and their opinions on the future of tourism in New Zealand. These interviews were conducted in parallel with a quantitative survey (n=599), which is explored in a separate report.

The participants' experiences reflected that the lockdown period saw substantial increases in walking across New Zealand. Many of the participants had also engaged in a new or different form of recreation during the lockdown period, or had taken on a challenge that they would not normally have done. These were both reported to be temporary phenomena, however.

Outdoor recreationists reported that, after the lockdown ended, they felt more appreciative of their outdoor recreation opportunities and for New Zealand's great outdoors. The events of 2020 also prompted many New Zealanders to consider the future of tourism in New Zealand. The outdoor recreationists' increased interest in travelling within New Zealand suggests that one enduring legacy of lockdown might be a renaissance for domestic tourism in New Zealand. This is supported by domestic tourism research and marketing campaigns by Tourism New Zealand (Tourism New Zealand, 2021). Furthermore, outdoor recreationists generally felt that international tourism is important for New Zealand, but they noted concerns about the number of tourists and the impact that international tourism has on the natural and social environment in the recent past.

¹ All subsequent mentions of 'lockdown' will refer to this Alert Level 4 period in March and April of 2020.

1. Introduction

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism had increased dramatically in New Zealand and around the world. In the seven years prior to 2020, total annual tourism expenditure in New Zealand had increased by 55% (\$15 billion) to \$41.9 billion per annum (Tourism Industry Aotearoa, 2020). This made tourism New Zealand's biggest export industry, directly employing over 225,000 people (around 8% of the New Zealand workforce) (Tourism Industry Aotearoa, 2020). Part of the attraction to New Zealand for international tourists is the geographical and scenic landscapes which enable a variety of forms of outdoor recreation. This is a major drawcard for New Zealanders as well, with outdoor recreation a popular pastime across the country. This is supported in research published by the Department of Conservation, which showed that in 2019, 91% of New Zealanders had participated in short walks under 3 hrs, 81% had been sightseeing and 52% had been on a day walk anywhere in the outdoors (Department of Conservation, 2020). However the Covid-19 pandemic saw an unprecedented constraint put on domestic recreation and tourism due to a national lockdown. This government-enforced lockdown limited the range and scope of outdoor recreation opportunities by only permitting specific 'low-risk' activities within local neighbourhoods. This research sought to explore the impacts of this period of lockdown on the outdoor recreation and tourism activity and perceptions of outdoor recreationists in New Zealand.

New Zealand Government Alert Levels

Before discussing the impacts of the lockdown period, it is important to outline the New Zealand Government's approach to containing the pandemic. In February of 2020, the first case of the Covid-19 virus was reported in New Zealand (New Zealand Government, 2020). Within the next month, the Government had designed and introduced a 4-tiered Alert Level system to help New Zealanders understand the risk of the virus and restrictions to their daily regimes. In this Alert Level system, Level 1 suggests a low level of risk and restriction, while Level 4 suggests a high level of risk and restriction. On the 23rd March 2020, the Prime Minister announced that New Zealand had entered Alert Level 3, and would move to Alert Level 4 in 48 hours. Thus, New Zealand entered a Level 4 lockdown at 11.59pm on 25 March 2020, requiring the entire nation to stay at home and self-isolate. New Zealand's first death from the Covid-19 virus was reported four days later (New Zealand Government, 2020).

New Zealand remained at Alert Level 4 for a period of five weeks, before moving to the slightly less restricted (but still severely limited) Alert Level 3 for 2 weeks on 27 April 2020. The country did not return to Alert Level 1 until 08 June 2020—almost four months after the

virus was first detected in New Zealand (New Zealand Government, 2020). While the city of Auckland returned to Alert Level 3 for 2 weeks in August after a small outbreak of community cases of the virus, the Level 4 lockdown in March and April of 2020 remained the only national lockdown for the year and the only period of time at which the entire country was in a lockdown state in 2020.

Impact of Covid-19 on tourism and outdoor recreation

Tourism data and evidence in the news media suggests that domestic tourism and recreation increased following the lift of the restrictions on domestic travel once New Zealand moved to Alert Level 2 in May of 2020. While the lack of international visitors entering the country was challenging for the many businesses and companies who previously relied on the traveller market, the growth in the domestic market may have provided some relief. This was particularly true during the school holiday period in July, during which all regions experienced an increase in domestic visitors, compared to the same period in 2019 (Tourism New Zealand, 2020). In a Tourism New Zealand (2020) report, the areas which experienced the most growth in the winter school holidays period when compared to 2019 were Kaikoura (56%), West Coast (51%), Fiordland (47%) and Marlborough (44%). Areas in the North Island experienced less growth, with the lowest increase occurring in Auckland (6%) - which subsequently moved back to Alert Level 3 in August of 2020. This pivot towards domestic tourism was reported across the country, with Whanganui in the North Island recording its strongest winter on record (Whanganui & Partners, 2020a, 2020b), and tourism spending in the Southland region growing by 3.4 percent (\$12.1 million) from June 2019 to June 2020 (Steyl, 2020). Furthermore, other small islands surrounding New Zealand such as Chatham, Stewart and Great Barrier Islands all reported record numbers of tourists since the lockdown period ended (Manson, 2020). Local tourism operators suspect that these tourists are New Zealanders who would have otherwise travelled overseas for their holidays (Manson, 2020).

Outdoor recreation has also received some attention in the news media for its unexpected popularity over the 2020 winter in New Zealand. In particular, the Department of Conservation (DOC)'s Great Walks proved popular when bookings for the 2020/21 season sold out just minutes after becoming available online. DOC reported to the media that 2000 users were logged on to the website when the bookings opened, and 1000 bookings had been made in the first 10 minutes (RNZ, 2020). Bookings were up 47 percent on the previous year, with the majority of this unprecedented demand being New Zealanders (Brownlie, 2020; Richardson, 2021). Similarly, New Zealand South Island ski-fields attracted high numbers of New Zealanders looking to have the slopes to themselves (NZHerald, 2020). On one single day in July, 10,000 skiers visited the Queenstown ski-fields— the

highest single day visitor count in seven years (NZHerald, 2020). Bike sales, including e-bikes during and since the lockdown have also indicated increased interest in outdoor recreation, with cycling shops across the country struggling to keep up with the demand for bikes (McAvinue, 2020; Smith, 2020). This is supported by a survey of approximately a thousand people undertaken by a Christchurch-based mountain biking park, which reported that close to 80 percent of respondents took up cycling during the lockdown (Lock, 2020).

The research literature on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on outdoor recreation and tourism in New Zealand is more limited to date. A special issue in *Tourism Geographies* explored some of the early impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism around the world. The authors attempt to sign-post opportunities for the transformation of tourism once travel for leisure resumes (Ateljevic, 2020; Brouder, 2020; Haywood, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020; Nepal, 2020). As part of this transformation, descriptions of the opportunities for post-Covid-19 tourism include a more regenerative, sustainable, resilient and innovative industry than in the past (Ateljevic, 2020; Brouder, 2020; Haywood, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020).

The impact of the pandemic on outdoor recreation globally has also been severe. Reports from the Young Explorers' Trust and the Institute for Outdoor Learning in the UK concluded that the dramatic reduction in outdoor recreation opportunities and loss of financial capital of expedition and outdoor learning providers could have negative impacts for young people (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2020; Young Explorers' Trust, 2020). In particular, a major impact for the UK will be the loss of opportunity to experience the benefits of outdoor experiences—including personal and social development, improved health and wellbeing, and better educational outcomes (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2020). In New Zealand, a research project conducted during the lockdown period (defined in the study as covering levels 3 and 4) found that New Zealanders felt more connected with nature during the lockdown period, generating a sense of calm and appreciation (Manaaki Whenua: Landcare Research, 2020). This sense of connection and appreciation may provide a partial explanation for the sudden increase in outdoor recreation activity reported in the Department of Conservation track counter data following the lifting of the Level 4 restrictions. For example, a visitor counter at Godley Head track near the city of Christchurch recorded a 55% increase in visitor numbers compared with 2019. A large spike in visitors is visible in the data captured in May 2020—which coincides with both the shift to Level 3 (27 April 2020) and the shift to Level 2 (13 May 2020) (Figure 1).

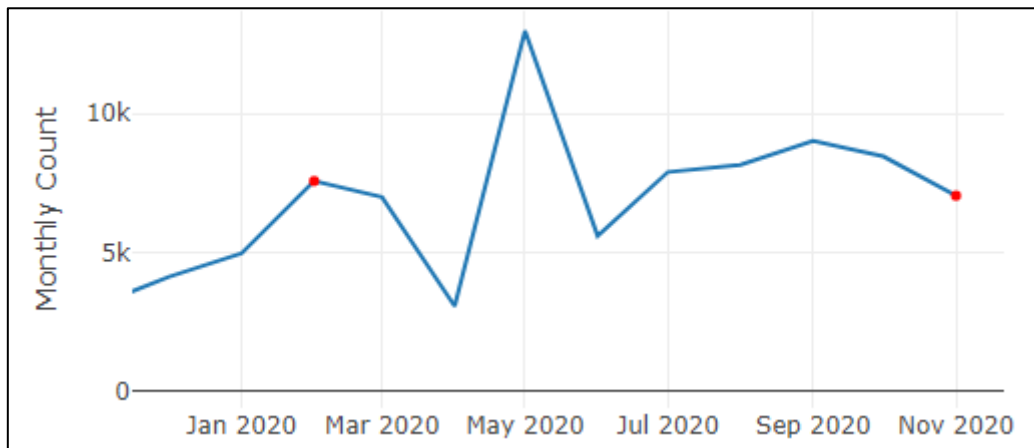


Figure 1: Monthly count of visitor numbers at Christchurch's Godley Head walking track, Jan-Nov 2020 (Department of Conservation, 2020)

Thus, while there are early indications in the media and the international literature that the lockdown has impacted New Zealanders' outdoor recreation and tourism activity and perceptions, there is little exploring the depth of these changes. Consequently, this report aims to explore and understand the changes in outdoor recreationists' activity and perceptions of outdoor recreation and tourism in New Zealand following the lockdown period.

2. Project objectives

The primary objective of this research was to explore how the lockdown period impacted outdoor recreationists' activities and perceptions of outdoor recreation and tourism six months on from the national lockdown. The secondary objectives were:

- To investigate outdoor recreation activity during the national lockdown period
- To develop a foundation for future research to examine these impacts at a later point in time
- To suggest some directions for further research

4. Method

This study utilised qualitative methods to explore the impacts of the Covid-19 national lockdown on the activity and tourism perceptions of outdoor recreationists in New Zealand. This entailed 20 interviews with outdoor recreationists from across the country. This qualitative study was conducted in parallel with a quantitative survey (n=599) exploring similar themes, which was the recruitment point for interview participants in the research reported here. The study presents a reflexive account of lockdown effects on outdoor recreation practices and implications for the future development of outdoor recreation services and domestic tourism.

Both the growth and adoption of Internet technology, and the present uncertainty around the ability to conduct face-to-face communications due to Covid-19, provided the opportunity to conduct participant recruitment using an online social media platform, an emerging data collection tool (Ali et al., 2020; Whitaker, Stevelink, & Fear, 2017). Although in the present study the social media platform was only used for recruitment purposes, publications on the use of social media for research suggest that these platforms can offer cost-effective means to run surveys compared with traditional paper-based methods (Chizawsky, Estabrooks, & Sales, 2011; Lafferty & Manca, 2015; Whitaker et al., 2017). More importantly, social media helps to target specific populations including those that may be difficult to otherwise identify and engage (Stokes, Vandyk, Squires, Jacob, & Gifford, 2019), and often elicits higher response rates (Whitaker et al., 2017).

In this study, Facebook was used to recruit participants for an online survey, through which interview participants were recruited. There are many favourable reasons for the use of Facebook in this study. Globally, Facebook is currently the leading social networking platform, reaching 60.6 per cent of internet users, and claims 2.60 billion monthly active users (Clement, 2020). Facebook is one of the fastest and most affordable methods of recruiting study participants for survey research (Ramo & Prochaska, 2012). The open and inherently public nature of Facebook groups makes it easy to reach out to potential participants, thus making it convenient as well as time-saving to collect the required data. In relation to the subject matter of this project, Facebook can offer exclusive access to a considerable number of outdoor recreationists with varying experience levels across New Zealand. Subsequently, interview participants were recruited through the survey by indicating their willingness to be contacted for an interview.

Information was sought from New Zealand residents, 18 years of age or older, who have been engaged in outdoor recreation within the last twelve months and were willing to be interviewed over the phone or online in English. In order to find such participants, a list of online groups of

outdoor recreationists whose leaders and members participate in outdoor recreation in New Zealand was compiled, using information publicly available through the social media website, Facebook. These groups were then prioritised based on membership and scope, and the Facebook administrators of the highest priority groups were contacted with a request for permission to promote the research. It was believed that permission was likely to be granted, as the research outcome is directly relevant to the focus of each group and the interests of the members.

In total, 31 New Zealand outdoor recreation entities were contacted. Of these groups and pages, 20 approved the advertisement, four declined, and seven did not respond. The 20 approved Facebook recruitment points included 16 private or public groups, and four public pages for organisations. The advertisement was shared in the 16 groups three times across a period of four weeks. The public pages each shared the advertisement at least once, with two groups sharing it twice. Following on from this, the research was subsequently shared on one outdoor recreation organisation website and appeared in one press release, before the lead researcher was approached about discussing the research on Radio New Zealand.

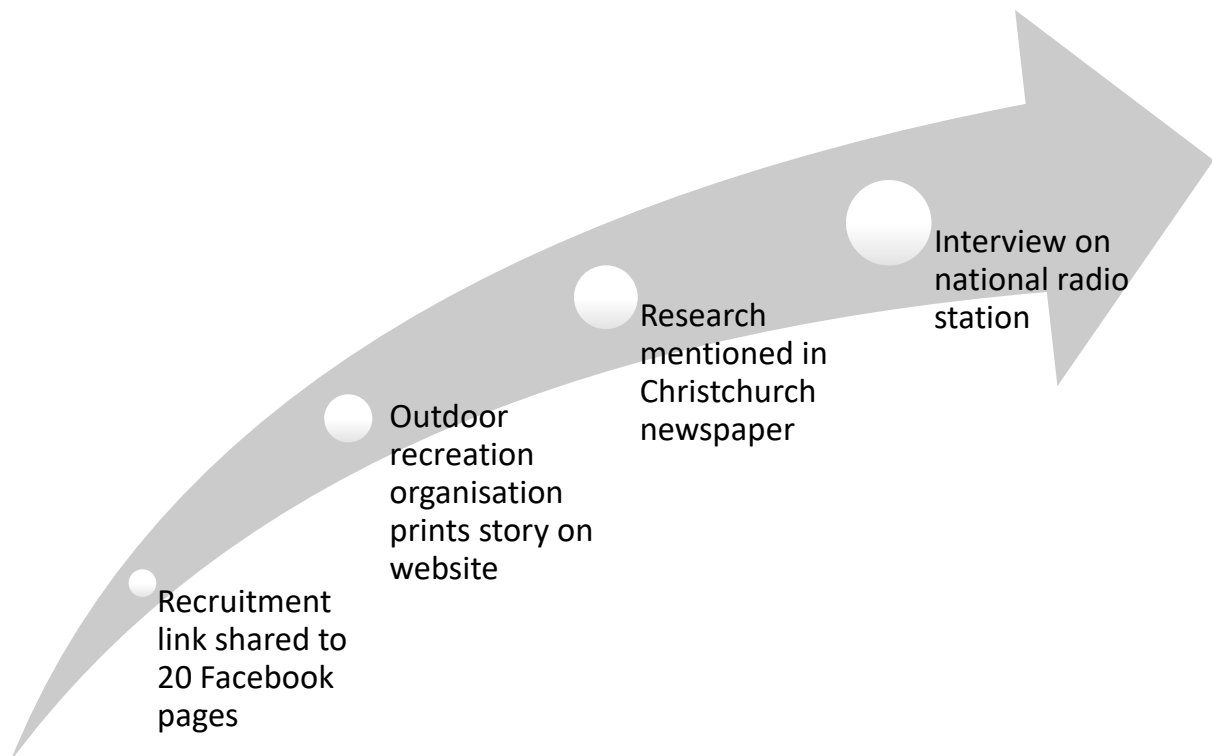


Figure 2: Survey recruitment reach

Based on this exposure of the research, the survey received 599 responses and 115 persons volunteered to take part in an interview. The interview volunteers were then prioritised based on their survey responses, in order to reflect a variety of genders, age groups, regions and outdoor recreation experience levels. Potential participants were contacted in clusters by email until saturation of the data was reached in the interviews. In total, 44 outdoor recreationists were contacted by email, and 20 interviews were completed. The participants included 12 men and eight women from a variety of age groups and regions of New Zealand (see Table 1 for participant information). The remaining 24 outdoor recreationists were either unavailable for an interview, or were unresponsive to the interview invitation. The outdoor recreation pursuits of these participants were wide-ranging, but included tramping, camping, cycling/mountain-biking, skiing, trail running, kayaking, surfing and hunting.

The research project was reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee (HEC). An information sheet (Appendix A) was e-mailed to the 44 individuals who were selected as potential interview participants. This information sheet described the project purpose, what was requested of participants, and the provisions for confidentiality and for withdrawal from the research. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to verbally express their consent to take part and be recorded on a Dictaphone. This was then recorded in the verbatim transcripts which were produced following each interview. The in-depth interviews each lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. Identifying information (such as participant names, and/or contact details) was ascribed a pseudonym. Participants were advised that although the information they shared might be included in published research or presentations, their name(s) and any identifying information would remain anonymous.

Table 1: Profile of Interview participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age group	Region
<i>Mason</i>	Male	55-59	Whanganui - Manawatu
<i>Lydia</i>	Female	25-29	Marlborough
<i>Stefan</i>	Male	45-49	Auckland
<i>Kevin</i>	Male	60-64	Wellington
<i>Hanna</i>	Female	65-69	Whanganui - Manawatu
<i>Walter</i>	Male	70-74	Bay of Plenty
<i>Tom</i>	Male	40-44	Otago
<i>Levi</i>	Male	45-49	Otago
<i>Rozanne</i>	Female	50-54	Canterbury
<i>Hector</i>	Male	55-59	Otago
<i>Petra</i>	Female	55-59	Whanganui - Manawatu
<i>Anita</i>	Female	40-44	Other
<i>Mattie</i>	Female	60-64	Canterbury
<i>Harper</i>	Female	18-24	Otago

<i>Chloe</i>	Female	18-24	Auckland
<i>Alex</i>	Male	35-39	Auckland
<i>Franz</i>	Male	60-64	Auckland
<i>Ralph</i>	Male	60-64	Canterbury
<i>Owen</i>	Male	30-34	Wellington
<i>Geoff</i>	Male	35-39	Northland

The interviews were semi-structured in nature, and included a variety of question types such as open questions, probing questions, and storytelling questions (Dunn, 2010; Roulston, 2010). The topics covered included the participants' and others' engagement with outdoor recreation prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, during the lockdown, and after the lockdown. Following this, the participants were asked about their perspectives and opinions on the future of tourism in New Zealand. Appendix B provides a copy of the interview question guide. It is important to note that in the interviews we aimed to understand what activities participants *actually* did, not what they were supposed to do. For this reason, in the analysis and reporting of data we chose not to filter participants' comments based on whether the activity was within the guidelines or not.

The verbatim transcriptions of each interview were subsequently uploaded to the qualitative research software 'NVivo 12', where they were coded into themes or 'nodes'. Coding involved close reading and re-reading of each interview in order to unearth new ideas and group the data in ways which made sense for answering the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This grounded approach to data analysis allowed the emergence of a number of common themes across the interviews, based on the participants' experiences and perceptions of outdoor recreation and travel before, during and after the lockdown.

5. Findings

The findings of the 20 qualitative interviews revealed a number of impacts of the lockdown on outdoor recreationists' activities and perceptions of recreation and tourism. These impacts are divided into three main areas of focus: outdoor recreation during the lockdown period, outdoor recreation after the lockdown period, and overall perspectives on domestic and international tourism in New Zealand going forward. The first section will focus on the outdoor recreationists' activity and observations during the lockdown period.

Activity during the lockdown period

The New Zealand government required recreation activity in the lockdown period to be limited to low-risk activities (such as walking and cycling), close to home with social distancing measures in place at all times (Sport New Zealand, 2020). Outdoor recreation during the lockdown period varied from person to person, however there were a number of common themes across the activities and observations of the participants in this study. One of the most frequently discussed topics across all of the interviews was the increase in outdoor walking during the lockdown period.

Walking

By far the most frequently discussed aspect of walking during the lockdown period was the visible increase in walking in communities. One participant stated that she had 'never seen so many people walking', while others described the number of walkers on local streets and tracks as 'phenomenal', 'incredible' and 'amazing'. Harper observed that a walkway near her house was so busy that it was 'like a highway' during the lockdown period:

My house that I lived at was quite close to the beach and so there was a bit of a walkway that goes around the beach and it was almost like a highway on some days because you could see over 100 people all walking that same highway, that same walkway (Harper)

Similarly, Geoff noticed evidence of the increased walking in his community at his local park:

So our local park for example...it was one big grassy area but during lockdown there became new paths which were worn in because it was being used so much... it's never like that normally (Geoff)

Mattie also noticed an increase in walking from neighbours who she would not normally see out walking. As she explained:

My area where I live, I have neighbours across the way that I wave to. I've never seen them out walking, they were walking with their children, teenage children. Everyone was walking, everywhere you went they were walking. People had just taken over walking everywhere, it was phenomenal (Mattie)

A number of participants mentioned the important role that walking played in their lockdown experiences. For many, walking represented an escape from the confines of home. Franz spoke about his compulsion to walk during the lockdown period:

I felt compelled to walk and so I did...I made it quite a discipline...almost not know where I was going but just sort of walk (Franz)

For others, walking was a substitute for other outdoor recreation which was restricted during the lockdown period. As Mattie explained:

Normally I'd go into the gym twice a week or go for a swim. Because none of those things I was actually able to do, I walked...we walked more, did a lot more walking (Mattie)

Petra also described using walking in place of other outdoor recreation, even donning a tramping pack on occasion to maintain her strength for tramping:

I made it my mission to every day, do some laps around the streets and every weekend to do big laps around the streets. So I was going 20 or 30 times around the same block...I sometimes did that with a full pack as well to keep the strength going (Petra)

Aside from these participants' use of walking as an escape and as a substitute, another participant incorporated walking as part of his work day by conducting meetings over the phone:

So I kind of realised I could actually do a meeting as a walk. So I'd just grab my phone and just go for a walk for an hour and a half and I kind of did that a couple of times a week in meetings (Alex)

Traffic

There were a variety of possible explanations for this increase in walking. A number of participants mentioned that walking was made easier by the almost complete absence of cars on the roads. Harper described how the absence of cars changed her experience of walking in her neighbourhood:

You could go walk down the middle of the street and you would very rarely see a car...you could just walk all over the street (Harper)

Hanna also enjoyed the car-less streets, and wished that her neighbourhood could remain without cars beyond the lockdown period. As she stated:

No cars, it felt very peaceful. It felt great. What a shame it couldn't be like that all the time (Hanna)

The lack of traffic on roads was particularly beneficial for cyclists and families with young children. Many participants with children mentioned the safety of biking on roads during the lockdown period:

It was just brilliant for a ten year old boy on the bike. It just gave me so much more peace of mind for him biking on the roads (Rozanne)

Stefan shared a similar sentiment:

We didn't like our boys riding on the road so much because they're still young but during lockdown we were quite comfortable (Stefan)

A number of participants over the age of 60 also commented on discovering enjoyment of road cycling during the lockdown period due to the lack of cars. Mattie described the feelings of freedom and safety she experienced biking through Christchurch CBD's 'red zone'²:

We biked all the way through the red zone and there were no cars. So it was so easy to bike, you didn't feel unsafe, it was just....it felt incredible, the freedom to bike, knowing that there were not cars.... (Mattie)

Community cohesion

One impact of more walking and cycling in local communities was the propensity for people to meet and engage in community bonding. This resulted in a number of stories about neighbours interacting and sharing solidarity. One participant who lives in an area of New



Figure 3: Roads felt safer for walking and cycling due to the lack of traffic (Image by N. Espiner, 2020)

² The 'red zone' is a largely uninhabited area of Christchurch's Central Business District which was severely damaged following the Christchurch Earthquakes in 2011

Zealand which is usually popular with tourists described how the lockdown initiated bonding between locals in his community:

The whole community here sort of quite liked the idea that there weren't any tourists for a while and there was a lot of sociability in terms of people just talking to each other. Because you pretty much knew that anyone you encountered was either a resident or they were maybe a seasonal worker who had got stuck here, but they were certainly living here for a period. They didn't just arrive off the boat as a day tripper (Franz)

Another participant described how seeing her neighbours out walking during the lockdown had prompted her to connect with them once the lockdown ended:

I ended up being Facebook friends with several neighbours because we all went out walking and established a greater rapport together with each other post our lockdown in terms of actually seeing us out walking. And normally we just kind of drive past each other—or you know, wave from in the car or wave from the house—but never really connect. But lockdown enabled us to connect because we were....it was different circumstances and we were all out walking (Mattie)

Integral to these descriptions of community bonding is a sense of solidarity. Harper illustrated how this sense of shared experience brought her community together:

It was quite funny because everyone was both trying to be cautious and not be too close to each other, but at the same time everyone is just like 'oh there's lots of people out' and you're just seeing everyone talking and laughing and having a good time even though we were in the middle of a pandemic. It felt like the community at that point, you could see everyone had come together and was just making it bearable (Harper)

On the other hand, a couple of participants mentioned the less positive aspects of community bonding during lockdown. In particular, the conflict with social distancing guidelines during the lockdown period was mentioned. Ralph explained why this community interaction made him uncomfortable:

One thing I was a little unhappy about I guess, I'm going: 'now I know those two families are not in the same bubble'— you know what I mean? Even up on the hills there were groups of young women and you know, teenagers and that all hanging out, yabbering, when they should have been at least a couple of metres apart (Ralph)

Creative recreation

While the large majority of participants limited their outdoor recreation to walking and cycling during the lockdown period, some people were more creative with their outdoor recreation. This was particularly true for those with children. For example, one family took picnics to their local urban park, while another wrote their names on a map using a GPS tracker to log their walking route, creating a digital trail. There were also a number of 'lockdown challenges' which the participants engaged in. Petra described a challenge in which her family 'bubble' walked the equivalent length of the Te Araroa Trail:

I chanced upon someone who had set up a Facebook group where the idea was that kilometres would be recorded and clocked against the Te Araroa Trail and so I thought 'oh that's a good idea'. And so you count all of the walking done by that entire bubble and put that in...So each day, I'd post how many kilometres our bubble had done...I carried on post-lockdown and I finished the trail. So I did 3,000 kilometres. Not me, that's the bubble—so the dog counts as part of the bubble! (Petra)

While for some creative recreation was entertainment for their children or themselves, others used it to push themselves out of their comfort zones. Runners were especially creative with these challenges. Running challenges which participants completed during the lockdown period included running every street in the neighbourhood, running 5km in the backyard, and running for 8 hours in one day. This last challenge was completed by Alex, who had never run that distance before lockdown. Alex explained his motivation for participating in this running challenge:

Hopefully I'm not going to be in lockdown too many times in my life so it's kind of cool to say oh yeah, we were in lockdown and I did this challenge (Alex)

Lockdown setting

Outdoor recreation was also more accessible for some than others during the lockdown period. Many participants expressed gratefulness for their location and accessibility of green spaces during the lockdown. Some participants had access to hills, while others enjoyed local forest tracks, beaches and rivers. One participant even happily remarked on an increase in dolphin sightings. Anita expressed this gratitude for her location during lockdown:

I didn't feel like I was really missing out on too much because of where I was. I was pretty thankful to be here and not stuck in a city (Anita)

Mattie was also grateful for her ability to access tracks from her house on a hill, and expressed sympathy for those who did not have those same opportunities:

I'm very lucky. I live on a hill in Christchurch, at the top of a hill and so my walking places were up the back onto tracks and within an hour I could be on the Summit Road and lovely places. Like I felt very sorry for people who were in town and all they could do was walk around blocks in town (Mattie)

Similarly, others were grateful for large gardens, as Hector recalled:

So we've got the old fashioned four bedroom bungalow on a quarter acre, and I remember saying to my wife early on: 'thank god we've got a decent sized section because we can potter around in the garden' (Hector)

On the other hand, those living in urban or suburban areas with limited access to green spaces did not feel so fortunate about their living situation during the lockdown period. The impact of this experience was so severe for one participant that after the lockdown she moved from Christchurch to the Malborough Sounds in order to live somewhere more 'lockdown friendly'. As Lydia explained:

It was definitely the part of lockdown that made me question why I was in Christchurch...Where I was in Wigram, there was only one little section of bush and the agriculture grounds...and then the rest of it is just running on footpaths, and so now I definitely appreciate green spaces a lot more. Kind of something I look for when I'm thinking about somewhere to live for a job: is it lockdown friendly? (Lydia)

Consequently, although most of the participants in this research felt grateful for their lockdown setting, most of the participants were also relatively wealthy, Pakeha, and described having some access to green spaces during the lockdown period. Therefore, this notion of one's residential setting being 'lockdown friendly' described by Lydia could be a major concern in a different demographic.

Stress and mental health during lockdown

Leading on from this, stress and mental health was a topic which was often discussed in relation to outdoor recreation during lockdown. Many participants described feeling 'frustrated' at not being able to do their usual activities or visit their favourite places for recreation. Again, this was particularly the case for those who did not have access to tracks and trails near their houses. As a result, a number of people mentioned the negative impact this had on their mental health. Chloe explained how the inability to train towards her outdoor recreation goals affected her:

You set yourself up at the start of the year with goals...and not being able to grow the skills at all or do anything that would contribute towards those goals. So everything

that you had planned just being thrown out the window...It was just disappointing, disheartening I guess (Chloe)

While Chloe was disappointed to not be able to train towards her goals, Tom described the toll that the outdoor recreation restrictions took on his family:

It was horrible and unexpected and a massive impact on me personally and also my children as well...what I didn't realise was how much doing that stuff was required to balance mood, manage emotions and just psychologically escape from everyday life. So I probably underestimated how much I am reliant on that stuff and my kids, it was very, very noticeable and felt very claustrophobic (Tom)

Tom's comment suggests that while he found the lockdown period stressful, it also helped him to realise the role that outdoor recreation plays in regulating stress and mental health for his family. On the other hand, a number of participants mentioned how despite the limitations on their outdoor recreation, they still managed to derive mental health benefits from their lockdown recreation. One participant commented that she 'would have gone insane' if she couldn't go outside for walks. Petra also felt that despite not being able to get into 'nature', walking around her suburb still helped her to relieve stress:

Because of Covid, my role is quite stressful so it did give me that stress relief and it gave me a sort of daily focus (Petra)

Alex also found that his lockdown recreation allowed him to regulate stress at work:

It's been a reasonably stressful year and I feel like if I hadn't been getting outside to exercise, I'd be feeling a lot flatter than I am....being able to get outside and exercise has brought a real release from those things and it's given me a lot of perspective to kind of journey through that (Alex)

Interim summary – Lockdown period

Overall, the lockdown period enabled most of the participants to continue to participate in some form of outdoor recreation—particularly walking and cycling—due to the lack of traffic and the need to regulate stress and mental health. As a result of this, some communities found solidarity in their walks, while others found new ways to be creative with their outdoor activity. The residential setting and access to green spaces also impacted stress and mental health, although most participants felt grateful for what they had. These results suggest that walking access to green spaces in different residential settings and demographics of New Zealand should be explored further.

Activity after the lockdown period

Immediately following the lockdown period, the restrictions on outdoor recreation were relaxed slightly as the country entered a Level 3 restriction period. This allowed some outdoor activities to commence—such as day walks on easy trails, local hunting, mountain-biking, swimming and other water-based activities—but within one’s local area under certain guidelines (<https://covid19.govt.nz/health-and-wellbeing/exercising-safely/#exercise-at-alert-level-3>). The interview data suggested that many people interpreted these guidelines differently, especially when it came to terms such as ‘local’, ‘safe’ and ‘experienced’ (with more activities permitted for those who consider themselves ‘experienced’). Despite most participants feeling somewhat satisfied with their lockdown outdoor recreation, almost all of the participants expressed an immediate positive response to being able to return to their outdoor pursuits. The participants variously described the feeling of being able to go into the great outdoors again as ‘wonderful’, ‘awesome’, and ‘a huge relief’. Chloe remembered that:

Everyone was just so happy to be there...stoked about being back out and doing what we love (Chloe)

Petra shared this sentiment, and used figurative language to describe how it felt to be allowed to do outdoor recreation again:

It was like getting released to play in a school when you’d had a hard day of school and now the bells gone and you can go to play (Petra)

It appeared that the participants in this research may not have been alone in feeling this way, however. Many of the participants reported huge increases in others’ outdoor activity immediately following the lift of the lockdown restrictions. Ralph mentioned noticing this on the first few trips he embarked on after the lockdown ended:

I think we went up to—where was it?—Mt Oxford, you know Coopers Creek way, and oh my god the carpark was full, it was chocca block...and even going up to Arthur’s Pass way...Unbelievable amount of people in there, it was crazy (Ralph)

Mattie shared a similar story:

I think immediately after lockdown happened...I did see a phenomenal increase. I think because we'd all been locked up and anyone who was a trumper was out in the hills. I heard stories from my mates who live over on the West Coast that they'd never seen 24 cars parked outside Cedar Flats which is a hot pool (Mattie)



Figure 4: Cars parked at a remote trailhead following the lockdown (Image by N. Espiner, 2020)

While most of the participants felt pleased to see so many New Zealanders enjoying the outdoors, others felt it detracted from the solitude of their outdoor experiences. As Franz explained:

To be honest...it was sort of marred by how everyone else was wanting to do the same thing. I got to this carpark and it was just ridiculous because the local authorities had not kept up with the change and so they hadn't lifted the barrier to the carpark so there were cars parked all up and down the road and it was just...it just reminded me of being in Auckland or something, there were just cars everywhere so that was kind of a bit disillusioning really (Franz)

Six months on

In the weeks and months following, the New Zealand government moved the country down to a Level 2 restriction, and then eventually a Level 1 restriction—which opened up the full range of outdoor recreation and domestic travel in the New Zealand winter. By the time the interviews were conducted, it had been six months since the end of the Level 4 lockdown, and all of New Zealand was at Alert Level 1. This section reflects the stories of the participants' personal recreation and observations of others in these six months following the lockdown.

Most people found that their outdoor recreation had returned to pre-lockdown levels, however a few people noted changes in their outdoor recreation since the lockdown ended. For example, Petra found that the walking she did in the lockdown period encouraged her to walk to work more often after lockdown:

Since lockdown, I have only driven to work five times. I made it my mission after the lockdown to walk to and from work...it was my walking around the streets in lockdown that gave me that drive (Petra)

A number of people also mentioned a shift in their priorities towards planning more outdoor recreation. Tom described this change for him and his friends:

There's been more emphasis on planning things...I guess we're just trying to make the most of it. So any opportunity we get, we're probably trying to go out there and do something. So, more so than we probably would have before lockdown (Tom)

Fitness was a factor for some people who had increased their outdoor recreation since the lockdown ended. A few people commented that the lockdown period have given them the time to build up their fitness. Alex explained how this happened to him:

So I've been running for ten years and this just kind of gave me a kind of good fitness base to be able to run for further, run for longer and therefore because of that fitness base, kind of set a few more goals (Alex)

Geoff also experienced increased fitness from walking during the lockdown, and reflected that this had enabled his family to be more adventurous since the lockdown ended:

My daughter, she's nearly 6...she built up quite a bit of walking fitness during the lockdown period and I think her strength got a lot more. To the point now where...we've walked up some of the bigger hills around here which are pretty, you know, a couple of them are pretty challenging...it's actually kind of allowed us, the family, to be more adventurous (Geoff)

Although changes in personal outdoor recreation were not commonly described, most of the participants had perceived changes in the activities of others since the lockdown ended—both within neighbourhoods and out on tracks and trails. The first major change which people had noticed was the lack of walking in their neighbourhoods, compared to during the lockdown period. Overall, most people thought that their neighbours who had been out walking during the lockdown were no longer doing so—or at least not locally. This was believed to be attributable to busy work schedules, or the attractiveness of alternative

walking areas further afield. Ralph described his observations of walking in his local community in lockdown, compared to six months later:

I think the thing that I noticed was how many people actually were getting out and going for walks and things like that which was conspicuous by its presence, but now it's conspicuous by its absence because you don't see those people out walking anymore (Ralph)

Franz made a similar observation of activity immediately following the lockdown, compared to six months on:

There was probably a bottled up pent up enthusiasm and yeah....it sort of settled down after a couple of weeks...I mean, just the other day I went back to the regional park and hardly saw a soul so it's quite different. (Franz)

While neighbourhood walking may have declined following the lockdown, the second perceived change in others' outdoor recreation was the increase in New Zealanders on tracks and trails. Hector, who was taking a year off work to travel with his wife, had noticed this through comparing his tramping before lockdown and after lockdown:

It was busier than I expected and I think that was because people saw the opportunity and had been cooped up so they said 'bugger it, we're going'...We certainly saw plenty of people on the tracks and trails...in the weekends they were chocca, so Friday and Saturday night the huts were full (Hector)

While Hector's observations came direct from the field, Petra had noticed this increased demand for tramping on social media:



Figure 5: Day-walkers observe the view from Banks Peninsula following the lockdown (Image by N. Espiner, 2020)

It's really, really evident on the Te Araroa Facebook page, there's a lot of local New Zealanders who had not considered doing something like walking the Te Araroa, who are now doing that and they're now doing that as a consequence of Covid (Petra)

Several participants also mentioned the popularity of cycling following the lockdown, particularly in relation to the sale of e-bikes. Walter was aware of this increase in bikes on the road, which he attributed to the ability to cycle safely during the lockdown:

I think from my perspective, because we tend to bike a lot, I've noticed there are more people on bikes now than there were before lockdown and I think that was probably caused by lockdown. People suddenly realised they could actually go out on a bike and get some exercise and there was much less traffic so it meant they were likely to bike on the road than they would have been before (Walter)

Appreciation

The overwhelming theme of the outdoor recreation discussions after the lockdown ended was the heightened sense of appreciation and gratefulness for New Zealand's outdoor settings. There were a large number of comments to choose from which encapsulated this renewed appreciation. Owen felt like he was 'rediscovering' his favourite tracks and trails, making his running even more enjoyable than it had been previous to lockdown:

I hadn't really thought about it until I got back there. And it was really cool. Just rediscovering it and it had been so long that it was even more fun... it think it was probably better just because I hadn't done it for so long (Owen)

Tom felt that the lockdown had not only renewed his appreciation for the outdoors, but helped him to understand that in the future he needs to prioritise time in the outdoors for himself as well as his children:

The outdoors is part of my identity and I didn't really understand how much of a role it played in my identity...I think it's put some things in perspective where prior to lockdown we worried about different things and then when that thing was taken away for me...it's become apparent that that's actually a really, really significant part of our lives and therefore needs to take a greater priority than what it has in the past (Tom)

Within this appreciation and reprioritisation, there was a sense of 'seizing the moment' recreation. More specifically, people felt that they wanted to make the most of the outdoors in case of another lockdown. Hanna explained how this feeling had made her reprioritise doing her outdoor recreation:

Well I suppose you think you just don't know what's around the corner, you better get out and do them before we're in lockdown again or there's another pandemic...I've always been somebody that's actioned things and planned things but we seem to be doing a lot of talking....and now, well we made plans and we're definitely going to do them (Hanna)

Petra summarised why she thought people were feeling this way after the lockdown period:

I think Covid gave people a greater appreciation of life, a greater feeling of what they had available to them...If you take something away from people, even if they didn't want it before, they want it afterwards (Petra)

As such, while most people did not believe that the lockdown had changed their level or form of outdoor recreation, many participants did comment that the lockdown had changed the way they feel about their outdoor recreation. Almost all of the participants mentioned feeling more grateful and appreciative of their ability to do outdoor recreation in New Zealand than they did previous to the lockdown.

Perspectives on travel

The final point of discussion for the section of the interview focuses on travel and holiday experiences after the lockdown. Many participants had completed travel within New Zealand in the six months following the lockdown. These trips were both new and postponed trips which could not be completed during the lockdown period.

Domestic tourism

A common theme was for participants to talk about the noticeable increase in New Zealanders travelling around the country. A number of people mentioned that the lack of international tourists was not actually noticeable, due to New Zealanders travelling instead. Alex mentioned this in relation to his travel experiences since the lockdown ended:

The places that I have been...have just kind of felt normal actually. They haven't felt any less busy (Alex)

This theme of some tourism appearing to be at normal levels was evident in mentions of the Department of Conservation's Great Walks. Many participants mentioned being surprised at the rapid rate at which some of these walks sold out online, as a substantial percentage of walkers on these tracks would normally be international tourists. Stefan discussed his surprise at the Great Walks still being difficult for New Zealanders to book, even without international tourists:

The Great Walks in particular, that's normally really difficult for Kiwis to get onto because they're booked years in advance and even still, I've heard people talking about the Milford Track and that's already booked out (Stefan)

In partial explanation of this sharp increase in New Zealanders on Great Walks, several participants discussed setting goals to complete Great Walks or the Te Araroa Trail before the borders reopen. This was either for personal challenge, substitution for overseas travel, or the chance to walk the trails without international tourists. Lydia was one of the participants who had considered walking the Te Araroa Trail (TA) or competing in the Coast to Coast since the lockdown ended:

I've kind of been considering the TA, the thought of doing the Coast to Coast has become more of a thing since lockdown in my mind (Lydia)

Similarly, Franz said he did not normally go on Great Walks, but this year he had booked two that he hadn't done before. He reflected on booking the Milford Track for 2021:

It's funny, it's one of those tracks that for years I've thought oh well, I'll leave that one for later, I'll leave that one for later and then I finally said to my two kids how about we just do it and they're keen (Franz)

Despite some people feeling frustrated at missing out on Great Walks due to record bookings, most people felt very positively about the demand for outdoor recreation and domestic tourism in New Zealand. As Ralph stated:

I'm really heartened to see that people are supporting New Zealand and getting out and travelling and going to places and using the facilities and booking in baches and houses and holiday homes... (Ralph)

Kevin had also noticed the number of New Zealanders travelling around the country, and noted through his involvement with a camping organisation that a lot of older New Zealanders have decided to sell their houses and buy recreational vehicles (RVs):

Something that we've noticed since lockdown is an increase in a lot of elderly people selling their family homes and buying smaller ones, downsizing or maybe even moving to a cheaper area. So what they've done is a lot of people are buying RVs (Kevin)

While none of the interview participants had purchased an RV since lockdown themselves, a number of them had taken advantage of cheap campervan rental deals to tour the country.

The outdoor recreationists had a variety of reasons for increasing their domestic tourism, including a newfound desire to travel since the lockdown, a compulsion to travel before international tourists return, and as a substitute for cancelled international travel. Hector was a particularly interesting example of someone who had changed his European travel plans to a New Zealand itinerary. He reflected on his two-month road trip around New Zealand:

For me, the New Zealand experience was a unique window where we were able to enjoy the freedom of movement and association that had been denied us during lockdown... We had many conversations with couples our age who were saying 'well we are meant to be in Europe, we're meant to be in Australia or visiting Canada' or whatever but they couldn't so they were doing what we were doing... So it's given people the opportunity to go 'hey, well actually you know, New Zealand is a pretty special place and let's enjoy it ourselves'. And that was part of our experience on the road trip was well, we're tourists in our country but there's good reason that tourists come here because it is so fantastic (Hector)

Hector's description of his experience of travelling in New Zealand post-lockdown showcases a variety of interesting themes about domestic travel which were touched upon in the interviews. In particular, his reflection describes domestic travel after the lockdown as a unique opportunity to be a 'tourist in [his] own country'. His comment also suggests a realisation or appreciation of why tourists come to New Zealand. Consequently, Hector's comment could be interpreted as illustrative of an outdoor recreation and tourism renaissance in New Zealand. While prior to the lockdown, New Zealanders may have felt less inclined to engage in tourism within New Zealand, the absence of international tourists enabled Hector, along with a number of other outdoor recreationists, to feel interested in travelling within their own country. This was also apparent from the number of participants who discussed future planned travel in New Zealand, and the distinct lack of interest in overseas travel once border reopened. This was despite the fact that a number of these participants had overseas travel planned prior to the lockdown period. Levi summarised his feelings on overseas travel now:

For recreation and holidays I actually don't feel the need to go overseas, because what we have here is so good (Levi)

Others had become more aware of the environmental impacts of aviation, wanted to 'boycott' carbon, or did not feel comfortable to travel in the near future due to the risk of contracting Covid-19. One particularly memorable comment came from Hanna, who despite having flights to Europe booked prior to the pandemic, had decided that she and her husband probably would not travel overseas ever again:

We probably won't go overseas again even if we get through the whole global lockdown sort of thing...just think the gloss has gone off travelling overseas for us...and I'm quite excited and quite looking forward to different trips in New Zealand because I feel satisfied with what I've done overseas and I think we've got loads here (Hanna)

Once again, Hanna's comment displays a rebirth of domestic tourism and a newfound positivity around travelling in New Zealand.

International tourism

The dramatic reduction of international tourism in the lockdown and post-lockdown periods has given New Zealanders the opportunity to reflect on the benefits and challenges of international tourism in New Zealand. We asked outdoor recreationists how they felt about international tourism in New Zealand. We asked outdoor recreationists how they felt about the future of tourism in New Zealand. More often than not, the first thing the participants made reference to was the importance of international tourism to the New Zealand economy. Comments about the economy were generally quite brief, for example: "we definitely need international tourists back" (Stefan) and "it's good for our economy. We need their money" (Anita).

Discussions about the economy were imbued with concerns about the value various tourists bring to New Zealand. Mattie explained her concerns about attracting low-value tourists to New Zealand from an outdoor recreation point of view:



Figure 6: Freedom campers crowd a carpark in Golden Bay prior to the pandemic (Image by N. Espiner, 2019)

I think we've tended to attract very low value people who are not really respecting our backcountry. They're coming with an attitude of take and not give and I think that needs to be changed (Mattie)

On the other hand, Hector felt that these 'low-value' tourists were vital to the New Zealand economy for other reasons:

I've been a bit cynical about us selling out to low grade tourists, these campervanners and backpackers...but now that I'm working with them I realise how valuable they are to our local economy in terms of fruit picking which is very important to our Central Otago economy (Hector)

Nonetheless, discussions of the economy were usually superficial and a preface to expressions of concern about the impacts of international tourism on the natural and social environment in New Zealand. Mason felt that tourism was partially responsible for the declining state of native forests, particularly in relation to issues such as Kauri dieback. As he explained:

Most people have no understanding of how vulnerable our forests are and tourism is not helping (Mason)

Geoff also expressed concern about the impact of over-tourism on the environment at tourist sites in New Zealand:

There's no doubt in my mind that the international tourism is damaging the natural environment...it is damaging the environment and it is damaging the beauty of what we're trying to sell to the international tourists (Geoff)

As a response to these issues, a few people suggested that New Zealand should reimagine its approach to tourism and focus on more sustainable forms of tourism, such as regenerative tourism. Franz explained how this might work:

There's a lot of talk here on the island about the idea of restorative tourism...forms of tourism that involve a sort of a lighter footprint. And there are even forms of tourism that would involve people actually getting their hands dirty, maybe even literally. You know, planting trees or helping with something and you know, feeling like somehow or other they are participating rather than just observing from a tour bus (Franz)

Beyond the perceived negative impacts of international tourism on the natural environment, the experiential environment was also a common theme discussed by the participants in relation to international tourism. In particular, the number of people in wilderness areas was

a key issue. Hanna explained the impact of over-tourism on her outdoor recreation experiences:

I remember doing the Tongariro Crossing maybe 40 years ago and it felt like we were the only ones on the mountain but I did it not so long ago when I was still able to walk and it was like a pilgrimage...It was just like a long line of people in front of us and when you look behind you, it was just a long line of people behind you...and that's kind of sad for me. It's not the same experience when there's 1,000 people walking over the walk...that's when it loses its appeal for me (Hanna)

The over-tourism on the Tongariro Crossing was mentioned by a number of participants, including Chloe who also felt that there were just too many people:

I mean it gets to the point where there's too many people and that's really frustrating...I think we need to control the numbers somehow. If you look at the thousands of people a day doing the Tongariro Crossing, it's too many people (Chloe)

Similarly, Tom felt that there were too many tourists in some places before the pandemic, and that New Zealand now has an opportunity to decide how many tourists is right in these areas. As he explained:

I think it's kind of an opportunity to stand back, have a look and go well how many people can it actually tolerate before it's starting to have a negative impact on those local users and also on the environment itself? (Tom)



Figure 7: Tourists by Lake Pukaki prior to the pandemic (Image by N. Espiner, 2019)

A major component of the number of tourists in certain places in New Zealand was the effect this has on New Zealanders' ability to access the outdoors and tourism attractions. Cost was also a factor which was often linked to Kiwi access, and something which had noticeably changed after the lockdown. A number of outdoor recreationists mentioned the benefits of the absence of international tourists in relation to both access and cost. Mattie thought it was heartening to see so many New Zealanders being able to access tourist activities:

You can go and experience stuff that normally the tourists would be doing and you wouldn't get a leg in the door because there's so many tourists there. So Kiwis are getting out and doing that now and I think is so heartening (Mattie)

Similarly, Harper mentioned that the discounts which tourism businesses have had to put in place since the lockdown ended have had a positive impact by making tourist attractions more affordable for New Zealanders:

I've noticed with all of the Covid stuff, especially straight after lockdown, a lot of businesses have put in more discounts or special deals to get people to go do their activities and things but it's made it affordable for us to actually be able to (Harper)

A couple of the outdoor recreationists felt that in the future, tourism should be more affordable and accessible for New Zealanders than it has been in the past. For example, a couple of people mentioned differential pricing or priority of booking for domestic and international tourists.

I hope that when the borders open again, they don't go back to over-charging for activities that would close out the opportunity for New Zealanders (Walter)

Overall, at the core of these discussions was the theme of a need for balance in New Zealand tourism. This was not only in terms of a more balanced economic reliance on international tourism, but a balance between tourism and environmental preservation. A number of participants mentioned 'finding a balance' as both an opportunity from the border closures and a potential solution to economic and environmental issues associated with tourism in New Zealand. Franz felt that this balance was currently not quite right, and that the country is too reliant on tourism:

You can't have sort of a totally open ended growth in tourism....you can try and contain it to places but then those places become totally degraded and so it is a real issue. It's probably a matter of balance and trying to diversify the economy a little bit and recognise that perhaps we've swung too far towards tourism (Franz)

Geoff also reflected on the state of tourism prior to the pandemic, and felt that tourism in the future should shift to a more environmentally-focussed approach:

It had begun to feel to me, for all of us, that we were losing the balance a bit...and I certainly feel that moving forward, we need to be thinking about our environment a bit more and actually saying 'look, yes tourism is great and it's going to give us income and revenue and businesses, but we can't destroy what we've got here' (Geoff)

Overall, these comments on the future of tourism in New Zealand reflect a strong sense of environmental awareness among outdoor recreationists and a vision for a future of tourism in New Zealand which is more accessible, more affordable, and more sustainable than it has been in the past. This is consistent with emerging research from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Tourism Futures Taskforce (One Picture, 2020).

Consequently, the outdoor recreationists in this study had experienced a number of impacts on their experiences of outdoor recreation and tourism since the lockdown. These impacts included changes to their personal perceptions and behaviour, as well as perceived changes in others' behaviour. The following section will summarise these changes and discuss some possible implications and next steps.

6. Concluding discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on New Zealand and the world in the year 2020. In New Zealand, a national lockdown for a period of 5 weeks confined New Zealanders to their local neighbourhoods and severely limited their freedoms to participate in outdoor recreation. This project aimed to investigate the impacts of this national lockdown period on outdoor recreationists' activity and perceptions of tourism and recreation. While at the time of writing we cannot predict the future course of the Covid-19, we can reflect on the broad impacts of this lockdown period for outdoor recreationists in New Zealand at this point in time.

This project involved 20 interviews discussing outdoor recreation and tourism activity with outdoor recreationists in New Zealand. These qualitative interviews took a chronological approach to exploring participants' outdoor recreation activity during and after the lockdown period. The interviews also explored participants' perceptions of tourism and their opinions on the future of tourism in New Zealand.

The participants' experiences reflected that the lockdown period saw substantial increases in outdoor walking across New Zealand. Many of the outdoor recreationists found escape in their ability to walk during the lockdown period, while others used walking as a substitute for other restricted forms of outdoor recreation. By far the most commonly discussed aspect of walking during the lockdown was the visible increase in walking in neighbourhoods. Several of the participants described being astounded at the number of people walking in their communities, or seeing neighbours walking who they had never seen walking before. This epidemic of walking—if it may be called that—was ubiquitous across New Zealand and made easier by the lack of traffic on roads. It also enabled neighbours and communities to spontaneously meet on their streets and feel united in solidarity.

Another impact of the lockdown described by the outdoor recreationists in the study was the propensity for being creative with one's recreation during the lockdown period. Many of the participants had engaged in a new or different form of recreation during the lockdown period, or had taken on a challenge that they would not normally have done. These challenges included long-distance running within a small area such as a neighbourhood block or backyard, and tracking walking kilometres against a significant trail. Both the neighbourhood walking and creative recreation were believed to be temporary phenomena, however, which rapidly decreased after the lockdown ended. Nonetheless, while lockdown habits may have been specific to the restricted period, these practices may have had broader impacts on outdoor recreation.

For one, outdoor recreationists commonly reported feeling more appreciative for their outdoor recreation and for New Zealand's great outdoors. This increased appreciation for and connection with nature was also reported in another research project conducted during the lockdown period (Manaaki Whenua: Landcare Research, 2020). While most people felt grateful for their living situation during lockdown—especially those with access to parks, rivers and beaches—it was also a welcome change to be able to re-enter wilderness areas and resume recreation restricted by the pandemic response. The lockdown period also gave many people the opportunity to realise the importance of outdoor recreation in their lives. Consequently, a number of participants described reprioritising outdoor recreation or planning more trips after lockdown. Overall, the changes to the outdoor recreationists' activity after lockdown ended were mostly psychological, rather than physical. Nonetheless, these psychological changes had impacts in practice. In particular, this was evident in the participants' perceptions of the increases in the number of people on tracks, on bikes, and in huts. These observations are consistent with DOC visitor insights on campsite and hut use over the New Zealand 2020/2021 summer. Visitor monitoring reveals that a number of Great Walks huts, backcountry huts and campsites were experiencing increased visitation over the New Zealand summer, while places popular with international tourists such as Milford Sound and Aoraki Mount Cook saw a decline in numbers (Richardson, 2021).

The events of 2020 have also prompted many New Zealanders to consider the future of tourism in New Zealand. From our participants' perspectives, domestic tourism was perceived to be thriving, with New Zealanders travelling all around the country and visiting new places since the lockdown ended. Many of the participants had travelled or considered travelling to new places in New Zealand, and almost all of the participants mentioned feeling happy to travel in New Zealand for the time being. Some participants had experienced a decrease in their desire to travel overseas in the future, as they were satisfied with what New Zealand has to offer—particularly while there are fewer international tourists at tourist attractions. The outdoor recreationists' perspectives on tourism collectively might suggest a rebirth of domestic tourism in New Zealand.

Furthermore, outdoor recreationists generally felt that international tourism is important for New Zealand, but had some concerns about the number of tourists and the impact that international tourism has on the natural and social environment in the recent past. A 2020 report from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Tourism Futures Taskforce reached similar conclusions on New Zealanders' perceptions of international tourism (One Picture, 2020). Overall, there is evidence to suggest that while outdoor recreationists in New Zealand believe tourism is important to the economy, they are unsure that the balance between profit and preservation is at equilibrium.

It is unclear whether the changes and perceptions highlighted here will persist in the coming months and years. However, based on the experiences of these outdoor recreationists—as well as the emerging statistical data which shows an increased demand for outdoor recreation such as tramping, camping, and cycling—it is evident that broadly, the lockdown period has affected the activity and perceptions of outdoor recreationists in New Zealand. Perspectives on tourism were also altered by the lockdown period, and will be further impacted by the growing awareness (and likely future regulation) of climate change and more carbon sensitive travel. Other emerging tourism research has also discussed the implications of the pandemic for advancing and resetting tourism around the world, both in practice and research (Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020; Sigala, 2020).

It should be noted that this study had some limitations. First of all, the use of participants' memories of activities which occurred up to six months in the past could mean that the reported experiences were not entirely accurate to each Alert Level. For example, some participants may have had trouble distinguishing in between activities they did at Level 4, and activities they did at Level 3. While this could suggest that relying on participant recall is empirically problematic, it can also be argued that the construction and retention of memories also represents a direct link to ingrained meanings of experiences in the past, in the present (Keightley, 2010; Onyx & Small, 2001).

Another limitation of this research was that the recruitment and sampling of participants may have limited the socio-demographic profile of the participants. Although interview participants were selected from a pool of volunteers to include a variety of ages, regions, genders and education levels, most of the volunteers were still relatively wealthy, Pakeha, high-school or tertiary educated and described having some access to green spaces during the lockdown period. Recruitment through social media, and the voluntary nature of both completing the survey and indicating interest in an interview may have impacted the sample profile. Future research could examine differences across groups in relation to factors such as ethnicity, region, age or income. Demographics of outdoor recreationists in New Zealand may have also contributed to the participant profile in this research. Existing statistics profiling those actively involved in outdoor recreation show that minority groups and those with low incomes and without higher education are under-represented in participation statistics (Manning, 2011; New Zealand Recreation Association, 2018). Ongoing research in this area might investigate the impacts of the lockdown on the outdoor recreation activity of all New Zealanders, not just those self-selecting as outdoor recreationists.

As a result of these limitations, there is an opportunity for interested parties to delve further into the inner workings of these changes in order to uncover how this demand and

enthusiasm for outdoor recreation might best be harnessed for all New Zealanders. Future research could also take a more longitudinal approach to explore how behaviour and perceptions are affected in the long term. If this is done well, perhaps the enduring legacy of lockdown - and the wider effect of the pandemic - could be an outdoor recreation renaissance and a re-imagining of tourism in New Zealand.

7. Appendices

Appendix A

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled:

Exploring New Zealanders' outdoor recreation and domestic tourism activity since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic

The aim of the research project:

To explore people's involvement in nature-based recreation and tourism since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic

Your participation in this project will involve:

Your agreement to be interviewed over the phone about your recreation in nature-based settings since the emergence of the Covid19 pandemic. The interview will be much like a conversation and will likely take between 30-45 minutes. We would like to record the interview to refer to at a later date, but will not do so without your consent.

What will happen with the information you give me:

The results of the project may be published or presented (e.g., at a conference), but you may be assured of your anonymity. Your name will not be made public or made known to any persons other than those on the research team (listed over the page), and the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee (in the event of an audit). To ensure anonymity, individual interview data (our transcribed conversation) will be stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the researchers. Any published work will use a pseudonym, and no other identifying information will be published.

What to do if you change your mind:

You are free to cancel the interview, to decline to answer questions, and to stop the interview at any time. If, after the interview, you want to withdraw any information you have provided, please contact any member of the research team (listed over the page) by 16 November 2020.

Note: this research has been approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions, or would like to withdraw your consent to participate in the research (by 16 November 2020), please contact any one of the research team (see below). You do not have to give a reason.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher: Stephen Espiner

Associate Professor of Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Department of Tourism, Sport and Society
Faculty of Environment, Society and Design
F711, 7th floor, Forbes Building

PO Box 85084

Lincoln University

Lincoln 7647

Christchurch

New Zealand

Ph. 03 423 0485

E: Stephen.Espiner@lincoln.ac.nz

Researcher: Emma Stewart

Associate Professor of Parks & Tourism

Department of Tourism, Sport and Society
Faculty of Environment, Society and Design

F712, 7th floor, Forbes Building

PO Box 85084

Lincoln University

Lincoln 7647

Christchurch

New Zealand

Ph. 03 423 0500

E: Emma.Stewart@lincoln.ac.nz

Researcher: Gebeyaw Degarege

Lecturer

Department of Tourism, Sport and Society
Faculty of Environment, Society and Design
F716, 7th floor, Forbes Building

PO Box 85084

Lincoln University

Lincoln 7647

Christchurch

New Zealand

Ph. 03 423 0488

E: Gebeyaw.Degarege@lincoln.ac.nz

Research assistant: Niamh Espiner

Research assistant

Department of Tourism, Sport and Society
Faculty of Environment, Society and Design

F810, 8th floor, Forbes Building

PO Box 85084

Lincoln University

Lincoln 7647

Christchurch

New Zealand

Ph. 03 423 0488

E: Niamh.Espiner@lincolnuni.ac.nz

Appendix B

INTERVIEW GUIDE / TELEPHONE SCRIPT

Project title: Exploring New Zealanders' outdoor recreation and domestic tourism activity since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic

Telephone script

Hi, this is Niamh Espiner calling from Lincoln University – how are you today?

I am just following up on the survey you filled out for us about outdoor recreation and the March-April Level 4 lockdown, are you still happy to take part in an interview?

The interview should take about 30-45 minutes.

- a) *If NO:* No worries. Thanks so much for your interest in our study!
- b) *If YES:* Is now a good time?
 - *If YES:* Great, thank you. Let's get started then.
 - *If NO:* If now is not a good time, we can organise another time for me to call you back and do the interview then. I can also set up an online video call if you'd prefer. When would be a better time for you?

Before we begin, I'd just like to remind you of a few things about our study.

So as you know from the survey, the research is looking at New Zealanders' outdoor activity since the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The questions I am going to ask you today will be themed around your outdoor recreation experiences in nature-based settings in New Zealand. With your permission, I would like to make an audio recording of the interview to refer to at a later date. Are you happy for me to start the recording now?

So now that we are recording, I will just explain a few key terms of the interview and get you to confirm on record that you consent to take part.

The results of this project may end up being published or presented, but your name will not be made public or made known to anyone other than our research team here at Lincoln University. We will use a fake name when quoting anything you have said, and the information you provide will be stored securely on a password-protected computer, which is only accessible by the researchers. You are free to decline to answer questions, and to stop the interview at any time. If, after the interview, you want to withdraw any information you have provided, please contact me by 16 November 2020.

Do you have any questions about the interview before we get started?

Can I ask you to please verbally indicate (yes or no) your consent to take part in this interview?

Interview guide

Theme 1: Individual patterns prior to Covid19

So first of all, I'm going to ask you to tell me a bit about the kinds of recreation you did prior to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Can you tell me a bit about your history and experience with outdoor recreation?
 - Length of involvement/experience
 - Locations (backcountry, local) and activities (overnight, day trip), NZ/overseas?
 - Company (friends, family, club?)
 - Frequency of engagement
 - Motives

Theme 2: Lockdown recreation

- Types of recreation during lockdown
- How did you feel about your ability to do outdoor recreation during lockdown?
- Did you plan/think about outdoor recreation you would do after lockdown?
 - Holidays?
- Did you experience any changes in the way you thought about nature / the environment during lockdown?

Theme 3: Outdoor recreation since Covid19 lockdown

- Can you tell me about when you first ventured out into the great outdoors after lockdown?
 - What were your early experiences of outdoor recreation after lockdown like?
 - Did you notice any changes in the way places were used?
 - What was different? Possible prompts: more/fewer/ different people, better/worse paths/parking, more/less litter, different behavior, driving challenges?
 - How did you feel about these changes then/now?
- Have you changed the places or the ways you carry out your outdoor recreation activity?

- Possible prompts: Is there somewhere you didn't used to go but now do? Are there activities you hadn't engaged with in a long time but since lockdown have? Have you been more or less active?
- Since the March Covid19 lockdown, have you engaged in or planned any trips that you might not otherwise have done?
 - Did you plan any extra holidays?
 - Did you cancel any plans?

Theme 4: Future of tourism and outdoor recreation

- Overall, how would you summarise the changes to your/others' outdoor recreation in NZ compared to before lockdown?
 - Have you planned more / different trips?
 - Have you visited somewhere new / revisited somewhere you hadn't been in a while?
 - How have you felt when in natural areas since lockdown? Is this different to before?
- Are there places you would like to visit in NZ that you didn't before?
- And finally, a few questions about tourism. How do you feel about the future of tourism in NZ?
 - What do you think domestic tourism will look like over the next few years?
 - Will you continue to travel domestically for leisure once borders reopen?
 - Are there certain places you would not visit once borders reopen?
 - How do you feel about the eventual return of international tourists to New Zealand's natural areas?
 - What do you think should change about tourism in New Zealand before borders reopen?
 - How soon do you think New Zealand should reopen its borders to (quarantined) international tourists?
 - How do you think your personal outdoor recreation would be impacted once borders reopen? Others?

8. References

- Ateljevic, I. (2020). Transforming the (tourism) world for good and (re)generating the potential 'new normal'. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 467-475. doi:10.1080/14616688.2020.1759134
- Brouder, P. (2020). Reset redux: possible evolutionary pathways towards the transformation of tourism in a COVID-19 world. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 484-490. doi:10.1080/14616688.2020.1760928
- Brownlie, K. (2020, 22 August). Boom for New Zealand's Great Walks, but Auckland hotels begging for help. Retrieved from <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/travel/2020/08/boom-for-new-zealand-s-great-walks-but-auckland-hotels-begging-for-help.html>
- Department of Conservation. (2020). *Visitor asset utilisation report: Godley Head, Pilgrims Way Trck*. Retrieved from <http://counterreports.doc.govt.nz/var/100095963.html>
- Department of Conservation. (2020). *New Zealanders in the outdoors: Domestic customer segmentation research*. Retrieved from <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/role/visitor-research/new-zealanders-in-the-outdoors.pdf>
- Dunn, K. (2010). Interviewing. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, C. M., Scott, D., & Gössling, S. (2020). Pandemics, transformations and tourism: be careful what you wish for. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 577-598. doi:10.1080/14616688.2020.1759131
- Haywood, K. M. (2020). A post COVID-19 future - tourism re-imagined and re-enabled. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 599-609. doi:10.1080/14616688.2020.1762120
- Institute for Outdoor Learning. (2020). *Outdoor learning COVID-10 impact surveys for organisations and outdoor professionals*. Retrieved from <https://www.outdoor-learning.org/Portals/0/IOL%20Documents/Covid-19/COVID-19%20IMPACT%20SURVEY%20REPORT%2012MAY2020.pdf?ver=2020-05-12-140350-380>
- Ioannides, D., & Gyimóthy, S. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for escaping the unsustainable global tourism path. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 624-632. doi:10.1080/14616688.2020.1763445
- Keightley, E. (2010). Remembering research: memory and methodology in the social sciences. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 13(1), 55-70. doi:10.1080/13645570802605440
- Lock, H. (2020, April 29). Cycling popularity changes gear during lockdown and supporters look to capitalise. *RNZ*. Retrieved from <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/415435/cycling-popularity-changes-gear-during-lockdown-and-supporters-look-to-capitalise>
- Manaaki Whenua: Landcare Research. (2020). Slowing down enabled connection with nature. Retrieved from <https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/news/slowing-down-enabled-connection-with-nature/>
- Manning, R. E. (2011). *Studies in outdoor recreation : search and research for satisfaction* (3rd ed.. ed.). Corvallis: Corvallis : Oregon State University Press.
- Manson, B. (2020, 13 August). Kiwis flock to our own island getaways. *Stuff*. Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/back-your-backyard/300079528/kiwis-flock-to-our-own-island-getaways>
- McAvinue, S. (2020). Bike sales booming since lockdown. *Otago Daily Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/bike-sales-booming-lockdown>
- Nepal, S. K. (2020). Adventure travel and tourism after COVID-19 – business as usual or opportunity to reset? *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), 646-650. doi:10.1080/14616688.2020.1760926

- New Zealand Government. (2020). History of the COVID-19 Alert System. Retrieved from <https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-system/history-of-the-covid-19-alert-system/>
- New Zealand Recreation Association. (2018). *Outdoor recreation in a superdiverse New Zealand*. Retrieved from https://issuu.com/newzealandrecreationassociation/docs/nzra_insights_report_1_diversity_in
- NZHerald. (2020, 16 July). Skiers in record numbers at Queenstown resorts, but overall visitors down. Retrieved from https://www.nzherald.co.nz/travel/news/article.cfm?c_id=7&objectid=12348614
- One Picture. (2020). *Unlocking the value of future tourism: The voice of New Zealanders*. Retrieved from <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/13598-appendix-b-1-unlocking-future-tourism-onepicture-and-tnz-research-october-2020>
- Onyx, J., & Small, J. (2001). Memory-work: The method. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), 773-786.
- Reisinger, Y. (2009). *International tourism: Cultures and behaviour*. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Richardson, B. (2021). Tourist hotspots cool over summer - DOC. *Tourism Ticker*. Retrieved from <https://www.tourismticker.com/2021/04/22/tourism-hotspots-grow-cooler-over-summer-doc/>
- RNZ. (2020, 18 August). Demand high for Milford Track bookings as trampers snap up places in minutes. Retrieved from <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/423834/demand-high-for-milford-track-bookings-as-trampers-snap-up-places-in-minutes>
- Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice*: Sage.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing : the art of hearing data* (2nd ed.. ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage Publications.
- Sigala, M. (2020). Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and implications for advancing and resetting industry and research. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 312-321. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.015>
- Smith, A. (2020, 27 May). Bike sales booming: Post-lockdown sales make up for closure. *NZHerald*. Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/bike-sales-booming-post-lockdown-sales-make-up-for-closure/QJHG24IJYWPBOX5U5SB3BX3E2Q/>
- Sport New Zealand. (2020). Play, active recreation and sport at Alert Level 4. Retrieved from <https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/play-active-recreation-and-sport-at-alert-level-4/>
- Steyl, L. (2020, 17 August). Coronavirus: Southland tourism industry sees unexpected growth. Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/122470860/coronavirus-southland-tourism-industry-sees-unexpected-growth>
- Tourism Industry Aotearoa. (2020). Quick facts & figures: Tourism by the numbers. Retrieved from <https://tia.org.nz/about-the-industry/quick-facts-and-figures/>
- Tourism New Zealand. (2020). *School Holidays Domestic Tourism Report*. Retrieved from <https://reports.dataventures.nz/population/20200720-tourism-new-zealand-school-holidays-report-20th-july-2020.html>
- Tourism New Zealand. (2021). New Zealand: Market overview. Retrieved from <https://www.tourismnewzealand.com/markets-stats/markets/new-zealand/>
- Whanganui & Partners. (2020a). New record set for July visitor spend. Retrieved from <https://www.whanganuiandpartners.nz/news-posts/july-visitor-spend>
- Whanganui & Partners. (2020b, 07 August). Visitors Flock To Whanganui Over Winter. Retrieved from <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/AK2008/S00158/visitors-flock-to-whanganui-over-winter.htm>
- Young Explorers' Trust. (2020). *Expedition providers in the UK: A report on the impact of Covid-19*. Retrieved from