

**MONITORING QUALITY OF  
EXPERIENCE IN FORESTS AND  
WOODLANDS IN GREAT BRITAIN  
REVIEW OF PILOTED METHODS**

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## A. Background and introduction

### Background

Forest Enterprise (FE) was established in 1996 as an executive agency of the Forestry Commission charged with managing the nation's 800,000 hectares of forests and woodlands.

FE endeavours to produce environmental, economic and social benefits from the forests and woodland it manages. This means balancing timber production for the wood processing industry with the wider benefits from recreational and environmental programmes for the public. The main aims of FE include maintaining and increasing the productive potential of the forest estate, increasing opportunities for public recreation, increasing the conservation value of its forests and increasing the net value of commercial activities.

According to the Forestry Commission, more than 70 percent of British adults have visited the nation's forests over the last few years. An estimated 350 million day trips are taken each year in addition to regular visits by holiday-makers, dog-walkers and others. Hence, forests are good resources for recreation, providing excellent opportunities for walking, cycling, fishing, birdwatching, horse riding, camping and many other activities.

During the last few years FE has continued to increase its investment in access and recreation. This has been carried out through actions such as contributing to the Access Forum, opening new facilities and centres, working in partnerships to meet specialist recreation needs and conducting visitor surveys.

In addition to these more outreaching activities and campaigns, there is also an extensive research programme called *Forest and society* which forms part of the Forestry Commission's research strategy. The general aim of this programme is to develop a greater understanding of the ways forestry can benefit society and how these benefits may be delivered. It is recognised that different groups in society may use forests and woodlands in different ways and a further understanding of this is vital for future management.

The *Forest and society* research programme consists of several themes, each of which represents a research programme. One of these programmes, *Forest visitor surveys and monitoring* has two major aims:

- to review the monitoring of visitor numbers to public forests and woodlands, and
- to monitor the quality of experiences which visitors receive when using these environments.

In June 2002, NFO Transport and Tourism was commissioned to undertake a study which would investigate what constitutes quality of experience for visitors, addressing related concepts such as motivations, expectations and the needs of different groups. The desired output of this study was a survey method which could be used across Forestry Commission sites to effectively monitor quality of experiences.

The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

- A.
  - 1) To consolidate existing knowledge of quality of experience in recreation contexts.
  - 2) To collate information regarding the findings of projects and research in the area referring to any variation in factors or levels of quality by demographics/social groupings and temporal and spatial dimensions.
- B. To understand the factors which make up quality of experience by user group, across regions in Great Britain. This should include an analysis of existing satisfaction data to identify any patterns by different user groups. It should also identify any visit-related factors that could be used to indicate new, or to segment existing user groups.
- C. To develop and test a set of indicators of quality of experience for different user groups. These would form a “health check” audit for use by FE at a site manager level and should be tested at a small number of forest sites (e.g. New Forest and Inverness).
  - 1) To suggest at least two methodologies for monitoring quality of visitor experiences (addressing issues such as motivations, expectations and needs) amongst user groups at key FE recreation sites in England, Scotland and Wales. These should include methodologies for monitoring both changes within the

components of quality of experience and levels of quality of experience amongst user groups.

2) To trial the final chosen methodology at a small number of pilot sites (e.g. Inverness and New Forest) and suggest a final refined methodology.

This report details the approaches taken by NFO to achieve these objectives, the different stages of the study and their outputs.

Section B describes the purposes and key outputs from the desk and qualitative research that was undertaken to inform the development of alternative survey approaches.

Section C summarises the alternative survey approaches that were then presented to Forest Enterprise as possible ways of monitoring the quality of experience of visitors. This section also explains why it was decided to follow the specific approaches which were subsequently piloted in South Wales and the New Forest.

Section D, provides a full description of the survey approach which was selected, feedback from the piloting and a description of the outputs that can be obtained from the proposed survey method.

This report aims to provide an overview of the approaches taken and final conclusions emerging from this study. More detailed results of the desk research, qualitative research and survey piloting have been produced under separate covers.

A 'health check' resource has also been prepared for use by site management who wish to measure levels of quality at the sites they manage. This has been designed as a 'stand alone' tool and is provided under a separate cover.

## B. Preliminary desk and qualitative research

### Desk research

Prior to the development of survey methods to be used by Forest Enterprise, an extensive review of surveys that had been carried out in similar countryside recreation contexts was undertaken.

As part of this review, the different survey methods used to measure and record quality were instigated, allowing the researchers to gain an insight into the advantages and disadvantages of alternative approaches. By carrying out this review it was also possible to examine different methods of categorising visitors and countryside recreation sites and to compare alternative processes used to analyse and present the results of satisfaction surveys.

All of this information provided vital knowledge which was subsequently used when the survey methods proposed for the Forest Enterprise survey were developed.

The full results of the desk research have been written up in detail and are presented under a separate cover. The main areas reviewed were as follows:

- *Forest Enterprise/ Forestry Commission Studies* – surveys undertaken on-site at forest sites between 1995 and 2000 were re-analysed. The results of questions relating to satisfaction were looked at in most detail and any shortcomings in the usefulness of the results were identified.

Other Forest Enterprise studies looked at this stage included wider public opinion surveys and qualitative research regarding perceptions of forestry.

- *Studies carried out by UK agencies that are involved in countryside recreation* – a review of other studies was also undertaken with research carried out by the Woodland Trust, Countryside Commission for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage, Countryside Agency and VisitScotland included.
- *Studies carried out by overseas agencies that are involved in countryside recreation* – the literature review also extended to studies undertaken overseas. This included work carried out in Scandinavia, North America and Australia.

This initial stage of the study provided the researchers with information and knowledge relating to the following areas:

- *The functions and benefits of forestry* – an understanding of the variety of different benefits obtained from the existence of forest areas ranging from direct uses (e.g. timber, recreation) to indirect benefits such as landscape values and altruism (e.g. being happy to know that other people can visit forests).
- *Users of the countryside* – a review of the different ways of defining user groups using factors such as place of residence, length of trip, activities undertaken, demographics, motives for trips and combinations of factors. This review led to the definition of four key Forest Enterprise user types (see page 6).
- *Methods of measuring experience, quality and satisfaction* – gaining an understanding of different approaches to measuring quality. Methods included satisfaction-based approaches (importance v performance), benefits-based approaches (expectation v experience), experience-based approaches (describing different phases of the forest 'experience') and meaning-based approaches (the role of forests in the users wider life). The methods subsequently proposed to Forest Enterprise combined elements of the satisfaction, benefits-based and experience-based approaches.

## Qualitative research

While the desk research stage sought information regarding methods of measuring quality and defining countryside sites and users, this stage did not provide specific details on the *drivers of quality* during visits to UK forests. It was important to obtain this information as these *drivers* would represent the key measures of satisfaction in the subsequent quantitative survey method proposed to Forest Enterprise.

By taking the information obtained for the previously undertaken Forest Enterprise studies and the methods of categorisation used in other countryside recreation studies, it was possible to divide forest users into four main groups. This 'segmentation' was mainly based upon the motivations and reasons for visits rather than merely visitor demographics or origins:

- **Convenience users** – very regular/routine visitors, live locally, likely to be visiting to walk dog or other spontaneous visit, wide age spectrum, spend short duration in forest, visit at least once a week. Many *do not actively choose the forest* but use as it is the only alternative.
- **Nature users** – enjoy wildlife and natural heritage aspects of forests, actively seek information/ interpretation, take days out and visit forests while on holiday, visit one or more forest sites once every two or three months. *Nature is the motivation for visit.*
- **Social users** – take days out to forests to relax with friends and family. Enjoy picnics and play areas. Require information and interpretation. Visit at least once every couple of months especially during summer months. *Nature is a 'backdrop' to their visit.*
- **Active users** – such as cyclists, mountaineers and longer distance walkers. Take days out to forests and visit while on holiday. Visit is an adventure, a test of personal limits. Visit at least once every couple of months. *Nature is a 'backdrop' to their visit.*

Recognising that members of each of these groups were likely to have different priorities during their visits to forests and that their views on quality of experience in forests were likely to vary, separate focus groups were undertaken with members of each group.

As such, a total of 8 focus groups were held in 4 locations during November and December 2002 with different types of users attending each discussion. The table below illustrates the composition of each.

	User type	Age group	Location
Group 1	Active (mountain bikers)	20-35	Glentress, Scottish Borders
Group 2	Convenience (dog walkers)	35-64	Glentress, Scottish Borders
Group 3	Active (hill walkers)	35-64	Afan Argoed, South Wales
Group 4	Nature (non-members)	25-44	Afan Argoed, South Wales
Group 5	Social (family)	35-54	Keswick, Cumbria
Group 6	Convenience (without dogs)	25-34	Keswick, Cumbria
Group 7	Nature (members)	45-64	Moors Valley, Dorset
Group 8	Social (friends)	25-34	Moors Valley, Dorset

The full results of the focus groups are provided under a separate cover. The following sections summarise the main areas covered in each discussion and some of the key 'overall' findings.

#### *Perceptions of forests*

- There are large variations between the perceptions of a forest and a woodland. Forests are seen as large, coniferous, regimented, commercial and dense. Woodlands are seen as deciduous, natural, small, open and wild. There is a general preference to visit woodland as it is seen as likely to have greater aesthetic value and friendlier atmosphere.
- Despite the above, when respondents were asked about what a forest represents (using a 'mind mapping' exercise) responses were generally very positive. Associations included an awareness of wildlife, fauna, fresh air, bird song and feelings of relaxation, happiness and freedom.

#### *Elements of a visit*

Respondents were asked about the importance of different elements of visits to a forest:

- *Company (solitude v shared experiences)* – some visits are made alone through necessity (e.g. dog walking) while others are taken to seek solitude and freedom. Other social users seek and enjoy time spent with family, friends or 'nature experts'.
- *Nature and wildlife* – nature (views etc.) is the core element to any visit to a forest, without this 'backdrop' visits are unlikely to be made at all. Wildlife can lead to a 'wow'

factor, especially for social users and is only sought out by nature users (e.g. birdwatchers). To others, sightings of animals, plants are a bonus.

- *Facilities* – car parking is widely needed and can be an issue if unavailable. Social users and families are the groups most likely to demand other built facilities such as benches, toilets, and playareas. Active users also likely to demand activity specific facilities. Convenience users (e.g. dog walkers) and nature users are least likely to personally require facilities (although they obtain some altruistic benefits from their existence).
- *Access* – awareness that land is owned by the Forestry Commission is important as, for many visitors, this equates to ‘freedom’. There is often much more uncertainty about rights of access in other types of countryside. Paths are seen as vital due to the density of forests. The mix of user types in forests is seen as positive as long as conflicting uses such as cycling and walking are separated where needed. Surfacing of paths should be in-keeping with the environment i.e. passable but not tarmac.
- *Information* – waymarking and interpretation is normally not used by local visitors but is seen as important for first time visitors and tourists. It is particularly important to maintain waymarking in remote areas for safety reasons (e.g. to stop mountain bikers or walkers getting lost in the forest).
- *Staff* – Forest Enterprise/ Forestry Commission employees are rarely encountered, most often ‘sightings’ are of forest operations workers or contractors. Any encounters with rangers have added greatly to enjoyment. Ranger-led walks and information provided to visitors by rangers are seen as excellent ideas but are not expected during visits.
- *Value for money* – visits to forest are generally seen as excellent value for money and often cost nothing. In particular, family visitors may compare the forest with other much more expensive ‘day out’ options.

### *Disturbances*

When asked to discuss issues and disturbances experienced during forest visits, the main ‘problem’ areas related to the noise and erosion caused by motorised sports, car security and concerns over personal security. Litter and vandalism were also mentioned regularly across the four locations.

### Conclusions

- The qualitative research confirmed that different user groups have different motives for visiting forests and different specific ‘product’ requirements.
- The natural aspects form the ‘core’ appeal of forest for all users but the other aspects are ‘peripheral’ and depend upon the specific needs of individual user groups.
- The greatest barriers to satisfaction relate to the user’s personal safety and security. Secondary barriers relate to issues that threaten the forest’s core appeal such as noise, litter or the behaviour of other users.

The table below summarises the elements of a forest visit that were discussed in the focus groups and their relative influences on satisfaction. Elements of a visit at the top of this table were generally found to be most influential on satisfaction while those towards the bottom were often less important.

<p><b>1) Unexpected excellence/ ‘moments of magic’</b></p> <p>Factors which can create an experience that is much better than expected</p>	<p>Mainly related to <i>nature and wildlife</i> – the examples given included the sighting of a stag in morning mist or a rabbit in a car park (for children).</p> <p>Could also be related to unexpected encounters with <i>FE staff</i> who provide information and interpretation of nature and add greatly to experience.</p>
<p><b>2) Required</b></p> <p>Factors which must be present for a visit to be enjoyed. If they are not present can create ‘moments of misery’.</p>	<p>The core product is unspoilt nature, peace and quiet and relaxation. As this tends to be the reason for a forest visit, its presence is vital so any factor which disrupts these aspects can spoil a visit.</p> <p><i>Unspoilt nature</i> – unspoilt from litter, vandalism and dog dirt.</p> <p><i>Peace and quiet</i> – forest should be a ‘haven’ from motorised sports and other noise.</p> <p><i>Relaxation</i> – requires personal safety, car security, waymarked or familiar routes.</p> <p><i>Access</i> to sites is also a vital ‘requirement’.</p> <p>This includes both physical access (car parking and passable footpaths) and monetary access (expectation of affordable charge to visit forest/ cheaper day out for families).</p>
<p><b>3) Desired</b></p> <p>Factors which should be available to users although they may not always be expected</p>	<p>The importance of these factors vary most between different types of users.</p> <p>Facilities such as <i>visitor centres and interpretation</i> are of more importance to less frequent, social visitors to a site (esp. families) but less important to frequent convenience users.</p> <p>Other, more <i>specialist facilities</i> are desired by certain user groups – e.g. dedicated trails for mountain bikers or water sports facilities.</p> <p>The presence of these facilities also provide altruistic benefits amongst non-users and can separate conflicting user groups.</p>

## C. Alternative survey methods

Following the completion of the desk and qualitative research, the information obtained from these stages was used to guide the development of a number of research methods that could be used to measure the quality of experience in forests. To achieve the study objectives, it was important that these methods allowed:

- The monitoring of the quality of visitor experiences;
- The investigation of motivations, needs and expectations;
- Monitoring of changes over time;
- Identification of variations between user groups.

It was also important that the survey methods proposed would provide practical, actionable information that could be used by forest managers.

A number of different survey methods which would achieve these objectives were presented to Forest Enterprise. The advantages and disadvantages of each of the alternatives were then discussed before the selection of a survey method which would be used in the subsequent piloting.

The following sections summarise the different methods proposed and the arguments for and against the use of each method.

## On-site surveys

Two possible approaches to on-site surveying were compared – face to face interviews or short interviews that were ‘followed up’ by a self-completion survey.

Method	‘Pros and cons’
<p><i>Face to face interview</i></p> <p>Undertaking a face to face interview (c.15 minutes long) with forest users as they leave site. Questions asked about visitor profile, activities, motivations, and importance of different aspects of visit, satisfaction with different aspects of visit, how these aspects compared with expectations, impacts of other users .</p> <p>Use of open-ended questions to obtain details to explain the ratings provided.</p>	<p><b>+</b></p> <p>Control over the sample composition</p> <p>Interviewer ensures respondent understands questions.</p> <p>Questionnaire routing can personalise survey to individual user groups</p> <p>Opportunities to use prompt materials such as show cards, images.</p> <p><b>-</b></p> <p>Limit to number of questions and detail that can be obtained.</p> <p>Difficult to measure how visit compares with expectations.</p>
<p><i>Short interview with ‘follow up’ self completion questionnaire</i></p> <p>Interview (max. 10 mins.) with users as they enter the site. Questions regarding profile, planned activities, motivations, importance of different aspects to visit.</p> <p>Detailed self-completion questionnaire then given to all respondents to complete after visit. Questions asked about actual visit experience, difference from expectations, satisfaction with aspects of visit, open-ended questions for ‘qualitative’ responses.</p>	<p><b>+</b></p> <p>A self-completion questionnaire can collect a lot of detail regarding actual experiences.</p> <p>Different versions of questionnaire can be given to different user groups.</p> <p>Possible to compare pre and post visit attitudes.</p> <p><b>-</b></p> <p>Issues re. measuring experience V expectations of regular visitors.</p> <p>Response to self-completion will reduce sample.</p>

### Non-users/ off-site surveys

Possible approaches to off-site research with non-users were also proposed. These methods were suggested as a useful supplement to the user surveys that would provide more insight into perceptions, expectations and barriers to usage amongst non-users. Both of the methods suggested focused on populations surrounding forest sites:

<p><i>Street interviews</i></p> <p>Interviews with people in towns and villages close to forest sites.</p>	<p><b>+</b></p> <p>Possible to include both locals and tourists visiting the area.</p> <p>Interviewer ensures respondent understands questions.</p> <p>Opportunities to use prompt materials such as show cards, images.</p> <p><b>-</b></p> <p>Issues regarding the choice of interview locations and obtaining a balance between achieving a satisfactory number of interviews per day and a representative sample of 'non-users'.</p>
<p><i>Telephone survey</i></p> <p>Contacting a sample of households within a defined catchment area surrounding forest site.</p>	<p><b>+</b></p> <p>Possible to obtain a representative sample of local populations with pre-selected 'catchment'</p> <p><b>-</b></p> <p>Coverage of local population only</p> <p>Not possible to use visual prompts.</p> <p>Length of interview limited to 10 minutes so detail restricted.</p>

## Qualitative research

While the quantitative survey approaches would provide information on the key issues and their impacts on quality of experience, it was recognised that follow up qualitative research would provide much more 'in-depth' information about specific issues and possibilities for improvements.

Two alternative qualitative options were suggested – focus groups and in-depth interviews.

<p><i>Focus groups</i></p> <p>Respondents are recruited in advance through the quantitative survey. They are then asked to attend a discussion at a venue close to or in the forest site.</p>	<p><b>+</b></p> <p>Possible to recruit specific user groups in advance e.g. mountain bikers.</p> <p>Costs reduced by 'recruiting' at earlier stages of survey (i.e. asking if ok to re-contact).</p> <p>Group situation facilitates discussions ('snowballing of ideas').</p> <p>Possible to set up pre-group activities e.g. site visit.</p> <p><b>-</b></p> <p>Mainly only possible to include local residents in discussions.</p> <p>Can be difficult to recruit groups with certain very specific, 'niche' users.</p>
<p><i>In-depth interviews</i></p> <p>Face to face interviews with users on site. Recruited using basic 'screener' and interviewed by experienced researcher for around 20 minutes.</p>	<p><b>+</b></p> <p>Undertaken on site so responses are based on very recent experiences.</p> <p>All users can potentially be included i.e. locals, day-trippers and tourists.</p> <p><b>-</b></p> <p>Requires a suitable on-site, indoor facility e.g. a visitor centre. Therefore it is harder to include people who avoid these locations.</p>

**Choice of method**

Following a presentation of the alternative survey methods outlined on the previous pages and detailed discussion of the pros and cons of each approach, a survey method to be piloted at Forest Enterprise sites was agreed.

It was decided that the focus of the research should remain on users with the non-user research options kept as possibilities for the future. Focusing on users best fulfilled the aim of this study to find out about quality of experience amongst people who currently visit forest sites.

This selected method combined parts of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches detailed above and is described in the following section.

## D. Selected survey method

The method piloted was selected to reflect the variety of different levels of experiences and knowledge held by visitors to forest sites and the possible issues which would be investigated. It was also expected that this method could provide useful information to both site managers and Forest Enterprise staff who are interested in quality of experience at larger geographical levels.

The approach taken focused on the views of current users, reflecting the key objectives of this study.

A summary of the recommended method proposed for future work following the pilot is provided in the Appendices.

### **Pilot sites**

Two forest sites were selected as locations to undertake the survey pilot:

- Ringwood in the New Forest district in the South of England.
- Afan Argoed in Coed y Cymoedd district in South Wales.

These sites were selected as they both were expected to have high visit numbers during the survey period (February and March) and each offered very different visitor experiences and were used by very different types of visitors.

### **Quantitative Stage**

The first stage of the research involved a quantitative survey of visitors at each of the forest sites.

#### *Method*

A two-stage approach was used. All visitors were interviewed as they entered the forest site using a questionnaire which contained questions regarding visitor profile, visit profile, motivations and the importance of different elements in the decision to visit (see appendix 1).

After obtaining this information, first time and infrequent visitors to the site (those who visited less than once a month) were given a self-completion questionnaire to take away and complete after their visit. This questionnaire asked for details regarding actual satisfaction with different elements of the forest, the impact of other users and how the visit compared with expectations (see appendix 2).

Visitors who normally came to the site at least once a month were not given a self completion questionnaire but, instead, were asked similar questions regarding their most recent visits to the site. These questions were contained in the second 'half' of the face to face questionnaire (appendix 1).

Interviews were undertaken across several access points at each of the pilot sites. These points were selected to ensure that a representative sample of visitors was interviewed and that different types of users were equally likely to be included. Interviewers selected respondents on a 'next person to pass' basis. Only one individual was interviewed per party of visitors with this person selected using the 'next birthday rule' (i.e. person whose birthday comes next is interviewed).

#### *Questionnaire content*

Identical questionnaires were used at both Afan Argoed and Ringwood. The main areas affecting satisfaction during forests visits were identified through the preliminary desk and qualitative research and are included in the questionnaires, together with open-ended questions to identify site specific issues.

The main advantage of using standardised questionnaires is the opportunity to compare results between sites and user groups. However, the questionnaires have also been designed to allow the addition of site-specific questions or the removal of irrelevant questions. For example, the factors rated in the questionnaire could be adjusted to include specific facilities provided at a site while others could be removed if they were not provided.

All of the survey materials have been provided to Forest Enterprise in an electronic format and it should be easy for these types of changes to be made to the questionnaire during future surveys.

### *Quotas and contact sheet*

To ensure coverage of both regular and infrequent visitors, interviewers were asked to ensure that at least two-thirds of the visitors they interviewed were either first time or infrequent visitors (less than once a month). Doing so ensured that sufficient numbers of self-completion questionnaires were distributed to allow a large enough sample of responses.

Whenever visitors were not interviewed because of the use of this quota, the interviewer was asked to record this on a contact sheet (see appendix 3). If required this information could then be used to weight results back to the true profile of visitors. During both of the pilot surveys it was not necessary to weight the results as the profile of interviewees closely matched the actual profile of visitors.

### *Sample sizes and response*

At each of the pilot sites around 150 interviewees were undertaken. While this sample of interviews was sufficient to allow overall analysis of results and identification of key issues, sub-analysis by age or user group was limited.

Just under 100 self-completion questionnaires were distributed at each of the site with these visitors given a reply paid envelope and pencil to encourage their response. By the final survey deadline some 38% of questionnaires had been returned.

The sample size of visitors to be interviewed in subsequent surveys is likely to depend upon the amount of information required from distinct user groups and users of specific sites. A sample of 150 visitors provides results accurate to +/- 9.5% at 95% levels of confidence. If comparisons are to be made between the results obtained at different sites, by different user groups or across a period of time, a larger overall sample would be recommended.

## Qualitative stage

Following the completion of the quantitative research, the main findings from this stage were examined in detail. At this point the main concerns affecting quality of experience at each site and the user groups affected by these issues were identified.

### *Method*

For the purposes of the survey pilot, it was decided that both the quantitative and 'follow qualitative' methods would be tested at each site. However, it is likely to be the case that during future applications of this survey methodology the quantitative survey alone will provide all of the information required for site manager. For example this survey may identify high levels of satisfaction with no specific issues requiring further, qualitative investigation. The qualitative stage should only be followed if further details are required on specific issues that arise from the survey and solutions are sought.

For the purpose of the pilot survey, two qualitative methods were used to investigate specific issues amongst key user groups:

- *In-depth interviews* - a series of 10 in-depth interviews of around 20 minutes duration were undertaken with mountain bikers at Afan Argoed. These interviews were a suitable method in this situation as it was important to cover both local users and users who had travelled from further a field. It was also suitable because members of this user group were not always regular visitors and on-site surveys insured immediate recollection of issues. Respondents were given a gift (a cycling bottle worth about £10) as a 'thank you' for being interviewed.
- *Focus group* – a focus group was undertaken with family visitors who used Ringwood forest. This method was suitable for this user group because they lived locally and could attend a discussion near the forest. These users were also regular visitors who could provide detailed information about the site and specific issues without actually having to be on-site. Respondents were given a cash 'incentive' (£30) for attending the group.

Both of these methods effectively obtained information from each of the user groups. The advantages and disadvantage of each of the approaches were covered in more detail on page 13.

### *Topic guide*

Due to the different priorities of individual user groups and the site specific issues to be covered in the qualitative research, the topic guide used by the interviewer during this stage should be prepared with these details in mind. The discussion guides used during the piloting at Afan Argoed and Ringwood are provided in appendix 4.

In future application of this survey methodology the following key areas are likely to be covered during qualitative discussions:

#### *Introduction*

Explain the purpose of the research, obtaining background information about the respondent re. family situation, participation in activity (e.g. mountain biking or days out with family)

#### *Choosing places to visit*

What types of countryside sites does respondent like to visit (to undertake their activity)?

What factors generally influence their decisions about where to go?

What places are their favourites and why?

#### *Particular likes of site*

When they visit site what activities do they like to undertake?

What are their main reason for visiting this particular site?

Prompt on factors likely to influence visit

Of the factors identified why are these important? And which are most important?

#### *Satisfaction with site*

Thinking about the factors important to them when they visit, does this site always provide these?

If yes – provide details of particularly good experiences when factors were provided.

What else, if anything makes the site more attractive than others to visit

#### *Particular dislikes of site*

How could the site be improved upon?

Give examples of poor experiences when what was important was not provided.

What if anything makes this site less attractive than others. Prompt on key issues identified from survey.

Why are these issues? Which are most significant?

#### *Suggestion for improvements*

Thinking of the issues, what could be done to improve things?

What else? What other improvements could be made at this site and at other local sites?

Is there a need for more places like this site?

#### *Summary*

What should be the priorities for the people who manage this site?

What other messages would you like to be passed back to them?

### **Reporting and outputs**

The site-specific results of the pilots undertaken at Afan Argoed and Ringwood are provided under a separate cover. It is expected that the outputs of this survey approach can potentially be used at two levels:

- At a site level by managers to help inform them of specific views amongst users, areas where they are performing well and areas where improvements are required. This information should be as practical and usable as possible.
- At a 'macro' level with the potential to obtain information on levels of satisfaction with specific elements across a number of forest sites.

The outputs of the piloting undertaken at Afan Argoed and Ringwood are presented under a separate cover. These reports are intended as examples of the type of practical information that could be given to site managers to help identify priorities for investment. Their main limitation is the number of visitors interviewed at each sites. Given larger samples, more detailed analysis of the opinions of specific user groups would be possible.

As the piloting of the survey methods was restricted to two sites and just over 300 interviews, no outputs can be provided on a 'macro' level. However, if this survey method was to be applied across a larger number of sites it would be possible to undertake the following:

- Measurement of how important different elements of the forest experience are to visitors across wider geographical areas (e.g. forest district, countries) and amongst specific user groups (e.g. birdwatchers, teenagers). This information and comparisons between these groups would reveal the underlying drivers of a quality experience.
- Measurement of satisfaction. This information alone would be useful to determine and compare overall satisfaction with different factors at different geographical levels and

amongst different users groups. When combined with the information on importance this information would be even more useful.

- **Benchmarking.** If surveying was undertaken at a number of sites it would be possible to establish 'average' satisfaction levels for specific factors at different geographical levels (e.g. forest district or a particular 'type' of site) or amongst different types of users. These averages could then be used to allow sites to benchmark their performance against others. There may also be potential to use this survey methodology at other types of countryside recreation sites such as national parks or waterways, allowing further comparison of both the drivers of quality experiences and satisfaction.
- **Measurement over time.** If this survey method is used over a number of years the outputs obtained will allow the tracking of satisfaction with particular elements of a site or wider geographic area. As such, the impacts of any changes made to a site and long term trends could be monitored.

## E. Appendices

Summary of recommended survey methods

Discussion guide used in preliminary research

Discussion guides used in pilot

Questionnaires used in pilot

## **Appendix 1 - Summary of recommended approach**

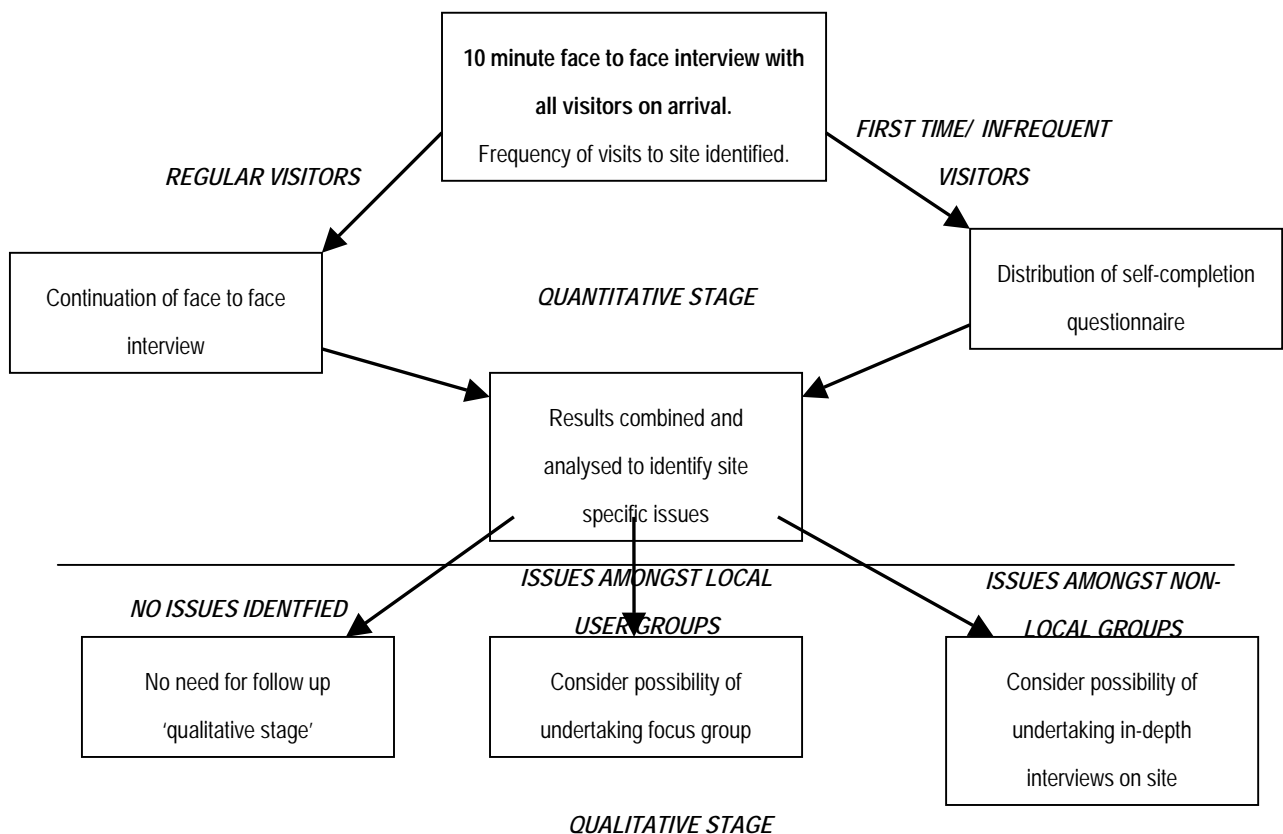
### **NFO Transport and Tourism**

#### **Measuring Quality of Experience in Forests and Woodlands in Great Britain**

##### *Background*

The survey methods outlined in this paper have been developed by NFO Transport and Tourism following a detailed review of alternative approaches. These methods were piloted during February and March 2003.

The chart below summarises the recommended method which is described in more detail in the following sections.



## **Stage 1 – Quantitative Research**

### **Method**

The questionnaire to be used is appended. All visitors are eligible for interview and should be asked questions 1 to 7. These questions collect information on the visitor (demographics, origin etc.), the visit (frequency of trip, activities undertaken etc.) and the importance of different factors in the decision to visit. After question 7, the interview should be continued amongst visitors who usually visit the site at least once a month (questions 8 to 16) while first time and infrequent visitors should be given a self completion questionnaire to take with them and return after their visit.

Questions 8 to 16 of the face to face interview and the self completion questionnaire ask visitors to comment in detail about their levels of satisfaction, impacts of other visitors and possible disturbances. By using two versions of the questionnaire it is possible to obtain information from regular visitors about their recent experiences while infrequent visitors provide their views both before and after their visit.

Visitors should be interviewed as they enter the site. The technique of personal interviews by experienced interviewers is recommended because of its ability to deliver the best quality of data from the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent.

Respondents should be selected on the basis of the next person to pass the interviewer (entering the site) on completion of the previous interview. Such an approach maximises the number of interviews in a given time-period while maintaining the random selection procedure. If a family or group of people leave together or pass the interviewer, the 'next birthday' rule should be applied. This procedure is important to ensure that one member of the family or group does not volunteer himself or herself as the respondent. The random nature of the sampling process is maintained by selecting the person from the family/group whose birthday comes next, after the date of interview.

### **Quotas and contact sheet**

To ensure representation of both frequent and infrequent visitors within the survey interviewers would aim to ensure that at least half of respondents fall into each group (i.e. 50% visit once a month or more, 50% visit less often). Doing so will ensure that at least half of those interviewed receive a self completion questionnaire therefore ensuring an adequate representation of infrequent visitors within the overall sample.

When potential respondents are not interviewed due to the use of the above quota control they are recorded on a contact sheet. This information can then be used to identify whether there is a need to weight results back to the 'true' profile of users. When this method was piloted the true profile of visitors was found to match the target sample profile so weighting was not required.

### **Sample size**

Decisions on the number of visitors to be interviewed at each site should be based upon the required accuracy of overall results, how much sub-analysis of different groups of visitors will be required (e.g. comparison of the views of young and old visitors) and the degree to which results obtained at different sites and in different time periods will be compared.

Our recommendation is that 400 interviews are undertaken per site. This sample size would give data robust enough to allow comparisons to be made between the different elements rated by respondents (e.g. satisfaction, importance) and for the results provided by different sub-groups to be compared (e.g. Young Independents V Empty Nesters).

With this size of sample overall results would be accurate to +/-4.9% at the 95% confidence interval. If the results obtained from two sub-samples each containing 200 respondents were to be compared, results would have to vary by up to 8 percentage points to be regarded as significant.

If results obtained at two sites where 400 visitors had been interviewed at each were compared, results would have to vary by up to 7 percentage points to be regarded as significant.

### **Strike rates and estimated number of shifts required**

When this survey method was piloted in February 2003, 10 interviews were achieved during each 6 hour interviewing shift. During busier summer periods it is likely to be possible to achieve greater numbers of interviews during an interviewing shift however this will vary between sites depending upon levels of throughput.

If, for example, an average of 14 interviews were achieved per shift a sample of 400 users could be interviewed across 29 days of interviewing. Fieldwork locations and timings are discussed in more detail in the following section.

### **Timing and location of shifts**

The timings and location of interviews is of critical importance to ensure that, as far as possible the sample contacted is *representative of all visitors* to the site.

In terms of the timings of shifts, how long fieldwork is undertaken for is likely to be driven by when results are required and visitor throughput at different times of year. If a 'snapshot' of quality of experience amongst visitors during a particular time of year is required the fieldwork may take place over a period of a month or less. However, if a more representative picture of usage is required, fieldwork may take place over a whole summer season or a year. If results are to be compared between sites it is important to ensure that the time of year of fieldwork is taken into account.

Timing of shifts in terms of the days of the week and times of day of shifts should aim to reflect visitor throughput interview locations. If automatic counter data is available this can be very useful.

If no count information is available, it is recommended that, reflecting national countryside recreation patterns, interview shifts are split 50:50 between weekdays and weekends. At quieter sites and during the winter months, it may be necessary to have a greater coverage at weekends as this is when visitor numbers are likely to be at their maximum.

The hours of shifts should also ensure coverage of different types of visitors, not excluding those visitors who may use a site before 10am or after 6pm. Doing so will ensure that there is no inherent bias within the sample.

When considering where to interview it is also important to ensure coverage of different types of users whilst optimising the number of interviews achieved per hour. Again if count data is available this can help in the choice of access points to include.

## **Self completion responses and incentive**

As mentioned previously, at least half of visitors who are interviewed should be given a self-completion questionnaire (i.e. those who visit less than once a month). During the survey pilot 38% of self-completion questionnaires were returned.

If this response rate was repeated, based on a total sample of 400 visitors being interviewed per site, and 200 being handed a self-completion questionnaire, a total response of around 75 self completion questionnaires could be expected.

In the pilot, to encourage responses to the self-completion survey visitors were entered into a prize draw (for a book about forestry) and given a Forestry Commission pencil.

## **Stage 2 - Qualitative stage**

### **Methods**

Following the completion of the quantitative stage, an initial analysis of the results should allow the identification of any key issues which may require further, in-depth, qualitative investigation.

A decision may be made at this stage to undertake no further research. However, if further detail is required, two possible methods may be used:

1) *In-depth interviews* – this approach should be undertaken on-site with users during their visit to the forest. Doing so offers the advantages of immediacy of recollection and, potentially, allows all types of visitors to be included (e.g. day or holiday visitors, different activity groups). Interviews last up to 30 minutes in total.

2) *Focus group* – this approach is more likely to be undertaken off-site in a venue such as a hotel meeting room although it could also be hosted in a forest visitor centre, classroom etc. This approach offers the benefits of the focus group approach (snowballing of ideas, time to test concepts etc.) but is generally only possible to undertake with people who live locally to the forest. Focus groups typically last for around one and a half hours.

## **Recruitment and incentives**

Respondents to each of the alternative methods are recruited as follows:

1) *In depth interviews* – respondents are recruited during their visit. An interviewer works with the researcher who undertakes the in-depth interviews and, using a short screener questionnaire, will find suitable respondents and invite them to take part in an interview. To encourage participation in the interview respondents should be given an appropriate ‘thank you’ gift.

2) *Focus groups* – the initial quantitative survey includes a question asking respondents whether they would be willing to take part in a further research (in the pilot over three-quarters agree to do so). This list provides a useful source to recruiting respondents from with respondents re-contacted by telephone and invited to attend at a local facility. Also, to encourage participation each respondent should be given a cash incentive of around £30.

## **Number of focus groups or interviews required**

The number of focus groups and/or in-depth interviews undertaken depends upon the types of users spoken to and levels of detail required in the results.

People are more likely to discuss their thoughts and opinions openly when they are amongst people with whom they share a common bond. Therefore it is crucial that the focus groups only contains individuals with similar demographic and attitudinal characteristics. Therefore if only one user group is to be spoken to (e.g. dog walkers or parents of young children), a single focus group may be sufficient. However, if several groups are to be investigated (e.g. because of an issue between mountain bikers and dog walkers), each should be covered in a separate discussion.

In terms of in-depth interviews. It is possible to undertake up to 10 during a six hour period but this maximum is only likely to be possible in sites with a high throughput of the type of visitor to be spoken to. It is therefore likely to be necessary to conduct fieldwork for this stage over at least 2 days.

## **Moderation and topic guides**

Both the focus groups and in-depth interviews should be led by a researcher with qualitative research experience and a good insight into the issues at the particular site. Discussions will be structured around a topic guide which is developed using the results obtained in the initial quantitative stage. The following provides a possible structure for these discussions with general issues covered first and more specific investigation towards the end:

### *Introduction*

Explain the purpose of the research, obtaining background information about the respondent re. family situation, participation in activity (e.g. mountain biking or days out with family)

### *Choosing places to visit*

What types of countryside sites does respondent like to visit (to undertake their activity)?

What factors generally influence their decisions about where to go?

What places are their favourites and why?

### *Particular likes of site*

When they visit site what activities do they like to undertake?

What are their main reason for visiting this particular site?

Prompt on factors likely to influence visit

Of the factors identified why are these important? And which are most important?

### *Satisfaction with site*

Thinking about the factors important to them when they visit, does this site always provide these?

If yes – provide details of particularly good experiences when factors were provided.

What else, if anything makes the site more attractive than others to visit

### *Particular dislikes of site*

How could the site be improved upon?

Give examples of poor experiences when what was important was not provided.

What if anything makes this site less attractive than others. Prompt on key issues identified from survey.

Why are these issues? Which are most significant?

### *Suggestion for improvements*

Thinking of the issues, what could be done to improve things?

What else? What other improvements could be made at this site and at other local sites?

Is there a need for more places like this site?

*Summary*

What should be the priorities for the people who manage this site?

What other messages would you like to be passed back to them?

**Analysis and reporting**

As this survey approach requires the use of various different qualitative and quantitative methods it is vital that the analysis and reporting stages combine these results into a single informative report.

The reports produced following the sampling of this methodology give an indication of the possible types of analysis that can be undertaken. Given, a larger sample size much more detailed analysis could also be possible.

Specific types of analysis which can add to the value of results include correlation of the levels of importance and levels of satisfaction and gap analyses.

Inclusion of verbatim statements obtained during the follow-up qualitative research can also add greatly to the value of results.

## **Appendix 2 – Discussion guide used in preliminary research**

### **1. Introduction**

- Background information, personal details, family situation, where from
- Last trip taken to countryside (few hours – day – holiday). Reason for visit, activities undertaken, how often.
- Last trip taken to forests or woods (few hours – day – holiday). Reason for visit, activities undertaken, how often.
- Who owned or managed the forests visited? Were visits to Forestry Commission/ Forest Enterprise land?

### **2. Use of forests and woodlands**

- What do you usually do when visiting forests and woodlands? e.g in last year or so. Probe to get more than one activity per person – who with, where.  
ACTIVITY BOARDS

### **3. Purpose of going to forests and woodlands**

- If I say forests and woodlands in UK, what do you think of? Describe spontaneous “images”.
- Difference between forests and woodlands?
- 

#### MIND MAPPING

*What do you feel, hear, smell, see and taste when you are visiting a forest?*

- What attracts you to visit a forest? What are you looking for?. Motivations behind visiting the area. Probe on both individual and social gains, activities, scenery?
- Detail previous visits to forests and woodlands, if repeat visitor. What did you feel afterwards? What did you get out of it?
- Variations in activities, motivations, levels of enjoyment, outcomes between different forests (e.g. dog walk V day out) – reasons why chose different forests for different reasons?
- Describe the best forest visit you can remember. What made it good?
- Describe the worst visit you can remember? What made it bad?

#### 4. Quality and satisfaction

- What is good quality for you when visiting a forest? Why do you say that? UNPROMPTED FIRST
- Which of these parts are relevant (if at all) to being satisfied with a forest visit: EXERCISE?
  1. Your own experience (e.g. solitude, escaping, challenge, safety)
  2. Meeting with other people, both those in your own party, other visitors and staff (e.g. family togetherness, meeting new people, sharing experiences, crowding)
  3. The nature in itself (e.g. view, backdrop, flora, sighting wildlife, presence of water bodies)
  4. Facilities and access (e.g. standard of facilities – roads, parking, toilets, interpretation)
  5. Service at the site (e.g. staff, services expected, complaints ever made and responses)
  6. Information, interpretations, signs etc (e.g. relevance of signs, usefulness, what expectations, educational)
  7. Value for money (e.g. charges paid, value for money vis-à-vis other leisure activities, prepared to pay more/less, trade offs)

#### 5. Importance of different aspects of forest visits

- Thinking of the parts which are included in a forest visit (see above), how important are they for your satisfaction. Name the three most important and the reason why. Does their importance change according to the reason why you visit a forest?

**EXERCISE:** SORT CARDS/PICTURES ILLUSTRATING ASPECTS OF FOREST VISIT (as above) ACCORDING TO IMPORTANCE – DISCUSS WHY AND VARIATIONS ACCORDING TO REASON FOR VISIT (see section 3).

Rate for different types of trip - e.g dog walks, family trips, holiday visits

#### 6. Expectations and disturbance

- When have visits been particularly better than expected – Why? What made it better?
- When have visits been worse than expected? Why? – UNPROMPTED DISTURBANCES

PROMPTED – SHOW DISTURBANCES BOARD

- Which of the following have had a negative effect on your experience (disturbances):
  1. Environmental degradation (erosion etc.)
  2. Signs of other people such as littering, vandalism, vehicles, roads
  3. Restricted access
  4. Other people: too many/too few/others' behaviour
  5. Noise
  6. Forestry/timber management

**EXERCISE:** USE CARDS WITH ABOVE (AND OTHER) POSSIBLE 'DISTURBANCES' TO RANK MOST INTUSIVE TO UNINTURSIVE – DISCUSS DIFFERENT SCENARIOS

- When/ if problems or disturbances occur what have you done? Complained? Never returned? Gone elsewhere? REAL OR HYPOTHETICAL
- What substitute (if any) have you chosen instead of visiting a forest site? Have you done any of the following:
  - gone somewhere else for same activity
  - gone somewhere else for a different activity
  - come back another time
  - stayed at home
  - gone to work
- What (if any) do you feel has been missing during your visit to forests and woodlands in UK?

## 7. Summary

- What improvements are important to make at forests and woodlands you have visited? Which are the priorities?
- Lessons for the Forestry Commission?
- Any other messages they want passed back to the Forestry Commission?

## **Appendix 3 – Discussion guides used in pilot**

### **New Forest (Families)**

#### **1. Introduction**

- Background information – Purpose of survey – done a large survey which they were included in and now want to find out a bit more about what is good and bad about site and what could be done to make it better for families.
- What is their family situation? How many children? What ages?

#### **2. General - Choosing places to visit with children**

- What types of place do they like to visit with their children? Include urban and rural places first then focus more on countryside sites.
- What affects their decision on where to go. Probe on convenience from home, parking, facilities for children (what facilities?), weather (shelter in forests?), nature and wildlife.
- To what degree do they decide or is it the child's decision?
- How does the age of children affect choices of places to visit on days out/ shorter trips – does this change as they grow up?
- **Summarise: Which factors are most important to them when they are choosing where to go?**
- Ask for example of favourite places to visit with children – what makes these places particularly good?

### 3. Particular likes about Moors Valley/ Ringwood

#### (1) IMPORTANCE

- During a typical visit to Ringwood/ Moors Valley what activities do they take part in – probe on tree top trails, play trails, railway, visitor centre, café, cycling, nature walks etc.
- How long would a typical visit last and do they always do the same activities?
- What are their main reasons for choosing to visit this site? What are the important factors in their decision to visit instead of somewhere else UNPROMPTED then PROMPT:

Children's facilities – play trail, adventure playground etc

*Adult facilities – café, visitor centre*

*Parking*

Proximity to home

*Wildlife at this site*

*Scenery/ backdrop/ peace and quiet*

*Value for money – cheaper than other options?*

For each mentioned **why are they important?**

Of those mentioned, **which are the most important** when visiting Moors Valley/ Ringwood?

#### (2) SATISFACTION

- Looking at the important factors (as identified above) – **does Moors Valley/ Ringwood always provide these?**
- If yes, ask for examples of particularly good experiences
- What, if anything, makes this site particularly **more** attractive to visit with children than elsewhere? UNPROMPTED i.e. what do they do best at this site?

## 5. Particular dislikes

- On the other hand – we are also interested in how the site could be improved upon.
- Thinking of Moors Valley/ Ringwood– can they think of any examples of any poor experiences when what was important was not provided.
- What if anything, makes this site less attractive to visit than other sites that other places they can go to with children? What are the downsides? UNPROMPTED then PROMPT:

*Litter and tipping – who causes it?, particularly bad near play trail?*

*Dogs and dog dirt – scary for children, unhygienic*

*Other users – too many visitors, unsupervised children, horse riders, cyclists*

*Noise – too many children, other users?*

*Muddy tracks – bad for kids, prams, dirty*

*Facilities – e.g. lack of toilets, café suitable for kids?*

*Forest operations – muddy tracks, closed tracks/ parts of trails*

*Motorised sports – noise and fumes*

*Car parking – limited, sometimes closed, expensive for locals?*

- Which are the biggest issues?

## 6. Suggestions for improvements

- Having discussed what is important to them and what is good and bad about Moors Valley/ Ringwood – would now like to think about possible ways of improving the site. Again have some ideas from survey but want hear theirs first.
- UNPROMPTED. Thinking of the issues, what could be done to improve things? (**esp on trips with kids**)

- *PROMPT:*

*Toilets nearer play trail for kids*

*More bins/ signs suggesting people take litter home near play area – which?*

*Staff to supervise play areas*

*More paths/ trails with things for kids to do, signs to follow*

*More organised children's activities e.g. holiday clubs for kids*

*More refreshment points around the play trail*

*More informal play structures – e.g. Den Building*

*More information/ interpretation boards in the forest.*

- What else? What about improvements elsewhere in Ringwood and the other local forests?
- Is there a need for more places like Moors Valley in the area or is this sufficient?

## 7. Summary

- What are the priorities for the people who manage the site? What should they be doing first?
- Any other messages they want passed back to the Forestry Commission?

## Afan Argoed (Mountain Bikers)

### 1. Introduction

- Background information – Purpose of survey – done a large survey and now want to find out a bit more about what is good and bad about site and what could be done to make it better for mountain bikers.
- How long have they been mountain biking for? How experienced are they?.
- Visits to Afan Argoed – how often do they visit? What are their plans/ what have they done today? Who with? How long visiting for? Where did they travel from?

### 2. Choosing place to mountain bike

- What types of place do they like to go mountain-biking?
- What affects their decision on where to go. Probe on convenience from home, parking, facilities/tracks/ routes for cyclists (what facilities?), weather (shelter in forests?), nature and wildlife.
- **Which factors are most important to them when they are choosing where to go?**
- Have they cycled in many different places – what are **pros and cons** – one or two examples?

### 3. Particular likes about Afan Argoed

#### IMPORTANCE

- What are their reasons for choosing to visit this site? What are the important factors in their decision to visit instead of somewhere else UNPROMPTED then PROMPT:

*Cycle trails*

*Other mountain bike facilities – which ones?*

*Socialising/ spending time with friends/ meeting other mountain bikers*

*Proximity to home*

*Wildlife at this site*

*Scenery/ backdrop/ peace and quiet*

For each mentioned **why are they important?**

Of those mentioned, **which are the most important** when visiting Afan Argoed?

#### SATISFACTION

- Looking at the important factors (as identified above) – **does Afan Argoed always provide these?**
- If yes, ask for examples of particularly good experiences at **Afan Argoed**
- What, if anything, makes this site particularly **more** attractive to visit for mountain-biking than elsewhere? UNPROMPTED

#### 5. Particular dislikes

- On the other hand – we are also interested in how the site could be improved upon.
- Thinking of the Afan Argoed – can they think of any examples of any poor experiences when what was important was not provided.
- What if anything, makes this site less attractive to visit than other sites that they can mountain bike at? UNPROMPTED then PROMPT:

*Litter and tipping – who causes it?*

*Dogs and dog dirt*

*Other users – walkers (too slow, get in the way?), mixed use of paths, other issues?*

*Muddy tracks – dangerous, ruins equipment*

*Facilities – e.g. café (opening hours), service provided*

*Forest operations – muddy tracks, closed tracks/ parts of trails*

*Motorised sports – noise and fumes*

*Vandalised signposts – chances of getting lost*

*Value for money – café, car parking*

## 6. Suggestions for improvements

- Having discussed what is important to them and what is good and bad about Afan Argoed – would now like to think about possible ways of improving the site. Again have some ideas from survey but want hear theirs first.
- UNPROMPTED. Thinking of the issues (show cards). What could be done to improve things.

### *PROMPT:*

*Shower block for cyclists*

*Changing room facilities*

*More information/ maps etc.*

*Improved bike washing facility/ jet wash – what price?*

*'Bike friendly' catering – e.g. filling up bottles, providing take away snacks*

*Better bike parking*

*Bike shop/ spares shop*

*More dedicated bike tracks*

- What else? What about improvements elsewhere in local forests?

## 7. Summary

- What are the priorities for the people who manage the site? What should they be doing first?
- Any other messages they want passed back to the Forestry Commission?

## **Appendix 4 – Questionnaires used in pilot**

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