

**Summary:**

# National Scenic Roads in Norway

This report summarises the main findings of surveys of road-users at four scenic roads in Norway in the summer seasons of 1995 and 1997. The surveys were initiated by the Norwegian Public Roads Administration as part of the development of a national Scenic-Roads Program. One of the main objectives of the Scenic-Roads Program is to contribute to the development of the national tourism industry. The analysis of tourists' experiences of scenic roads is an important contribution to the understanding of summer tourism in Norway, where half of the foreign motor tourists are on a round trip (cf. Jacobsen & Haukeland 1994). Knowledge of different tourist highway experiences is important both to road administration authorities, tourism marketers and scholars, since the uses of the scenic roads are vital to the national tourism industry.

Although it is the objective of several scenic-road programs to protect and enhance the scenic, cultural, and historical assets within the scenic road corridors, comparatively little attention has been directed to understanding the users' experiences of such roads. The planning, design and marketing of scenic roads must be based on how visitors experience both these roads and their attractions and environments (cf. Gunn 1988:23–35). A basic knowledge of the characteristics of those motorists using the scenic highways is essential in order to effectively implement resources.

The first part of the report discusses the phenomenon of scenic roads. The focus here is mainly on the scenic road as a tourism attraction. To be considered an attraction, a road must either be perceived by visitors as being special or extraordinary or it must lead to important attractions. The main objective of the empirical part of the report is to describe the actual use of the roads. The route-choice motives of the motorists are explored. Moreover, some of the perceptions that such tours entail are included. Additional aspects are identification of road-use problems, the lack of facilities and other weak points as experienced by the users. Further, the report deals with the particular benefits motorists seek when they choose to travel along these specific Norwegian scenic highways.

Romanticism provides an important background for today's use of scenic roads in the mountainous landscapes of Norway. Early tourists in Norway were characterised by a love of physical activity for its own sake combined with a romantic fascination of mountains. This type of tourism is partly explained as a search for the very quintessence of wild or untamed landscapes. Today's travel to the Norwegian fjords, coastal areas and mountain plateaux is also explained as a component of green tourism. Green tourism

generally appears to be a result of an increasing interest in the environment and its constituency. This kind of tourism seems to be a variable phenomenon. Green tourism can be understood as an escape from everyday life, as a protest against modern life and as a rejection of the artificial. The green trend also includes communication with a vanishing nature and aesthetic or romantic outdoor experiences. The unique right to trespass in the forests, mountains and seashores gives tourists an almost free access to hiking, walking and camping in non-populated or non-agricultural areas – making Norway especially interesting to motor tourists with an interest in enjoying proximity to nature.

The surveys were conducted during selected days from the end of June to the middle of August in 1995 and 1997. The questionnaires were distributed and collected at two points at each of the national scenic highways included in this study. A random sample of road-users were stopped by the Road Administration staff and asked to answer a questionnaire, which was available in five languages: English, French, German, Norwegian and Swedish. The highways included in the surveys are not classified as parkways; they are not functionally restricted and also serve motorists who use them for non-recreational purposes, for instance as a quick passage (cf. Hoel & Perfater 1992:16). Consequently, commercial vehicles and local traffic by residents of the areas along the route were excepted from the survey. A total of about 6300 questionnaires were returned to the staff. Nearly 100 questionnaires were incomplete and rejected, making the effective sample size 6217. The response rate is between 80 and 90 per cent. As with all sample surveys the results are tinged with uncertainty. Both the sampling procedure and the design of the questionnaire imply that some caution must be used in interpreting the results.

The principal aspect influencing the motorists' choice of their particular route is the view from the road. A varied landscape is also very important. Further, the surveys show that there is great interest in experiencing landscapes such as the fjords, the high mountains, and, in one case, also the coast. For many of the motorists, it was convenient to take the particular road.

On an average, the road-users made four stops on their trip along the national scenic highways included in the surveys. Most of the stops are related to visual experiences such as a more prolonged look at the view and taking pictures or filming. One third of the road-users took short walks near the road, and the same proportion stopped by a river, a lake or by the sea. Only one in eight went for a long walk (more than 30 minutes) or hiked in the mountains. Two in five motorists pulled over at rest areas to eat their own food, and one in four pulled off the highway in order to eat their own food at places other than rest areas. One in four stopped at cafes and restaurants. On the scenic roads that go through high mountains, a considerable number of motorists stopped to play in the snow.

Heavy traffic is regarded as a negative aspect by one fourth of the scenic road users. One in five motorists find that the speed makes it difficult to enjoy the view from the road. Moreover, the same proportion of road users feels that

there are too many road tunnels along some of the routes. Another important problem is littering along the roads and at some rest areas. Other, minor problems are vegetation that block the view along three of the roads, road cuts and fills marring the landscape, and some run-down areas along parts of the roads. On two of the scenic roads, the users regard queues at the fjord ferries as somewhat negative.

Two in five motorists feel that there are too few toilets along their route. One third are of the opinion that there are not enough filling stations. One in four would like more marked hiking trails. One in five motorists think that there are too few rest areas and picnic areas along these scenic roads. Approximately one in six find that there are too few campsites, hotels/pensions, cafes and restaurants. Most of the road users are satisfied with the quality of the new information signs along some of the roads.

The empirical findings are briefly discussed in relation to previous research. The study confirms the importance of the gaze or the vision in motor tourism (cf. Urry 1990). It seems that many of the motorists surveyed drive through the varied landscape as if they were watching a film. This attitude is related to an enjoyment of the actual progress of the tour and a perception of the driving itself as an experience. The surveys further indicate conflicting interests between different types of users, especially between those who use the highway as a quick passage and those who find that the speed makes it difficult to enjoy the view from the road. The surveys also show that the roads studied are both highways and byways, depending on the situation of the actual user. Moreover, it appears that user expectations increase when a road is called a scenic road.

One limitation of this study lies with the self-reported measures of opinions and attitudes. A second limitation is that the surveys cover only certain aspects of the users' cognisance of the scenic highways. In order to compensate for these deficiencies, further investigations should include more-detailed studies of actual route-choice behaviour, especially decision-making processes en route. It might, for instance, be necessary to use personal interviews as a supplement to surveys based on questionnaires.