

### 3. METHODS USED FOR THIS STUDY

The methods used in this study were selected after careful consideration of the data requirements for the MASOOR spatial planning model, a review of methods used in countryside recreation research and most importantly those used in the APVS. The desire for comparability meant that the broad approach taken to the survey work needed to be similar to the APVS. However, a roadside and traffic count survey was not possible within the confines of the budget and time scale available.

Based on the broad scope of the survey requirements and the information needs identified, the key methods of the survey involved:

- Face-to-face interview survey (site survey);
- Observation/counting survey (site survey)
- Telephone survey (household survey);
- Postal questionnaire survey (occupancy, visits to attractions, educational and organised visits surveys);
- Desk-top research (use of secondary sources).

The following provides an overview of the data collection methods used in this study with some discussion regarding the issues arising from our experiences.

#### 3.1 Site interview survey

3,838 face-to-face interviews were conducted by trained interviewers with a random sample of visitors to the New Forest. Interviews were used to obtain the following data (see Appendix 1 for copy of questionnaire):

- Visitor profile: (type of visit, group type, age, gender, disability, occupation)
- Visitor origin: home location & postcode
- Visit characteristics: purpose of visit, activities undertaken, length of stay, type of accommodation used by staying visitors, number of previous visits within the last 12 months, transport used, use of facilities, expenditure breakdown
- Alternative modes of transport: whether considered, whether would use a park & ride scheme
- Sources of information used to plan visit, identification of specific leaflets, maps or guides
- Visitor Opinions: likes/ dislikes, information and facilities for disabled people, suggested improvements for disabled visitors.

In addition to providing descriptive, attitudinal and behavioural data, the findings were used in the economic modelling work to assist in approximating overall visitor volumes, their associated expenditure and their resultant economic impact.

##### 3.1.1 Interview locations

The interviews were undertaken at carefully selected locations within the proposed national park boundary area to reflect the different types of use and the diverse landscape of the New Forest.

A total of 70 sites were selected, including 64 observation sites and six 'interviewing only' sites (Sandy Balls Holiday Park, Lymington, Lyndhurst, Brockenhurst, Burley and Ringwood town/village centres).

Two observation/interviewing sites were subsequently dropped. Blashford Lakes was discontinued as a survey site after the National Park boundary was finalised in June 2004, and Copythorne Common was discontinued after difficulties finding suitable public access points, apparent low levels of use and objections from local residents.

##### 3.1.2 Sample size & composition

Overall, 3,838 interviews were achieved, including 2,711 interviews completed at observation sites, 1053 interviews completed in town/village centre locations and 74 interviews completed at Sandy Balls Holiday Centre.

The number of interviews achieved by site over the overall survey period ranged from 3 interviews (Markway Bridge) to 140 interviews (Blackwater).

All types of leisure visitors were included in the survey. These were:

- Leisure visits from home/workplace by New Forest residents;
- Leisure visits from home/workplace by people living outside the National Park boundary, including visits to friends and relatives;
- Holiday visits (1+nights away from home) by those staying overnight inside the National Park (including VFR);
- Holiday visits (1+ nights away from home) by those staying overnight outside the National Park boundary (incl. VFR) referred to as day visitors on holiday;
- Holiday visits by non-UK tourists.

These included visitors on holiday, day visitors and local users.

### **3.1.3 Survey period**

10 to 12, 5 hour interviewing sessions were completed at each location over the survey period. Sessions typically took place between 11am and 4pm and included a set number of weekdays and weekends.

At the observation sites, dedicated interviewing sessions were scheduled to supplement interviews obtained on an ad hoc basis by interviewers collecting observation/count data. The observation sites survey sample therefore includes interviews obtained between 8am and 8pm over weekdays and weekends throughout the year.

Overall, 1,638 interviews were completed during the peak summer period (1<sup>st</sup> July to 18<sup>th</sup> September), 1,175 were completed during the 'shoulder' period (April to June and 19<sup>th</sup> September to 18<sup>th</sup> October) and 1,025 were completed during the 'off-peak' period (19<sup>th</sup> October to the end of March).

### **3.1.4 Comments on data collection**

Acknowledging the difficulties experienced in the APVS in staffing the field interviews with volunteers (e.g. high turnover of staff, inexperience and inconsistency in data collection), only trained market research interviewers were used. This added to the cost of the survey but in our opinion increased the confidence in the validity of the data. Experience from delivering other surveys shows that it is easy for untrained interviewers to unintentionally influence the respondent, introducing bias into the data collected.

Although the New Forest survey sites included several towns and villages, many of the survey sites were relatively remote. The remoteness of certain locations raised issues over the safety of interview staff, especially female staff. The use of male interviewers at remote sites raises another issue. We have experienced certain instances where lone female visitors perceived male interviewers as a potential threat and avoided contact. A basic risk assessment was carried out for each site at the start of the survey and field staff were allocated accordingly. Interviewers were recommended to carry a mobile phone with them during survey sessions, and an 'emergency contact' phone number was covered by TSE project staff both over weekdays and weekends. The Forestry Commission were notified of survey dates and locations in advance, and forest rangers frequently stopped at survey sites where interviewers were working.

As highlighted earlier, a number of locations recorded a low throughput of visitors, limiting opportunities to obtain interviews at those sites. A number of sites were so busy that interviewing was possible only when dedicated interviewers were on site.

## 3.2 Site observation survey

The data obtained from the observation survey forms the basis of the MASOOR spatial planning model outputs, and was therefore critical in assessing visitation patterns, visitor density flows and activities undertaken at each site.

Data collected through observation included:

- The date and time the activity took place
- The direction visitor groups came from and proceeded to (referenced to line-of-sight site plans for each site)
- The mode of transport used at that time (walking, cycling, on horse-back, in a vehicle etc.)
- The number of people within the group
- The number of dogs (if any) and whether dogs were on or off lead
- The presence of children within the group
- Any other relevant comments

A site plan was prepared for each site with code numbers allocated to possible routes or paths including access roads, formal paths, cycle routes, bridle-ways or open forest. Field staff positioned themselves at a nominated position within that site, affording the best possible view of key entry and exit points.

Each visitor 'movement' was recorded according to the direction taken and mode of transport. Thus, two people arriving at a car park location by car would be recorded as one movement. Those same people leaving the car park on foot and walking along a path would be recorded as a second movement. The return to their car on foot at the end of their walk would be recorded as a third movement and departure from the car park by car onto a road would be recorded as a fourth movement.

Cyclists, walkers and riders transiting through or past a survey location would have fewer movements recorded since their mode of transport would not vary, only the direction taken.

Examples of a site plan and observation record sheet are included in Appendix 2.

### 3.2.1 Site observation locations

The observation sites were carefully chosen by the Countryside Agency and Forestry Commission in consultation with the National Trust, Hampshire County Council and Hampshire Wildlife Trust to reflect different levels of use, different types of user (local/visitor), the diverse landscape of the Forest and the sensitivity of specific habitats to disturbance through recreational use.

The survey locations represent varying landscape qualities, including woodland sites, open heathland sites, wetland locations and sites which combine these various qualities. The sites include large 'honeypot' sites and smaller, quieter locations. Other considerations in site selection included; use by local people or visitors, the types of activity known to be popular at the sites and the sensitivity of habitats to recreational activities taking place from those survey locations.

64 observation sites were selected initially. This was reduced to 62 when the National Park boundary was finalised, eliminating Blashford Lakes which was excluded from the National Park, and Copythorne Common which was discontinued due to access issues and problems with local residents.

Observation locations included car parks, laybys, campsites and pedestrian paths, all providing access onto formal paths, cycle routes, bridle-ways, informal paths or open forest.

### **3.2.2 Survey period, sample size and composition**

A total of 730 observation days were completed at the 62 observation sites between January 2004 and March 2005. Observation sessions covered daylight hours (8am to 5pm in winter, 8am to 6 or 8pm in the summer), typically divided into two sessions of 5 hours duration, and were completed by trained interviewers. Overlaps in sessions completed during the winter enabled off-peak interviews to be obtained without the additional cost of dedicated interviewing sessions.

Observation sessions were scheduled carefully to include a representative number of weekdays, Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays over the peak, shoulder and off-peak periods of the year. On occasions when adverse weather was forecast (prolonged periods of moderate to heavy rain), scheduled sessions were postponed and re-scheduled for another date.

An estimated 215,000 visitor movements were recorded over this time. Levels of activity varied considerably by site. One or two sessions recorded no visitor movements at all during a 5 hour period, while at others, over 800 visitor movements were recorded during a 5 hour session.

All groups observed arriving at, transiting or departing from a survey location were recorded. Passing vehicles were not recorded.

### **3.2.3 Comments on data collection**

In view of the vital importance of the observation data to the MASOOR model and for similar reasons to the interview survey, only trained field staff (rather than volunteers) were used for observation survey sessions. This added to the cost of the survey but increased our confidence in the accuracy and validity of the data.

Sessions were scheduled to cover up to 12 daylight hours on any given day, however, this was not always possible due to staff availability, ill health or personal problems requiring occasional sessions to be cancelled and unexpected adverse weather conditions. On one or two occasions sessions were terminated midway due to unexpected events or incidents including car crime affecting field staff. As for the interview survey, the remoteness of some of the survey sites, combined with relatively little passing traffic raised issues over the safety of interview staff, especially at quieter times of the day.

In a few instances, field staff turned up for a session only to find that a car park had been closed, logging operations were about to take over the car park or that a horse trial event was taking place nearby, preventing visitors from accessing those sites. On another occasion a large number of 'travellers' had taken over a car park with their caravans and were deterring other visitors from stopping. In these and similar situations sessions were re-scheduled to cover more typically representative days.

As highlighted earlier, a number of locations recorded a low throughput of visitors, while others were so busy or so large that two staff were required on site to complete a session. At a number of sites, the onset of dense foliage on shrubs or trees during the spring meant that it was no longer possible to view paths or site areas which had previously been visible through the winter leaf cover when the site plans were prepared.

At a small number of sites it was not possible to see the road to note the direction cars came from. Priority was given to the observation of pedestrian or other movements away from the car park into the open forest.

For some of the smaller car parks or lay-bys, the visitor throughput was limited by the availability of parking spaces. At peak times of activity, potential visitors were not always able to find space to park in their chosen location and therefore had to turn around and go elsewhere.

### 3.3 Survey of local households

It was generally agreed that the overall volume of visitor activity would be influenced by the size of the population living within an easy travelling distance to the Park. Quantifying the volume of visits from the local population and adjacent main population catchment areas was one of the key objectives of the household survey.

In addition, past research has highlighted the fact that local residents often have a very different pattern of usage of an area than either holidaymakers or other day visitors, both in terms of the destination visited, dwell time and frequency of visits. The household survey thus provided a key source of information concerning leisure visits undertaken from home or work by people resident within the National Park boundary. The survey provided information on the frequency, location, expenditure and other characteristics of these visits, and in conjunction with the site visitor survey data, enabled estimates to be made concerning the volume and value of this visitor segment.

The household survey also provided an opportunity to establish whether any of these trips were VFR related (e.g. primarily motivated by friends or family visiting from outside the Park) and thus improve our understanding of VFR related tourism within the New Forest National Park area. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 3.

A telephone survey was chosen as the most cost-effective method for gathering data from local users. The following information was collated:

- Household profile; household composition in terms of adults/children, age and gender, disabled persons within the household, socio-economic profile
- Visit characteristics: purpose of visit, locations visited, length of stay, frequency of previous visits, group type, transport used, use of facilities, expenditure breakdown, activities undertaken;
- Sources of information used to plan visits (if any), identification of specific leaflets, guidebooks, maps or websites used;
- Opinions: likes/dislikes, information and facilities for disabled people, suggested improvements for disabled visitors;
- Reasons for not visiting: - to find out more about local people who never, or rarely, visit the New Forest for leisure or recreational visits.

#### 3.3.1 *Sample size*

As with the onsite visitor survey, the geographical scale and composition of the area demanded a relatively large sample to allow sufficient representation. The sample was split between those households located within the proposed National Park boundary area, those households located in towns and villages immediately adjacent to the boundary, and the major conurbations of Bournemouth and Southampton. Refer to Appendix 4 for a sample breakdown by postcode area.

It was decided that 50% of the target survey sample of 2000 interviews would involve inner catchment households located within the National Park boundary, 30% would involve households in areas adjacent to the boundary and 20% of the sample would involve urban conurbation households in Bournemouth and Southampton.

Within each of the target populations outlined above, the interview target sample was distributed according to the population density of the wards identified. Telephone numbers for households in each sample strata were obtained from an external agency.

#### 3.3.2 *'Warm up' and interviewing*

As a matter of courtesy, a 'warm up' letter was sent to randomly selected households to inform them in advance of the research and to advise them that they would be contacted in the near future, typically within two weeks. The letter provided details of the purpose of the survey, information on the commissioning agency, a map of the proposed area, and also included a cash prize draw competition to incentivise participation. The letter also provided the opportunity for those in the sample to contact the project team should they not wish to be interviewed (refer to Appendix 3).

Interviews took place during the working week between the hours of 11am and 4pm in the daytime and 5pm and 8pm in the evening.

### **3.3.3 Survey Period**

The survey period was split into two main phases reflecting the peak, shoulder and off-peak periods of the year in order to aid recall of visits made during those times. The first phase of interviewing took place from mid-June to mid-July and the second phase from early September to mid-November. During both phases, respondents were asked how many times they had visited the New Forest for leisure or recreational purposes in the 12 months prior to the interview.

### **3.3.4 Number of interviewing sessions**

Interviewing sessions were divided evenly between the daytime and evening. Previous experience has shown that telephone interviews conducted during the day result in a survey sample containing a high proportion of retired people or those in the mature age groups who were more likely to be home during the day. Conversely, evening telephone surveys are more productive in terms of contacting households with younger working people.

Around 20% of the overall survey sample interviews were obtained in the morning (11am to 1pm), 40% in the afternoon (1-4pm) and 40% in the evening (5-8pm).

On average, interviewers completed four to five telephone interviews per hour. Calls that achieved no response were called back up to 5 times to minimise potential non-response bias in the sample.

### **3.3.5 Sample size**

5,445 households were contacted to achieve the target sample of 2,000. The actual sample achieved was 2,164, a response rate of 40%.

### **3.3.6 Comments on data collection**

Two options were available in order to contact people for the household survey; random digit dialling method and current registered numbers from the BT Phone Book.

The first stage of the random digit dialling process involves the selection of residential blocks, or exchanges (i.e. the first seven digits of a telephone number), with probability of selection proportional to population. The remaining four digits needed to complete the telephone number are then randomly generated, meaning that new and ex-directory numbers have an equal probability of inclusion in the resulting sample. This method does not enable names and addresses of households to be identified.

The use of the BT Phone Book as a sampling frame enabled households to be contacted before the survey, but it was acknowledged that this approach would automatically exclude a significant section of the population: all ex-directory numbers. This introduced the possibility that households, which are ex-directory could be different to households that are directory based. Currently there is no research evidence that we are aware of to suggest that ex-directory households are significantly different to those that are listed.

A number of factors lead us to conclude that, on balance, the exclusion of ex-directory numbers was less of a problem than the potential for a high refusal rate from 'cold calling'. Public hostility to perceived 'tele-marketing' strategies and the difficulty of establishing and maintaining rapport without face-to-face contact meant that our approach needed to assure households that the survey was genuine and that we were not in the business of selling them a product.

Registered household numbers enabled us to contact the household before the interview since the name and address of the occupier are also made available. This allowed us to inform them of the survey, provide them with the opportunity not to be called and thereby set in place a more conducive response to telephone interviewers. Respondents also needed to be clear about the boundaries of the New Forest National Park. To assist them, a map of the proposed National Park boundary was enclosed with the 'warm-up' letter.

The publication of a different 'final' National Park boundary map in June 2004 complicated matters slightly in that a number of households had already been sent the National Park (Designation) Order 2002 version as a reference.

The alteration of the Designation Order boundary to the 'final' National Park boundary announced on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2004, midway through the first phase of telephoning also affected the ward target quotas planned at the outset of the survey. Significant residential areas including Lymington, Ringwood and Bransgore were eliminated from the National Park area and the target samples for each ward were adjusted accordingly. As a result, some of the households adjacent to the boundary are slightly over-represented in the survey sample.

### **3.4 Educational & organised visits surveys**

Education and group use of National Parks can be substantial, yet these groups are likely to be under represented in site surveys.

391 educational establishments were identified within a catchment area that included Hampshire, Dorset and the Salisbury area. Primary/infant schools (apart from those within New Forest District) were excluded from the survey.

The group use survey involved compiling a list of societies, clubs and other activity based associations located in Hampshire, Dorset or Salisbury or identified as group users from a permissions list prepared by the Forestry Commission. In total 221 groups were identified and contacted (158 via email, 63 by post).

Educational establishments were mailed a short postal questionnaire to gather information on the number of trips made to the New Forest, locations visited, the duration of trips, average group size, the main activities undertaken and expenditure relating to the trip.

Groups and societies were sent a similar questionnaire. Refer to Appendix 5 for example questionnaires.

The education survey received a 27% response rate (107 questionnaires out of 391 returned, although not all had made trips to the New Forest within the previous year). A similar response rate was achieved for the group survey, 27% (60 questionnaires out of 221 returned).

#### **Comments on data collection**

The response rate from organised groups was lower than anticipated. Generally, however, both surveys supplied acceptable response rates.

### **3.5 Accommodation occupancy and attraction visits surveys**

**Serviced accommodation occupancy data** was obtained through an established postal survey of serviced accommodation establishments within New Forest district, as part of the Southern Region sample for the UK Occupancy Survey<sup>1</sup>. Results are based on data provided by participating open establishments, therefore sample sizes may vary from month to month due to

---

<sup>1</sup> As part of the EU Directive on Tourism Statistics adopted in 1995, the UK must report regularly on a specified range of statistics to Eurostat, the official statistical office of the European Union. The responsibility for providing this data lies with the four National Tourist Boards, and across England the survey is undertaken by the Regional Tourist Boards.

seasonal closures and non-returns. Up to 45 establishments returned data during 2004, including 22 B&Bs (1-3 rooms) and 23 hotels (4+ rooms).

Occupancy questionnaires are mailed in advance on a monthly basis, and participants are supplied with regular feedback in the form of results sheets containing figures for their own establishment, Hampshire and the UKOS Southern Region as a whole.

Whilst every attempt has been made to maintain a constant sample of participating establishments, this has not been possible due to the voluntary nature on which participation is based. However a level of proportionality is achieved by weighting establishments on the basis of their size (i.e. bedspaces) relative to the average establishment size within the survey population.

**Self-catering accommodation occupancy data** is obtained through a quarterly postal survey of self-catering accommodation providers. Results are again based on data provided by participating open establishments/properties, and sample sizes vary according to seasonal closures and non-returns. Up to 31 self-catering providers returned data during 2004, representing 167 self-catering units (houses, cottages or flats) overall.

The occupancy forms are mailed at the end of each quarter, and participants are provided with personal results for their own business, as well as district and county averages. Self-catering accommodation results are based on 'unit weeks' or part-weeks let, and are unweighted.

**Touring caravan and camping occupancy data** is also obtained through a retrospective quarterly postal survey, but data from Forestry Commission sites is obtained at the end of each year. Participants are asked to provide details of pitches occupied on a daily basis, and results are again unweighted.

Many of the sites are closed during the winter months, and results outside the main visitor season are therefore unreliable. 2004 results are based on 12 touring camping & caravanning sites, including the 10 Forestry Commission sites within the New Forest.

Data on **visits to attractions** was already collected by TSE from a number of attractions in the New Forest as part of the Hampshire Tourism Trends Attraction Survey<sup>2</sup>. Participating attractions are mailed on a quarterly basis, and data collected on free and paying visitors. Participating attractions receive feedback via a results bulletin, reporting on district and county results for a 'constant sample'.

Those New Forest attractions not participating in the above survey were approached for their overall 2004 visitor figures early in 2005. A number of attractions were only able to provide estimates, and some do not record visitor numbers at all.

Visitor figures obtained from the 14 attractions that were able to provide data have been included in the economic impact component of this study. The confidential nature of this information precludes the publication of results for individual attractions within this report.

### 3.6 Quality Control

The various surveys generated a considerable stream of count sheets and questionnaires. To ensure quality control, all questionnaires were processed centrally through the research unit at Tourism South East. This involved the preparation of all survey materials, management of the interviewing and observation sessions, checking of questionnaires and observation sheets, coding of open responses on questionnaires, running the analyses and report writing. The only element to be contracted-out was the data entry. A specialist data entry agency was employed to undertake the data processing of questionnaire and observation data.

---

<sup>2</sup> This is a monthly tourism barometer undertaken for Hampshire County Council and Districts by Tourism South East.