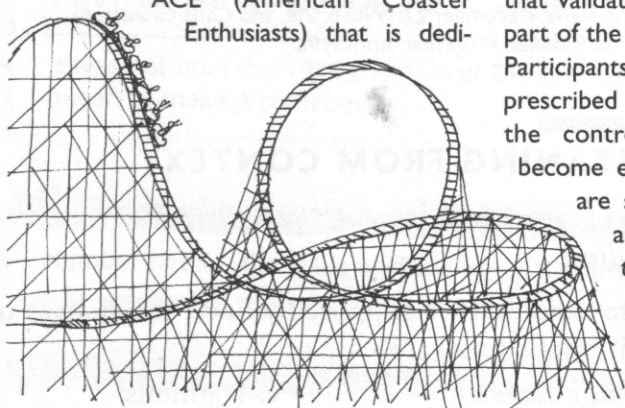


engaging in hobbies, comes in at 2.7 hours a week. Judging from these statistics, we might conclude that many Americans seem to enjoy being couch potatoes. Now, if you want to spend your leisure time channel surfing, that's your choice. There are, however, many rewarding pursuits out there. With all the extra leisure time that we supposedly have, it behooves us to know how to spend it interestingly. Here are three of the more unusual and interesting popular hobbies.

Roller coasting has become so popular that there's even an organization called ACE (American Coaster Enthusiasts) that is dedi-



cated to preserving, appreciating, and enjoying roller coasters. The precursors of roller coasters originated in Russia as ice slides built high into the air, and the first actual mechanical roller coasters were also constructed in Russia. From there the idea migrated to Paris, where a kind of roller coaster with wheels was built in 1804.

Eventually the roller coaster made its way to the United States, with more and more coasters being built until Depression times. Then they began to fall out of fashion, and many were torn down. It was not until the 1950s, with Walt Disney's opening of the first Disneyland, that roller coasters began to make a comeback. Now they're being built at breakneck speed. Marie Miller, a member of ACE now in her eighties, is a major enthusiast. She figures she's ridden on most of the roller coasters in the United States, saying, "There was a time

when I rode every wooden coaster in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, but I can't keep up with them. One thing's certain: I'll never stop riding until I'm in my grave."

Another fascinating pastime is orienteering, a combination of map reading and cross-country skiing or running. Orienteers are given a map that shows where a set of "control points" are located. They try to follow the map by interpreting it carefully and using a compass to plot their course. Each time they succeed in finding a control point, they stamp a card that validates their having completed that part of the game. The sport is competitive: Participants get a starting time and have a prescribed time period for locating all of the control points. Orienteering has become extremely popular. Why? There are several reasons. It's interesting and healthy. You get the chance to enjoy the outdoors. Best of all, it taxes both your physical strength and your mental acumen.

Then there's letterboxing, a hobby that is like a combination of orienteering and treasure hunting. It began in England in 1854, when an English gentleman put his calling card (a little like today's business card) into a bottle and left it on the bank of a pond. Someone else

found it and contacted him, and from this the hobby sprang up. What happens

is this: People put a notebook and a rubber stamp in a bottle (the letterbox) and

they provide special clues for finding the bottle. Participants

have to follow the clues by hiking in certain sections of the English countryside until they finally locate the letterbox and stamp their notebook. For some aficionados, letterboxing is so enjoyable that it's become a way of life.

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