

**MONITORING THE QUALITY OF
EXPERIENCE IN FORESTS
RESULTS OF PILOT UNDERTAKEN
IN AFAN ARGOED, WALES**

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A. Background and introduction

Background

This report is one of the final outputs of a study undertaken by NFO Transport and Tourism which aimed to develop a methodology that would be used by Forest Enterprise to monitor the quality of visitor experiences at forest sites.

The survey method has been developed on the basis of information obtained from an extensive review of literature and detailed discussions with both forest users and managers. It is expected that this survey methodology will be used to provide practical, management information at a local level and more general information at a district or national level. It is also hoped that, when sufficient numbers of interviews have been undertaken, results will be analysed and compared according to different geographical areas and user groups, providing significant opportunities for benchmarking satisfaction across the Forest Enterprise estate.

This report details the findings of a survey pilot that was undertaken during February and March 2003 in Afan Argoed in South Wales. Piloting was also undertaken at Ringwood in the New Forest during the same period – results of this exercise are presented under a separate cover.

Method

A total of 153 visitors were interviewed at three points - Afan Argoed Visitor Centre and access points on the A4017.

Visitors who used the site at least once a month were interviewed and asked to rate both the levels of importance of different aspects of forest visits and their satisfaction with the same aspects at Afan Argoed. Visitors who came to Afan Argoed less often were interviewed for a shorter period before being given a self-completion questionnaire regarding their levels of satisfaction. This was completed and returned, using a reply-paid envelope. Copies of the questionnaires used are appended.

Following the completion of the survey, a series of 10 in-depth interviews of around 20 minutes duration were undertaken with mountain bikers. 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 afield. 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 as a 'thank you' for being interviewed. The topic guide used during these interviews is also appended.

Report

This report provides the results of the pilot survey undertaken at Afan Argoed. A more detailed review of the development of these survey methods and potential uses of the results are provided under a separate cover.

As this survey was a pilot which aimed to test the survey methods, the total sample size is relatively small. It is therefore important to treat the results with some caution. In the sections discussing importance and satisfaction results have been tested using ANOVA (analysis of variance) techniques and only statistically significant findings are discussed in the commentary.

B. Main results

Visitor profile

To determine the types of people using the forest, visitors were asked to provide some information about their age, family situation and place of residence.

Demographics

The majority of visitors (58%) to Afan Argoed were in the Young Independent lifecycle group (under 35, no children in household) while about a quarter (23%) were Empty Nesters (over 45, no children in the household) and 20% were in the Family lifecycle group (children under 16 living in the household).

The age profile of respondents reflects these findings with over two in five visitors aged under 35 (43%) while only 16% were aged 55 or over.

Table B-1 – Age and lifecycle (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
Age	
16 - 24	8
25 – 34	35
35 – 44	29
45 – 54	12
55 – 64	10
65+	6
Lifecycle	
Young Independents	58
Families	20
Empty Nesters	23

It is notable that the largest proportions of Young Independents were found amongst people who were cycling in the forest (76%) while the majority of dog walkers were Empty Nesters (60%).

Origin

The majority of visitors lived in South Wales with around a third travelling from the Cardiff area (33%) and 31% from Swansea. A smaller yet significant proportion came from Bristol (8%) while 7% lived in Port Talbot.

Table B-2 – Area of residence (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
Cardiff area	33
Swansea area	31
Bristol area	8
Port Talbot	7
Other South West	8
Other	13

Experience of mountain biking

Cyclists who were interviewed in-depth at Afan Argoed were also asked about their level of experience of mountain biking. There was a wide range of experience, with some respondents having recently taken up the sport for purely recreation purposes while others had been cycling for more than ten years and were training for competitions.

Trip profile

Visitors were also asked a number of questions about their current trip, the length of time spent away from home, time spent in the forest and activities undertaken.

Type of trip

The majority of respondents stated that they were on a short trip away from home which would last for less than 3 hours in duration (69%). About a quarter were on a longer day trip (23%) while 8% were on holiday. It is important to remember that this survey was undertaken in February and March 2003 – if interviewing had been undertaken during the summer months the proportion of day visitors and holiday visitors may well have been higher.

Table B-3 – Type of trip (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
On a short trip of less than 3 hours from home	69
On a day out for more than 3 hours from home	23
On holiday away from home	8

Visitors most likely to be on a short trip of less than 3 hours' duration included Empty Nesters (83%) and dog walkers (90%). Visitors more likely to be on a longer day trip included Young Independents (27%) and cyclists (30%). Cyclists were also more likely to be on holiday (10%).

Amongst the cyclists who were interviewed in depth, the majority were locals who visited Afan Argoed once or twice a week while a smaller number had travelled from England with the specific purpose of riding there.

Frequency of visits

When asked about their frequency of visit, a quarter of visitors stated that they were on their first ever trip to the site (24%). A smaller proportion usually visited once a week or more (15%) while 27% visited on 1 to 3 occasions per month.

Table B-4 – Frequency of visits to forest (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
Every day	24
4 to 6 times per week	2
1 to 3 times a week	3
1 to 3 times a month	10
4 to 6 times a year	27
1 to 3 times a year	21
Less often	11
First ever visit	3

Length of visits

Visitors spent an average of about 2 and a half hours in the forest. However, over a third of visitors spent more than 3 hours there (38%).

Table B-5 – Length of visit (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
Up to 15 minutes	2
15 – 30 minutes	5
30 minutes – 1 hour	11
1 hour – 2 hours	20
2 hours – 3 hours	25
3 hours – 5 hours	33
More than 5 hours	5
<i>Average</i>	<i>2hrs 37 mins</i>

It is interesting to note the variations in average length of visit between different types of visitor. Generally, visitors spending the longest time included cyclists (3hrs 14mins) and Young Independents (3hrs 5mins). Conversely, the shortest visits were usually taken by Empty Nesters (1hr 46 mins) and dog walkers (1hr 26 mins).

Activities undertaken

When asked what they did during their visit, the most frequently mentioned activities included cycling on waymarked tracks (53%), walking without a dog (20%), cycling off waymarked tracks (16%) and dog walking (13%).

Table B-6 – Activities undertaken during visit to forest (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
Cycling on waymarked tracks	53
Walking without a dog	20
Cycling off waymarked tracks	16
Dog walking	13
Hill walking/ rambling	5
Picnic	4
Seeing something in the woodland (e.g. sculpture)	3
Birdwatching	3
Photography	3
Orienteering	3
Motor sports	1
Running	1
Nature/ natural history visit	1
Horse riding	1
Others	8

Visitors most likely to take part in cycling on waymarked tracks included Young Independents (70%) and people who visit the site less than once a month (58%). Conversely, only 11% of Empty Nesters took part in this activity.

Visitors most likely to have taken a walk *without* a dog included Empty Nesters (40%) and people who visit the site less than once a month (25%). Dog walking was undertaken by nearly a third of those visitors who came to the site once a week or more (30%).

Importance of different aspects of visit

To identify the drivers of quality, it was useful to ask visitors to rate how important different aspects were in their decision to visit the site. Visitors could rate each of a list of aspects as 'very important' (+2), 'quite important' (+1), 'neither important nor unimportant' (0), 'not very important' (-1) or 'not at all important' (-2). Scores were then applied to responses, allowing averages to be obtained across the whole sample - the higher the average score, the more important the aspect is across the sample as a whole.

This analysis suggests that the priorities for visitors to Afan Argoed as a whole included feeling happy to 'leave their car in the car park', 'being able to enjoy scenery and views', 'clean toilets' and 'being able to enjoy wildlife'. In the table below an overall 'average' across all of the mean scores has been included in the ranking. Any aspect above this level can be considered as very important to the site amongst *all* visitors while other aspects may be of less importance overall or only important to specific groups of visitors (e.g. play equipment or baby changing facilities).

Table B-7 – Importance of different aspects in decision to visit (mean score)

Base: All respondents (153)

	Importance score
<i>Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park</i>	1.82
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	1.78
<i>Clean toilets</i>	1.68
<i>Being able to enjoy wildlife</i>	1.50
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	1.50
<i>Enough car parking</i>	1.47
<i>Choice of trails for other activities (e.g. cycling or riding)</i>	1.42
<i>Clear signposting on footpaths</i>	1.28
<i>Feeling safe in the forest</i>	1.24
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	1.23
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	1.21
AVERAGE	0.97
A café	0.96
Availability of staff at the site (e.g. rangers)	0.86
Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting	0.80
Choice of paths for walking	0.55
A shop	0.48
Children's play equipment	-0.59
Baby changing facilities	-0.63

When comparing these scores it is important to bear in mind that not all variations are statistically significant. For example there is no significant difference between the mean scores given to 'Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park' and 'Being able to enjoy scenery and views'. There is however, a statistically significant difference between the scores for 'Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park' and 'Clean toilets'.

This ranking should therefore be treated as providing a broader indication of what is most important and what is least important to visitors.

While these averages provide an overview of the importance of each element across *all* visitors, it would also be useful to look at the levels of importance to specific user groups. However, due to the relatively small size of sample used in this survey pilot it is difficult to identify any statistically significant variations in the responses provided by different groups of users.

Respondents were also asked to specify what else, if anything, had influenced their decision to visit. The largest proportion of respondents (28%) stated that they had visited Afan Argoed because of the high quality of the cycling trails, 14% visited for more general reasons such as fresh air or a day out and 12% visited because the site was close to their home.

Table B-8 – Other influences on decision to visit (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
Cycling trails are the best	28
For fresh air/ day out/ meet friends	14
Weather/ day in the sun	13
Convenience/ close to home	12
Regular activity/ enjoy it	12
Recommended by friends/ relatives	5
Visit café	4
Walk the dog	3
Mountain bike facilities	2
Others	1
No other reasons	16

During the in-depth interviews undertaken with mountain bikers, respondents were asked about what factors usually influenced them when they were deciding where to go cycling.

Generally, purpose built facilities which welcomed mountain bikers were preferred. Specific places mentioned included Coed-y-brenin, Gwydr Forest, Nant-y-arian, Cwm Carn, the Brecon Beacons and the Forest of Dean.

Specific factors that affected decisions included the condition of trails and how technical they were, accessibility and parking, toilets and, possibly of most importance, the level of ‘welcome’ provided to cyclists:

“In Wales they have all these great facilities, they actually want us here. In England we get treated like lepers.”

Afan Argoed was preferred because of the low cost of parking, the friendly welcome and because the site catered well for mountain bikers with separate trails provided for walkers and horse riders. When prompted about what was most important to their satisfaction at this site the following responses were provided:

Cycle trails – the trails at Afan Argoed are very well built, a good length, dry and in good condition. This level of provision is very important to satisfaction amongst mountain bikers.

Other mountain biking facilities – the provision of bike washing facilities, free locks for bikes and a café which welcomed mountain bikers were all mentioned as elements that would impact upon satisfaction.

Socialising – it was commented that this site had a good atmosphere, especially at weekends when ‘*everyone is there for the same thing.*’

Proximity to home – while this factor was clearly important to the local, frequent users, a proportion of mountain bikers were prepared to travel from further afield to use this specialist facility.

Wildlife – it was commented that little wildlife was seen due to the speed and noise of cycling. This element was not important in the decision to visit but was nice to see unexpectedly (a bonus).

Scenery, backdrop and peace and quiet – this element was perceived as being very important. It was mentioned that the natural elements of a visit and benefits gained from their presence were perhaps more important ‘on reflection’ than during the process of deciding where to visit.

Overall, when deciding where to go mountain biking, the provision of purpose built tracks and the welcoming, encouraging atmosphere were seen as being most important.

Favourite aspects of forest

When visitors interviewed in the survey were asked about what they liked most about Afan Argoed forest, the most frequently provided responses related to peace and quiet, tranquillity and scenery (33%) and the cycle trails (27%).

Table B-9 – What liked most about Afan Argoed (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
Peace, tranquillity and scenery	33
Cycle trails	27
Fresh air	9
Close to home	5
All the facilities needed	4
Wildlife/ trees	3
Walking area for dogs	3
Good walks	1
Children's activities	1
Don't know/ not stated	39

The answers provided to this question varied between different visitor groups. Over half of Empty Nesters, visitors who came once a week or more and dog walkers mentioned peace, tranquillity and scenery (54%, 57% and 60% respectively).

The cycle trails were more likely to be mentioned by visitors who came to the site between once a week and once a month (56%) and, not surprisingly, amongst those who actually took part in cycling (38%).

Satisfaction with different aspects of visit

Visitors were provided with a list of different elements of the site and asked to rate how satisfied they had been with each during their visit. Respondents could rate each of the list on a five point scale which included 'very satisfied' (+2), 'quite satisfied' (+1), 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (0), 'not very satisfied' (-1) or 'not at all satisfied' (-2). Also, if visitors had no experience of a specific element they were asked to indicate that they did not know.

Scores were then applied to responses, allowing averages to be obtained across all of the visitors who provided a score - the higher the average score, the more satisfied visitors were with this aspect. This analysis suggests that, overall, visitors were most likely to be satisfied with 'the scenery and views', the 'provision of car parking', the 'value for money' of their day out, the 'choice of trails for other activities (e.g. cycling)' and the 'provision of leaflets and information'.

Table B-10 – Satisfaction with different aspects at forest (mean score)

Base: All respondents (153)

	Average
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	1.79
<i>Enough car parking</i>	1.74
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	1.73
<i>Choice of trails for other activities</i>	1.73
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	1.71
<i>Feeling safe in the forest</i>	1.69
<i>Being able to enjoy wildlife</i>	1.66
<i>Clean toilets</i>	1.65
<i>Feeling happy to leave car in the car park</i>	1.65
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	1.63
<i>Clear signposting on footpaths</i>	1.61
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	1.54
TOTAL	1.54
Availability of staff at the site	1.49
Cafe	1.45
Shop	1.45
Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting	1.73
Baby changing facilities	0.90
Children's Play Equipment	0.81

When comparing these scores it is important to bear in mind that not all variations are statistically significant. For example, there is no significant difference between the scores given to 'Being able to enjoy scenery and views' and 'Feeling safe in the forest'. There is

however, a statistically significant difference between 'Being able to enjoy scenery and views' and 'Being able to enjoy wildlife'.

This ranking should therefore be treated as providing a broader indication of what visitors are most and least satisfied with.

Expectations V Reality

Respondents to the self completion questionnaire, who were either on their first ever visit to the site or visited less than once a month, were asked to indicate how their overall visit had compared with expectations.

While the majority of respondents did not provide a response to this question, 17% of visitors had found the forest to be better than expected while none found it to be worse than expected.

Table B-11 – Overall rating of visit to forest compared to expectations (%)

Base: All self-completion respondents (53)

	%
Much better	11
A little better	6
As expected	25
A little worse	-
Much worse	-
Don't know/ not stated	58

Identification of issues

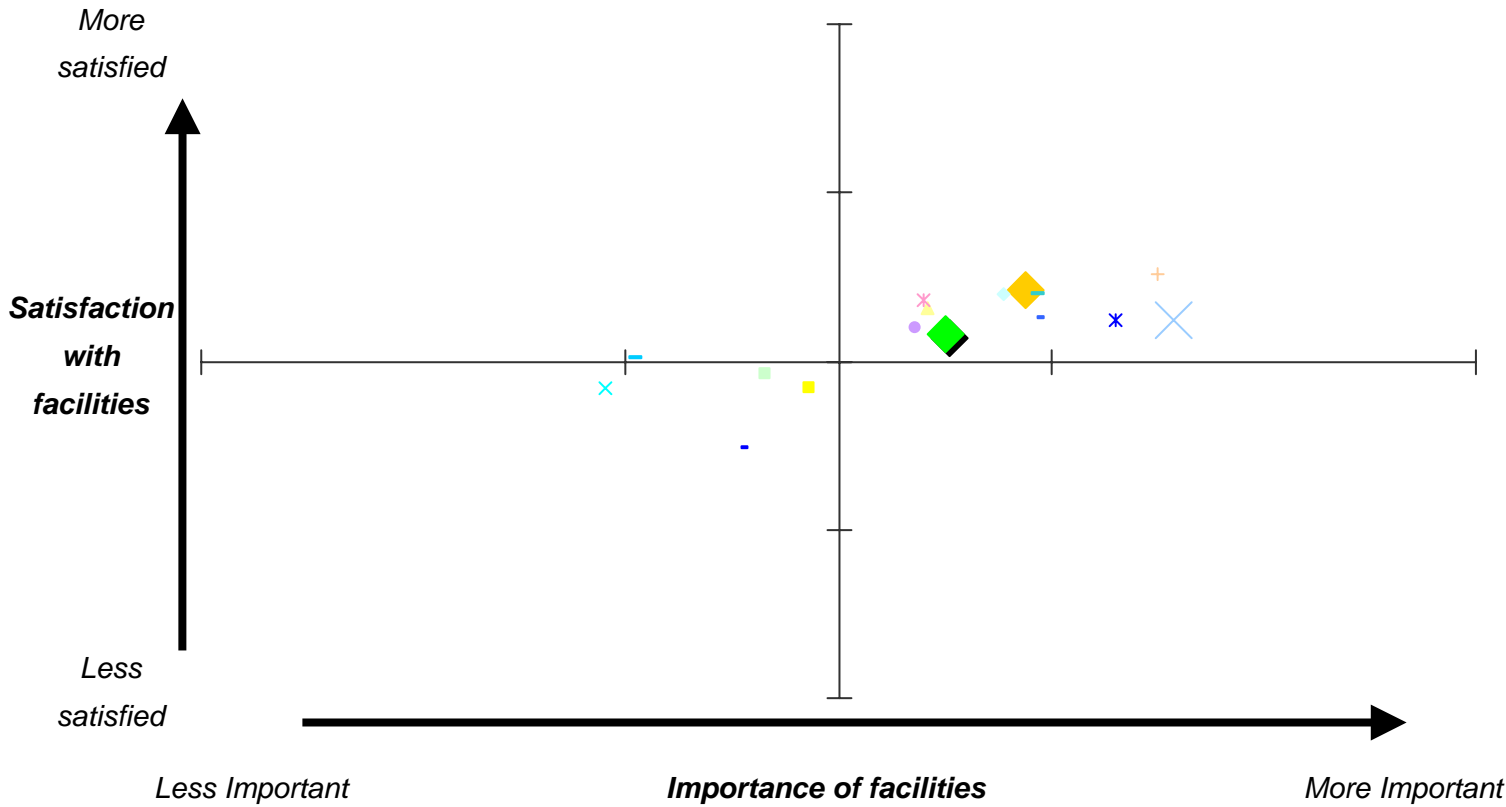
Tables B-7 and B-11 illustrated a ranking of the overall levels of importance and levels of satisfaction visitors have with different aspects of the 'visitor experience' at Ringwood. It is useful to combine these two measures to identify the elements which are most relevant to improving quality.

The chart opposite presents each of the elements that were rated in terms of both importance and satisfaction. The centre point is where the 'average' importance crosses the 'average' satisfaction score (as shown in B-7 and B-10). Each of the elements are plotted in the 4 quadrants as follows:

- Top left – *More Satisfied - Less Important* – choice of paths for walking. Visitors are generally satisfied with these elements although they are rated as less important on average.
- Bottom left – *Less Satisfied – Less Important* – shop, café, availability of staff, leaflets and other information. Overall, visitors are slightly less satisfied with these aspects but they are also seen as less important amongst a large proportion of visitors. These elements can therefore be seen as lower priorities for investment and improvement.
- Top right – *More Satisfied – More Important* – solitude, clear signposting, feeling safe in the forest, being able to spend time with family and friends, choice of trails for activities other than walking, enough car parking, value for money, clean toilets, being able to enjoy scenery and views and being happy to leave car in the forest. Elements in this quadrant are rated highly overall in terms of both importance and satisfaction. These are the forest's key strengths which should be maintained.
- Bottom right – *Less Satisfied – More Important* – encouragingly, none of the elements rated are in this quadrant. Elements appearing in this quadrant would have been rated as more important than 'average' but would have received lower than average satisfaction scores. These elements would therefore have required further attention.

It is important to note that the scores presented in this chart are averages across *all visitors* during the period in which the survey took place. With a larger overall sample size it would be very useful to segment the results further according to distinct user groups to identify the priorities amongst, for example, families, dog walkers or cyclists.

Analysis of importance of elements of visit V satisfaction with same elements
 Base: All respondents (153)



- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ◆ Enough car parking | ◆ Clear signposting |
| × Shop | ■ Café |
| * Clean toilets | ● Baby changing |
| + Children's play equipment | - Leaflets & info |
| - Choice of paths | ◆ Choice of trails |
| ■ Availability of staff | ▲ Safe in the forest |
| × Happy to leave car in car park | * Solitude etc. |
| ● Spend time with family/ friends | + Being able to enjoy scenery/ views |
| - Being able to enjoy wildlife | - Value for money |

Other visitors

When asked which of a list of other users they had encountered during their visit, 59% had encountered cyclists, 56% encountered walkers and 38% encountered children. Over a third of visitors had not encountered any of the other user types listed (38%).

Table B-12 – Other visitors encountered (%) and impact on enjoyment (row %)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%	Increased enjoyment a lot +2	Increased enjoyment a little +1	Made no difference 0	Decreased a little -1	Decreased a lot -2	Score
Walkers	56	7	9	81	1	1	0.20
Children	38	10	3	84	2	-	0.22
Cyclists	59	11	10	75	3	1	0.26
Horse riders	17	4	1	88	4	-	0.08
Vehicles driving in the forest	12	-	5	79	11	5	-0.16
Anglers	5	-	-	100	-	-	0
Motorbikers/ moto cross	11	-	-	65	12	24	-0.59
None of these visitors	38						

Respondents who had encountered each of the different user groups were asked to indicate whether or not this had increased or decreased their overall enjoyment. Mean scores were applied to results from +2 if a user group 'increased enjoyment a lot' to -2 if they 'decreased enjoyment a lot'.

As the table above illustrates, on most occasions encounters with other visitors had no impact on enjoyment. Cyclists were most likely to have enhanced the experience of other visitors with 21% of those who encountered them stating that they enhanced their enjoyment.

Motorbikers or people taking part in moto-cross were more likely to have decreased enjoyment. About a tenth of visitors had encountered this user group (11%) and a large proportion of these respondents stated that their presence had decreased their enjoyment (36% of those who had encountered them).

Another user group that had an overall negative impact amongst those who had encountered them was vehicles driving in the forest. About an eighth of respondents had encountered this group (12%).

It is interesting to note variations in the impact of encounters amongst different types of visitors. For example, the presence of cyclists had the most positive impact on other participants of this activity (+0.38) but an overall negative impact on walkers (-0.19).

Similarly, walkers were most likely to appreciate the presence of other people taking part in this activity (+0.33) while cyclists were less likely to do so (+0.05).

Disturbances to visit

Respondents were also presented with a list of potential negative disruptions and asked what impact, if any, each had on their visit. As the table below illustrates, the majority of respondents either indicated that each of the potential impacts either ‘didn’t reduce their enjoyment’ or that they did not know (suggesting the impact had not been encountered).

The disruptions most likely to have had any effect were litter or fly tipping (decreased the enjoyment of 13% of visitors), dogs and dog dirt (decreased the enjoyment of 12%) and forest operations (decreased enjoyment of 12%).

Table B-13 –Impact of potential issues on enjoyment (row %)

Base: All respondents (153)

	Didn't reduce enjoyment	Decreased a little	Decreased a lot	Don't know	Score
	1	2	3		
Noise from other users or motorised sports	47	4	5	44	1.24
Litter or fly tipping	46	10	2	42	1.25
Dogs and dog dirt	46	7	5	41	1.30
Muddy tracks	52	8	2	38	1.20
Vandalised missing or damaged signposts	51	5	2	42	1.15
Forest operations such as felling	47	7	5	41	1.28

Respondents were asked to indicate what else, if anything had decreased their enjoyment. Some of the answers provided are reproduced below:

The tap not working properly.

Sometime if there are a lot of bikes it can be a nuisance, but they have to use it as well.

The closing time of the cafe (aren't always open).

Forestation is detrimental to the area, not scenically appealing.

During the in-depth interviews, mountain bikers were probed for more detail on some of the key issues at Afan Argoed. It is important to note that visitors to this site were generally very positive and saw this site as an example of an excellent facility for mountain biking that should be replicated elsewhere:

“Good on the Welsh Forestry Commission, much better than England, they’re just not interested.”

However, when asked about specific areas, the following responses were obtained:

Trail closures – in the past, sections of trails had been closed and never re-opened. While some of the respondents understood that this might be because of the costs of clearing trees which had blown down, etc. others felt that this was a big problem and that action should be taken to clear these routes.

Muddy tracks – this is a major issue amongst mountain bikers as it could lead to sections of trail being unusable. It was specifically mentioned that use of the trails by motocross bikes should be stopped. While muddy tracks are expected, it was suggested that signage, the provision of alternative routes and rapid repairs to paths were vital. Examples were given of prolonged path closures and inadequate temporary detours.

Motorised sports – in addition to the trail damage they cause, motocross bikes were seen as being very dangerous to mountain bikers who were concerned about the large stones that they throw up and the possibilities of collisions.

“It really annoys me. I’ve got one myself. There’s places, plenty of places. Why must they come here and ruin our tracks?”

Litter and tipping – the mountain bikers spoken to recognised that litter was dropped by other cyclists (e.g. energy bar wrappers, drinking bottles) and that this was a problem that had increased with increasing numbers of visitors. This was seen as an issue but something which was no worse at Afan Argoed than at other sites used by mountain bikers.

Facilities – specific issues mentioned regarding built facilities at Afan Argoed included cold changing facilities in winter, the lack of showers and the cost and unsuitability of the café for mountain bikers.

Value for money – overall, Afan Argoed was seen as offering excellent value for money. Indeed, some of the respondents stated that they would pay more if it meant that facilities could be improved and closed tracks could be re-opened.

Improvements

When asked what, if anything, needed to be improved at Afan Argoed nearly two-thirds of visitors either stated that nothing should be changed or that they didn't know (61%).

The suggestions that were made are listed below. A tenth of visitors (11%) suggested that more trails should be provided, 8% wanted better cycling facilities such as lanes or a washing facility and 7% suggested shower blocks.

Table B-14 – Suggested improvements (%)

Base: All respondents (153)

	%
More trails	11
Better cycling facilities e.g. lanes, washing facility	8
Shower blocks	7
More maps/ signs	3
More bins	2
Keep it natural	2
More children's activities	1
Improve paths	1
Nothing	20
Don't know/ not stated	41

The key issues arising from the survey and possible solutions were discussed in more detail during the subsequent in-depth interviews undertaken with mountain bikers. Some of the main areas discussed are summarised below:

- *More single-track trails* – it was suggested that it would be good if the trails at Afan Argoed were suited to a wider variety of skill levels. There is currently nothing really challenging for elite/ professional riders. However, it is still important to maintain the ‘chicken runs’ for families. It was also suggested that slaloms, jumps, short runs or even a downhill trail (with a chairlift) would be great improvements. However, it was also stated that the provision of new trails was only worthwhile if they could be maintained and kept open.
- *Shower block and changing facilities* – the provision of these facilities would be ‘nice to have’ but were generally not seen as being vital. They would be appreciated most by visitors who had travelled a long distance to Afan Argoed while locals would be unlikely to use them.
- *Improved bike washing* – similarly, an improved bike washing facility would be appreciated most by people who had travelled to the site from further away. This is another facility that would be nice to have but was not vital to future satisfaction or repeat visits.
- *‘Bike friendly’ catering* – this is an area which was seen as definitely having potential for improvement. At the moment the café facilities appear to be orientated mostly to families or older people (‘coffee and cakes’). There is a greater demand for the provision of food and drinks such as energy drinks, power bars etc. which mountain bikers would prefer.
- *Bike spares shop and repairs* – while there is little demand for a ‘full blown’ bike shop, a shop selling spares and doing basic repairs would be appreciated and would probably be very useful.

Other suggestions for improvements made by mountain bikers in the depth interviews included the provision of bins at logical positions along the trails and improved winter maintenance of muddy areas.

Priorities

After discussing the possible areas where improvements could be made in this forest, the respondents were asked to identify the priorities. The key priorities for mountain bikers were:

- Maintenance and development of dedicated trails.
- Provision of more suitable catering facilities and a shop selling basic spares.
- The provision of shower blocks/ bike washing for visitors who do not live locally.

Overall it was notable at this site that respondents to both the quantitative and in-depth surveys were very positive about the site and its facilities. The key message they asked to be passed back to the Forestry Commission was one of appreciation and to keep up the good work.

Key findings

The survey and in-depth interviews undertaken at Afan Argoed have provided an insight into levels of satisfaction at this site, especially amongst mountain bikers. A number of key findings have emerged from this exercise:

- A significant proportion of visitors to this site take part in mountain biking. These users are predominantly young, many live within a short drive of the site while others have travelled from further away to use the specialist facilities.
- Overall the most important elements of a visit relate to car security, being able to enjoy scenery and wildlife, clean toilets and value for money. Cyclists also rate the provision of trails for cycling as very important reasons for their visiting this site. Peace and quiet and the cycling trails are also mentioned as 'favourite' aspects of the site.
- Overall, visitors are most satisfied with the scenery and views, provision of car parking, value for money provided and the choice of cycling trails provided at this site.
- Areas most likely to have caused dissatisfaction at this site included motorcross bikers (and the damage they cause), litter, dogs and dog dirt and muddy tracks.
- The key suggestions for improvements included development and improvement of the mountain bike trail network, the provision of improved changing facilities, improved bike washing facilities and 'bike friendly' catering.

C. Appendices

Discussion guide used in qualitative stage

Questionnaires used in quantitative stage

Discussion Guide used in Depth Interviews

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?

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