

Laggan Wolftrax

Evaluation

for

Forestry Commission Scotland
HIE Inverness & East Highlands
Laggan Forest Trust



December 2006

*St George's Studios, 93-97 St George's
Road, Glasgow, G3 6JA
Tel: 0141 353 1994 Fax: 0141 353 2660*

*E-mail: ekos@ekos.co.uk
www.ekos-consultants.co.uk*

TOURISM RESOURCES COMPANY
Management Consultancy and Research Services

2 LA BELLE PLACE, GLASGOW G3 7LH
Tel: 0141-353 1143 Fax: 0141-353 2560
Email: info@tourism-resources.co.uk
www.tourism-resources.co.uk

CONTENTS

<u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>	1
<u>1. INTRODUCTION</u>	1
<u>2. LAGGAN WOLFTRAX PROJECT</u>	4
<u>3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND PARTNER CONSULTATIONS</u>	8
<u>4. VISITOR SURVEYS</u>	13
<u>5. COMPANY SURVEYS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS</u>	35
<u>6. ECONOMIC IMPACT</u>	47
<u>7. LAGGAN WOLFTRAX MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY</u>	54
<u>8. MARKET AND PRODUCT POSITIONING</u>	60
<u>9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	67

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The overall aim of the study was to evaluate the performance of the Laggan Wolftrax development to date in order to assess project performance and inform future delivery.

KEY FINDINGS

The project is delivering across three broad strands – economic (generating additional economic activity, particularly within a peripheral area), environmental (allowing development within a less environmentally sensitive area) and community (helping to support a rural/fragile community).

In terms of progress against the objectives of the project achievements have included:

- development of a high quality product (evidenced by mountain bikers survey responses – 73% rated the trails as very good and 15% as good);
- development within a less environmentally sensitive area and the robustness of the site in environmental terms will allow for further development;
- 16,000 visitors (original target 20,000) which forms a good basis on which to develop the site further and increase visitor numbers in the future;
- 93% of visitors in the Laggan local area as a result of Laggan Wolftrax (77% in Badenoch and Strathspey and 63% in Inverness and East Highland)
- generating 15,000 net additional visitors to the Laggan local area and net additional expenditure annual expenditure of £280,000;
- net additional annual expenditure at the Highlands & Islands level of £390,000; and
- net additional employment of 6.9 FTEs in the Laggan local area and 9.6 FTEs in the Highlands & Islands.

In terms of increasing the impact of the project in the future the key issues to be addressed include development of longer trails and a wider range of trails (particularly green and blue routes). This will help to broaden the visitor market and encourage longer lengths of stay and associated expenditure.

Also development and promotion of other activities onsite – walking and pony trekking (positive feedback from visitors to these activities suggest a greater role for them in the future) – and offsite in the local area will help to develop a wider visitor experience and increase the number and range of visitors.

There are a number of recommendations that have been identified to help develop and enhance the project in the future and build on the success to date, these are:

Recommendation 1: *Develop a broader marketing approach for the trails that includes all users - mountain biking, walking and pony trekking.*

Recommendation 2: Development of additional catering and retail facilities to be assessed against their potential sustainability, viability, but also current local provision before being supported by public sector.

Recommendation 3: FCS to continue to control /manage product development but to develop a more formal management and operating plan with LFT and BaseCamp MTB.

Recommendation 4: HIE Inverness and East Highland to take the lead in providing business development support to the Haflinger Pony Trekking Business.

Recommendation 5: Develop health and safety procedures in line with evolving national policy. Also develop a maintenance strategy that clearly identifies ongoing financial commitments and annual funding requirements.

Recommendation 6: Proceed with the developments set out in the current planning application.

Recommendation 7: Undertake market testing before developing a larger permanent visitor facility. Careful consideration should be given to location, style, size and range of facilities for development.

Recommendation 8: Establish a development and management plan for forest recreation in Strathmashie Forest covering next 5 to 10 years.

Recommendation 9: Develop an annual marketing plan and budget.

Recommendation 10: Develop a strategic approach to identifying and securing potential sponsorship. This should be linked to an annual programme of events.

Recommendation 11: Improved signage to the site (if possible signs on the A9, however we realise that there have been issues about achieving this in the past).

Recommendation 12: Work with accommodation providers to enhance the marketing of the visitor experience. This should include familiarisation visits for local accommodation providers.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

This report provides an evaluation of the Laggan Wolftrax development, which is based at Laggan. The main purposes of the report were to assess the project's performance to date and inform future delivery.

1.1 **BACKGROUND**

Forestry Commission Scotland has a formal Partnership Agreement with the Laggan Forest Trust for the management of the Strathmashie woodlands near Laggan Bridge in Inverness-shire, the location of the Laggan Wolftrax mountain bike trails.

The desire for a single-track off road cycling facility had been raised formally in the past by Laggan Forest Trust, with development plans being accelerated during 2003/04. The mountain bike trails became fully operational in November 2004.

In addition to the mountain bike trails the forest is also used for informal walking and pony trekking.

The brief requested an evaluation of the Laggan Wolftrax mountain bike facility but as part of the proposal and selection process it was agreed that the report should also provide a profile of visitors to the walking and pony trekking trails.

1.2 **OBJECTIVES**

The overall aim of the study was to evaluate the performance of the Laggan Wolftrax project with the more detailed objectives being to:

- assess the success of the Laggan Wolftrax facility in meeting its original objectives and targets (in qualitative and quantitative terms) and the extent to which the project objectives are still valid;
- measure the impact of the Laggan Wolftrax facility, in both qualitative and quantitative terms including:
 - the direct effects of the Laggan Wolftrax facility both positive and negative since September 2004 on local residents and local businesses, and the outputs and impacts which can be attributed directly to the facility;
 - a review of the effectiveness of the Laggan Wolftrax facility in delivering the objectives of the strategic context of its partners;
 - an assessment of additionality, displacement and knock on effects as a direct result of the Laggan Wolftrax facility;
- consider how the Laggan Wolftrax facility and its management can be improved, in light of the findings of the evaluation, to meet Forestry Commission Scotland and its partners' objectives, and through reviewing the project and external best practice, to suggest a future operational and organisational model;
- consider the future impact on the local economy with a view to enhancing positive impacts and minimising negative impacts of the Laggan Wolftrax facility and provide recommendations aimed at eliminating displacement of existing local commercial activity; and

- provide recommendations for the future direction and development of the Laggan Wolftrax facility paying heed to the product placement as indicated in the Forestry Commission Scotland draft national and northern mountain biking strategy documents and suggest appropriate performance measures for ongoing monitoring and management of the Laggan Wolftrax facility.

1.3 METHOD

The study method comprised the following components:

- Study set up: to provide a base for the subsequent work;
- Desk-based review and consultations, the latter being with:
 - Forestry Commission Scotland;
 - Laggan Forest Trust
 - HIE Inverness & East Highland
 - Scottish Natural heritage
 - Cairngorms National Park Authority
 - Highland Council
 - VisitScotland
- Best Practice Review of developments elsewhere;
- Fieldwork, comprising surveys of:
 - Mountain Bikers
 - Walkers
 - Pony trekkers
 - Local businesses
 - Activity holiday operators
 - Community Groups
- Analysis and reporting.

1.4 REPORT STRUCTURE

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: provides a brief description of the Laggan Wolftrax project;
- Chapter 3: reports on the strategic context and views of the partners;
- Chapter 4: provides analysis of the visitor surveys;
- Chapter 5: reports on the surveys of companies and community groups;
- Chapter 6: assesses the economic impact of the project;
- Chapter 7: reviews the project management and delivery;

- Chapter 8: considers the market product and positioning; and
- Chapter 9: provides the conclusions and recommendations.

The best practice review is provided in the Appendix.

2. LAGGAN WOLFTRAX PROJECT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter provides a brief description of the project and its progress to date (these issues are considered in greater detail later in the report).

2.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.2.1 Location

Laggan Wolftrax is located in the Strathmashie Forests near Laggan Bridge, as shown in **Figure 2.1**. The site is adjacent to the A86 trunk road, the main arterial road linking Spean Bridge to Kingussie.

Figure 2.1: Laggan Wolftrax Location



2.2.2 Mountain Bike Facility

Laggan Wolftrax is a purpose-built, single-track mountain bike centre. The trails include a Blue Fun Park, Red Route and Black Double Diamond Route, as set in **Figures 2.2 and 2.3**. There is also “Air’s Rock” a black graded slab feature, which can be bypassed if desired.

Figure 2.2: Laggan Wolftrax Trails

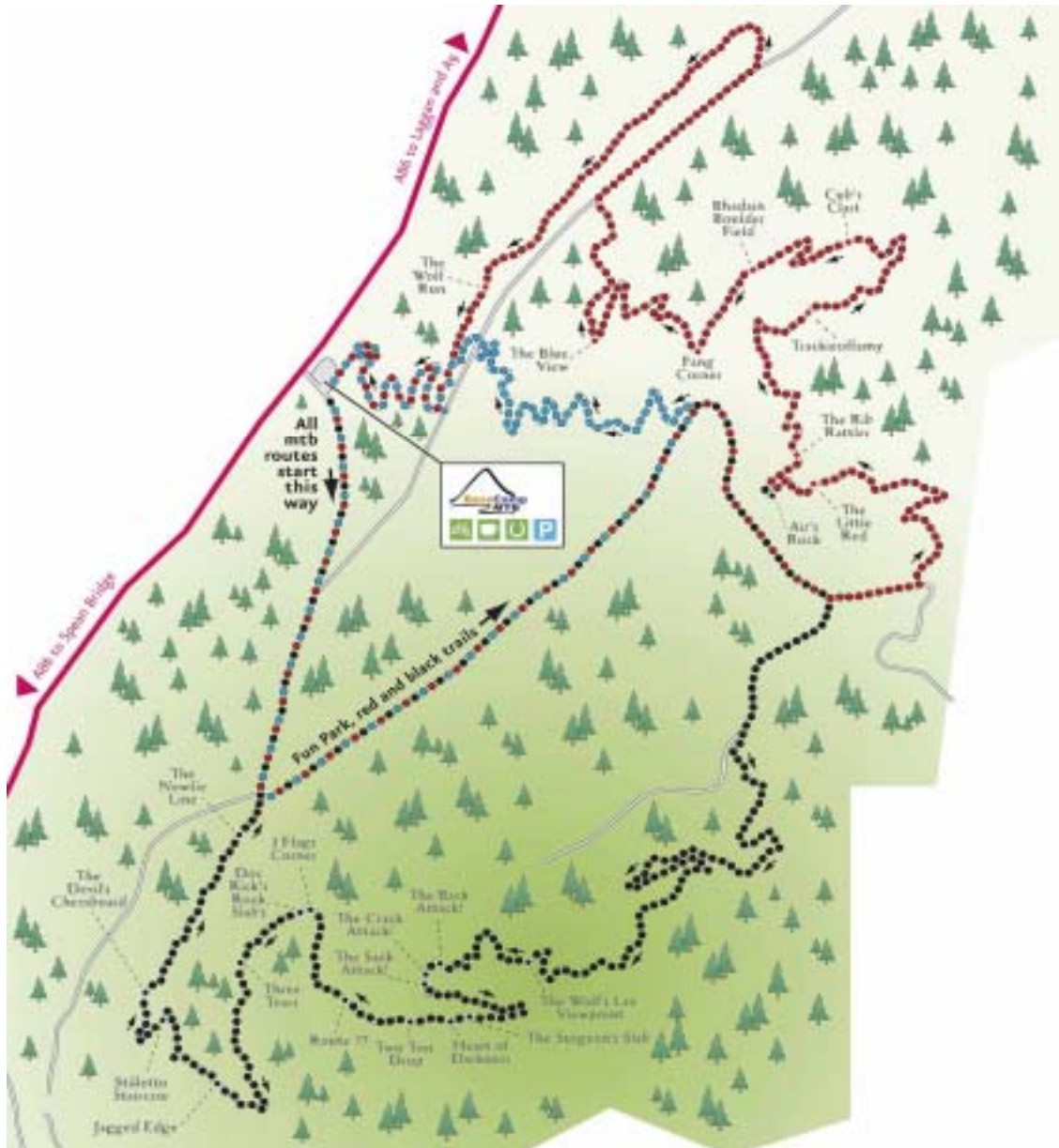


Figure 2.3: Grade of Laggan Wolftrax Trails



There is another level of trail - categorised as green routes - but there are no green routes at the Laggan Wolftrax site. Further detail on these types of trails is given in **Figure 2.4**.

Figure 2.4: Other Grades of Trail

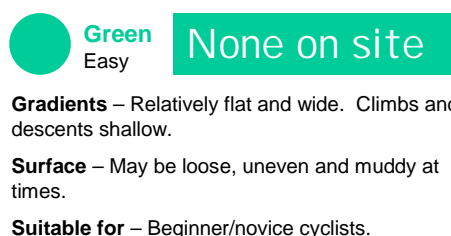


Table 2.1 details the length of trails that have been developed at the Laggan Wolftrax site.

TABLE 2.1: LENGTH OF LAGGAN WOLFTRAX TRAILS			
Section	Constructed length (m)	Other route used (m)	Total (m)
Blue Fun Park	1,420	1,794	3,214
Red Route	3,760	2,891	6,651
Black 'dd' Route	3,836	3,970	7,806
Facility totals	9,016	8,655	17,671

Source: Forestry Commission Scotland

In total, over 17km of trails are available to users, around half of which (9km) were single-track trails constructed specifically for the site.

In addition to the trails there are other facilities provided on site including:

- bike shop, offering:
 - Giant bikes and a range of mountain bike accessories for sale
 - Giant and Cove bikes for demo
 - bike hire
- café (open seven days a week); and
- toilets and shower facilities.

2.3 COSTS AND FUNDING

2.3.1 Cost of Development

The overall budget for the development of the Laggan Wolftrax site was £203,900. However, as **Table 2.2** shows, the actual cost of the development was 23% higher than originally anticipated at £250,500.

Detail	Budget (£)	Actual (£)	Variance (£)
Consultant (including some preparatory work)	14,300	15,000	700
Route construction (including FC staff time)	124,700	139,800	15,100
Car park and ancillaries	43,200	64,300	21,100
Relocate tack room	5,000	6,800	1,800
Accommodation units	8,700	11,600	2,900
Printed and onsite media	8,000	10,400	2,400
Opening event	-	2,600	2,600
Total	203,900	250,500	46,600

Source: Forestry Commission Scotland

Analysis of the different components of the development shows that one of the main reasons for the over spend was a result of the car park, which was 49% over budget and accounted for 45% of the total budget variance.

2.3.2 Sources of Funding

Funding was provided by a number of partners as detailed in **Table 2.3**.

Partner	Amount allocated (£)
Forestry Commission Scotland (in kind)	19,500
Forestry Commission Scotland (local division)	19,500
Forestry Commission Scotland (via Scot Exec)	100,000
Scottish Natural Heritage	25,000
HIE Inverness & East Highland (formerly MBSE)	20,000
CNPA	15,000
Highland Council	5,000
Total	204,000
Total costs	250,500
Difference	-46,500

Source: Forestry Commission Scotland

The further £46,500 required to fund the project was provided by the Forestry Commission local division bringing their total contribution to £66,000.

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND PARTNER CONSULTATIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the strategic context for the project and the views of the public sector partners involved in the development and support of the project.

3.2 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Strathmashie Forest, in which Laggan Wolftrax is situated, is managed by Laggan Forest Trust. For the Laggan Wolftrax project the Forestry Commission acted as lead partner. However, as mentioned in the last chapter, a number of other partners were also involved in the project; namely:

- Scottish Natural Heritage;
- HIE Inverness & East Highland;
- Cairngorms National Park Authority;
- Highland Council; and
- VisitScotland.

It is important to consider the extent to which the Laggan Wolftrax development not only fits with the strategic objectives of the partners but also actively contributes towards their successful achievement.

Analysis of the partner strategies was therefore undertaken to ascertain which objectives the Laggan Wolftrax facility is contributing to and these are detailed in **Table 3.1, over**. It is clear from analysis of the table that Laggan Wolftrax is helping contribute to some of the objectives of all the partner organisations.

TABLE 3.1: RELEVANT OBJECTIVES OF PARTNER ORGANISATIONS		
<p>Forestry Commission <i>'The Scottish Forestry Strategy 2006'</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - business development to underpin sustainable forest management and support economic growth and employment across Scotland. - Improving the quality of life and well-being of people by supporting community development across Scotland. - Making access to, and enjoyment of, woodlands easier for everyone - to help improve physical and mental health in Scotland. - Protecting the environmental quality of our natural 	<p>HIE Inverness and East Highland <i>'A Smart, Successful Highlands and Islands'</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strengthening communities through: creating community assets; enhancing natural and cultural heritage. - growing businesses through: a culture of enterprise and more businesses of scale; success in key sectors (i.e. tourism) 	<p>Scottish National Heritage <i>'A Natural Perspective: SNH Corporate Strategy'</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promote understanding and make it easier for people to enjoy Scotland's natural heritage. - help to make sure that its use and management are sustainable.
<p>Highland Council <i>'Highland Community Plan'</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing a strong, sustainable and competitive economy. - encouraging lifelong learning and developing community capacity. - enhancing cultures, heritage, the Gaelic language and natural environment. 	<p>Cairngorms National Park Authority <i>'Looking to 2030'</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage. - to promote the sustainable use of natural resources. - to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the Park's special qualities. - to promote the sustainable social and economic development of the Park's communities. 	<p>VisitScotland <i>'Framework for Change'</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - grow the tourism industry by 50% over the next decade through the following. - exceeding visitors' expectations, the quality of service that is provided to visitors and the quality of the environment. - continual investment in new products and services that build on Scotland's tourism assets, deliver distinctive visitor experiences and reflect modern consumer interests.

Also the partners are involved in taking forward actions set out within the Draft Cairngorms National Park Plan. Actions that the project is already contributing to or would contribute to as part of plans for further development at Laggan Wolftrax include:

- Providing High Quality Opportunities for Outdoor Access:
 - Provide more cycling opportunities through provision of off-road facilities, removal of unnecessary barriers and by developing specific marketing initiatives
 - Improve availability and use of functional walking and cycling routes, especially near schools and work places

- Promote community involvement in path development and maintenance through grant schemes, training and capacity building, sponsorship and other support
 - Encourage feedback from residents and visitors about path condition and about outdoor access opportunities generally with a view to improving opportunities in future
 - Collect and collate better information on the economic, social and environmental value of paths (and outdoor access opportunities more generally) and the benefits of their active management
 - Provide more safe routes to school in communities; and
- Making tourism and business more sustainable
 - Ensure communities are represented in tourism planning and are able to generate positive benefits from the tourism industry
 - Encourage benchmarking of performance to improve quality of customer experience.

3.3 PARTNER CONSULTATIONS

However, in addition to analysing their strategies, consultations were undertaken with the partner organisations listed above to gather their views on the project to date and its future development.

FCS and LFT are directly involved in the delivery and management of the project and this is discussed in greater detail later in **Chapter 7**.

3.3.1 Rationale for Support and Contribution to Objectives

There was a mix of factors that provided the rationale for support from the partners, including:

- Economic: generating additional economic activity, particularly within a peripheral area;
- Environmental: allowing development within a less environmentally sensitive area; and
- Community: help to support a rural/fragile community.

There was demand from some mountain biking enthusiasts within the local area for the development of a mountain biking facility at Glenmore. However, this is a very sensitive area for Capercaillie breeding and it was decided that development should take place elsewhere. The Laggan Wolftrax site provided a more environmentally robust area. The facility allowed development in an area away from the “honey pot” areas in both conservation and economic terms.

3.3.2 Role in the Project

FCS took the lead on the management and delivery of the project. The other partners have provided support in the form of funding and advisory roles, where appropriate. The partners were very positive about FCS’s management and delivery of the project, which has delivered a high quality end product.

One point raised was that had there been time it would have been appropriate to undertake more market research in advance of the project to confirm the demand/need for the facility. The partners' therefore welcome this current study, not only because it will assess the impact to date but also help inform the nature and scale of any future developments at the site.

3.3.3 Strengths and Weaknesses

The partners identified a number of strengths with the project including:

- the high quality of the product that has been developed;
- the café facilities;
- FCS's management of the project and the strong links with the community;
- drawing visitors into a more peripheral part of the local area; and
- the development being in a more environmentally robust area.

The partners also identified key weaknesses with the project, including:

- the length of the trails are too short;
- there is a need for a wider range of trails;
- the lack of signage; and
- lack of public transport – need own transport to get to the site, so is it accessible for all?

Interestingly location was identified as both a strength and weakness. It is considered a strength in that it is encouraging visitors into a more peripheral, less busy part of the local area and is therefore helping to support that local community.

It is considered a weakness in that it is more difficult to attract people into the Laggan area than those areas that already offer a wider range of activities, such as Aviemore.

3.3.4 Suggested Improvements

The suggested improvements in many ways derive from the weaknesses identified above. These include:

- the need to extend the length of the trails to retain visitors longer in the local area;
- a wider range of trails, particularly lower grade trails, to encourage a wider market; and
- development of other activities at the site; this is why some of the partners supported the recent development of the pony trekking trails.

These suggestions were made with the caveat that the scale and nature of future developments should be in keeping with the anticipated level of demand and thus need for the facilities.

An additional suggestion was for a continual review process to be implemented following this study to help measure performance of any future phases.

3.3.5 Other Developments

Another issue discussed was that of the impact of other developments and whether developments elsewhere such as Learnie Red Rocks, Black Isle; and Witches Trail, Fort William would create a network of facilities that would enhance visits to Laggan or displace them.

The possible development of another facility in the Badenoch and Strathspey area, potentially in a more traditionally popular tourist area such as Aviemore was raised with concerns over impacts on Laggan Wolftrax. However, the partners were not aware of any other possible developments at the moment (although some estates in the local area have talked about it in the past).

3.3.6 Future Role

In terms of a future role, while some of the partners would be in a position to support future phases of development others do not envisage having a long-term role, although they may support associated developments such as interpretation of the natural heritage.

The partners all see this current study as key in identifying the full range of outputs and impacts that have occurred to date and in helping to shape the future development of the site.

3.4 SUMMARY

All of the partners were positive about the way that the project had been delivered and the quality of the end product. They feel that it is helping to contribute to their respective strategies and the economic, environmental and social development of the local area.

The key weaknesses and therefore areas for improvement are the need to extend the length and range of trails in order to retain visitors in the local area longer.

4. VISITOR SURVEYS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter provides analysis of surveys undertaken with:

- mountain bikers;
- walkers; and
- pony trekkers.

Some of the data collected through the surveys has been used to assess the economic impact of the project and has been reported later in **Chapter 6**.

4.2 MOUNTAIN BIKERS

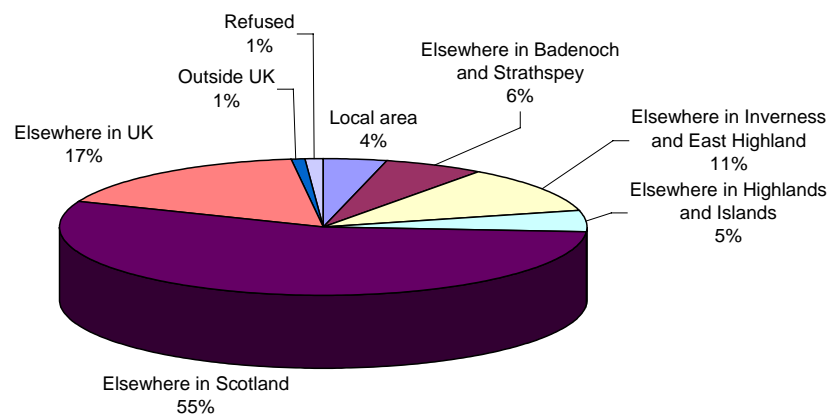
4.2.1 Method

Face to face surveys were undertaken with a total of 506 mountain bikers during July and August 2006.

4.2.2 Visitor Origin

Figure 4.1 shows the origin of the visitors.

Figure 4.1: Visitor Origin



Some 79% of visitors are from outwith the Inverness and East Highland area, with the majority of visitors coming from elsewhere in Scotland. Some 17% of visitors were from elsewhere in the UK with 1% from overseas.

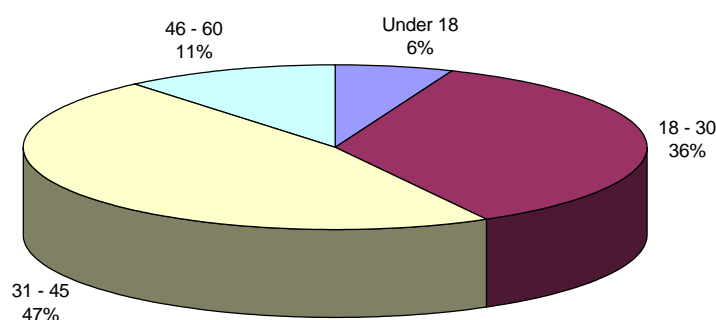
Of these visitors (excluding those from Inverness and East Highland) 93% had visited Inverness and the East Highland before with 7% visiting for the first time. Of those visiting for the first time, 67% live elsewhere in the UK, 19% live elsewhere in Scotland and 15% live outside the UK. Under half (45%) of the respondents were making their first visit to the mountain bike trails.

4.2.3 Visitor Profile

As **Figure 4.2** below shows, the mountain biking trails are most popular with two age groups. Almost half of visitors were aged between 31 and 45 (47%), while 36% belonged to the 18-30 age range. The majority of visitors are male (83%) and in full-time employment (82%) with 4% working part-time. Around 10% of those surveyed were in full-time education with only 1% in each of the following categories: unemployed, housewife or retired. Over a quarter (29%) of respondents had children within their group.

A large proportion of visitors were from the C1 social class (42%), with just under a third of visitors (30%) in social class AB and 24% in C2. Only 1% were in class D, while 3% refused to comment on their social class.¹

Figure 4.2: Age Profile



Visitors to the trails tend to participate in a number of other sports the most popular being:

- walking/hill walking (53%);
- skiing (34%);
- climbing/mountaineering (22%);
- canoeing/kayaking (15%);

¹ AB is defined as upper middle / middle class (higher managerial, administrative or professional / intermediate managerial, administrative or professional)

C1 is defined as lower middle class (supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional)

C2 is defined as skilled working class (skilled manual workers)

D is defined as working class (semi and unskilled manual workers)

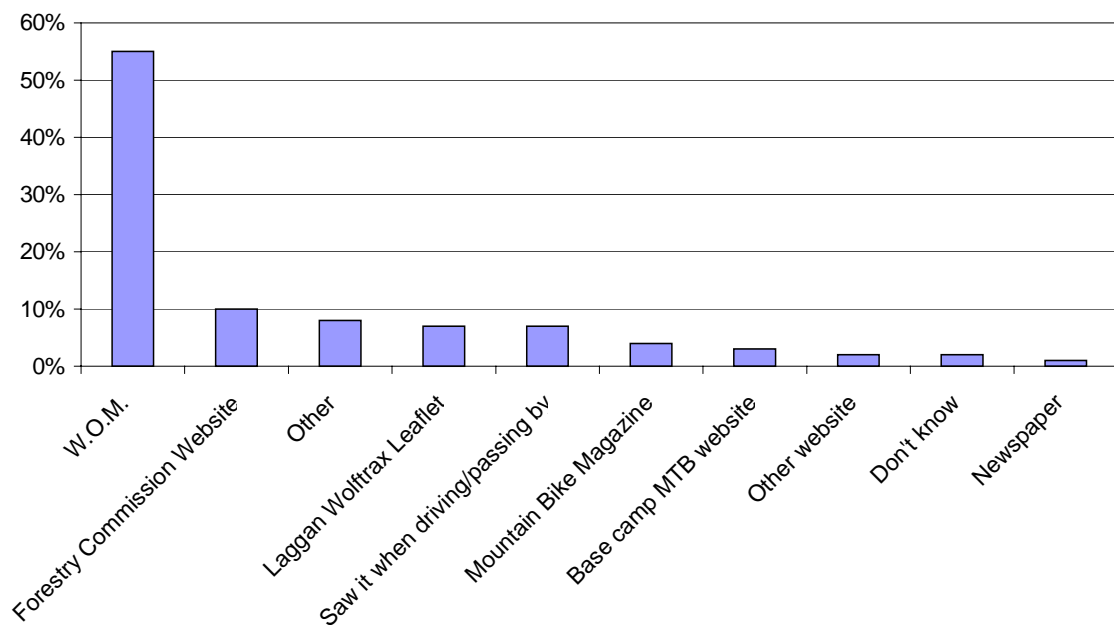
- snowboarding (15%);
- running/jogging (14%);
- road cycling (7%);
- golf (6%); and
- football (5%).

Other sports mentioned included fishing, diving, sailing, swimming and surfing.

4.2.4 Awareness

Figure 4.3 shows that over half (55%) of visitors became aware of the mountain bike trail by word of mouth. This hopefully augurs well for the future given the high quality ratings reported later in **Figure 4.6**.

Figure 4.3: Awareness of the Laggan Wolftrax Mountain Bike Trails



The next most common way to find out was through the Forestry Commission website (10%) followed by the Laggan Wolftrax leaflet (7%) and driving/passing by also accounted for 7%. The most popular magazine identified by respondents was “Mountain Bike Rider”.

Table 4.1 shows the importance of the trails in the decision to visit Inverness and East Highland.

Only reason for visiting Inverness and East Highlands	50
One of the main reasons for visiting Inverness and East Highland	16
One of several reasons for visiting Inverness and East Highland	23
Not a factor in decision to visit Inverness and East Highland	10
Don't know	1

The mountain bike trails figure highly as a reason for visiting Inverness and East Highland area with 50% stating it was their only reason for visiting while only 10% stated it was not a factor in visiting the area.

Table 4.2 examines what the respondents would have done if they had not visited the mountain bike trails.

Stayed at home/Gone to work	40
Visited Laggan local area anyway	4
Visited elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey	13
Visited elsewhere in Inverness and East Highland	7
Visited elsewhere in Highlands and islands	4
Visited elsewhere in Scotland	30
Visited somewhere in Scotland	2

The majority of respondents (40%) would have gone to work or stayed at home. Nearly a quarter would have visited the Inverness and East Highland area anyway while nearly a third (30%) would have visited elsewhere in Scotland.

However, when we analyse this by origin only 7% of visitors would have been in the Laggan area anyway and only 24% would have been elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey. Therefore, the mountain bike trails are the reason that a large proportion of visitors are in the area.

Table 4.3 shows which of the three trails visitors have used or planned to use on their visit.

	Trail used
Red Route	90%
Blue Fun Park	84%
Black Double Diamond Route	45%

The most popular trail was the Red Route with 90% of visitors having used or planning to use this trail, followed closely by the Blue Fun Park with 84%.

Visitors were asked if they had used or planned to use the uplift service, which is provided to take riders along with their bikes to the top of the trails. There was an even split with 49% saying yes and the same saying no with 2% unsure.

The majority (77%) of visitors planned to only visit the mountain bike trails for one day on their trip. A further 17% were planning to visit for two days with 3% planning three days and a further 1% visiting it for four days.

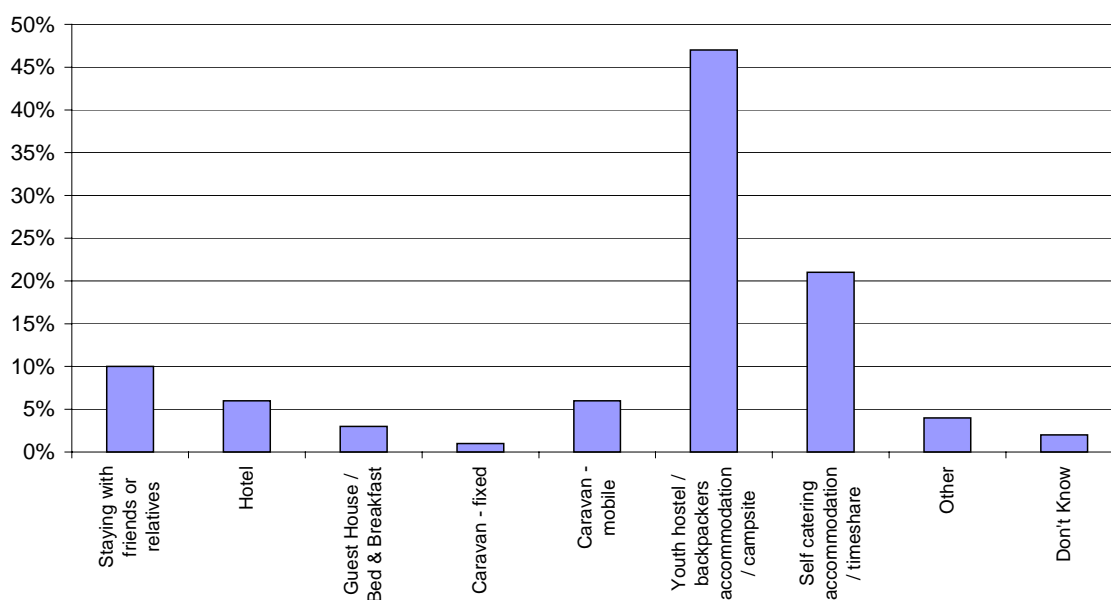
Over half 55% had visited the trails in the previous 12 months. **Table 4.4** shows the number of times they had visited the trails over the last year. This level of repeat visitation would suggest that people like the trails but also the need to raise awareness to other potential users in order to increase numbers in the future.

Once	14
Twice	23
Three times	11
Four times	14
Five times	2
Between 6-10 times	26
Between 11-20 times	8
Over 20 times	3

4.2.5 Accommodation

Just over half (52%) were spending at least one night away from home. As shown in **Figure 4.4**, the most popular type of accommodation for visitors, with 47%, was youth hostel / backpackers accommodation or campsite. Just over a fifth (21%) of visitors stay at self catering/timeshare accommodation, with 10% staying with friends or relatives.

Figure 4.4: Types of Accommodation

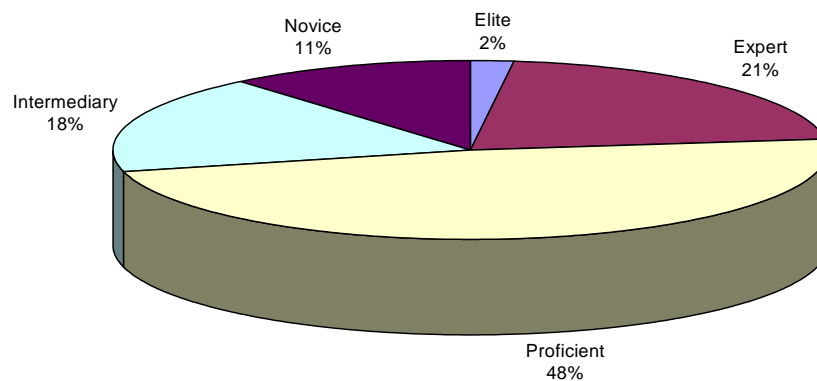


Nearly half (49%) are planning to spend at least one night in the Laggan area with 33% planning to stay at least one night elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey. Nearly 60% of those staying elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey were located in Aviemore with the next most popular area being Carrbridge with 7%.

4.2.6 Skill Levels and Ratings

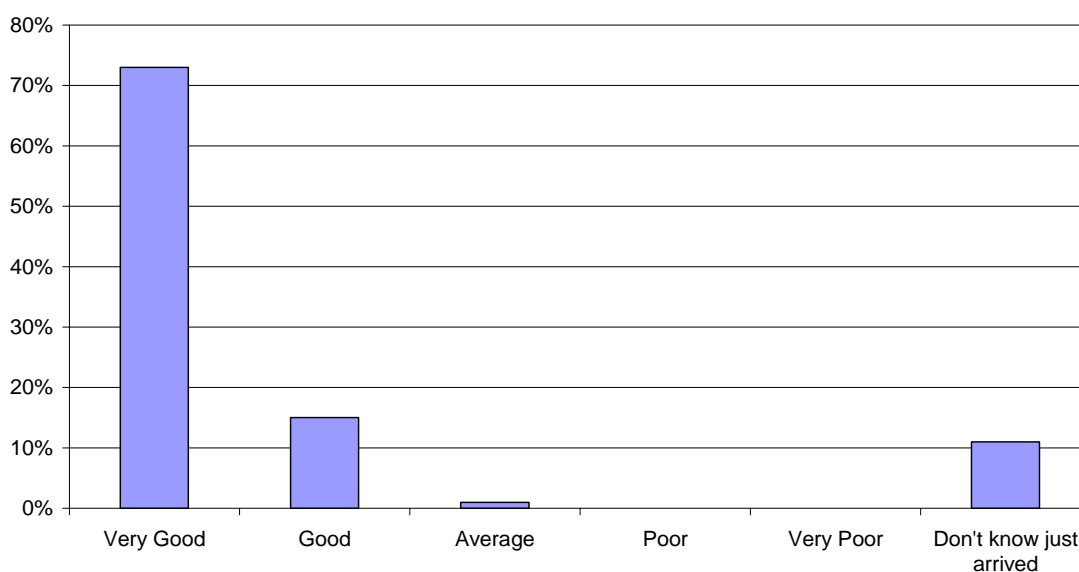
Nearly half (48%) of those interviewed considered themselves to be proficient in mountain biking. Over a fifth (21%) considered themselves to be experts and a further 18% intermediate. At each end of the scale 2% considered they were elite and 11% as novices.

Figure 4.5: Level of Mountain Bike Expertise



As **Figure 4.6** shows an overwhelming majority of visitors rated the Mountain Bike trails as very good (73%), with 15% stating that they were “good”. Only 1% thought the trails were average with a further 11% unsure because they had not used them yet.

Figure 4.6: Quality of Mountain Bike Trail



There were a number of different reasons for rating the trails very good. The most often quoted related to:

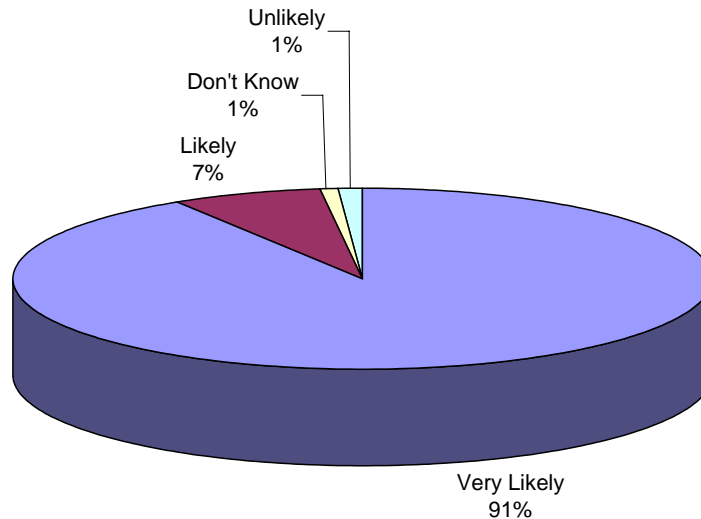
- the technical level and quality of the trails 33%;
- the great variety of trails 18%;
- the fact that trails are well maintained 14%;
- fast/free flowing trails 8%;
- availability of good facilities 8%; and
- fun 6%.

Some of the positive comments included:

- “Technical, challenging and well maintained”;
- “A lot of work has been done on them and a lot of thought put into them”;
- “Well constructed, well maintained, well thought out and good variety”;
- “Well thought out, built by people who mountain bike themselves”; and
- “Design is very good. Much better than any other place in Scotland”.

Figure 4.7 shows over 90% of visitors are very likely to use the trails again in the next two years, with 7% likely to visit again. Only 1% of visitors said that they would be unlikely to visit the Mountain Bike trails again in the next two years.

Figure 4.7: Likelihood of Visiting Trail in Next Two Years



Only 11% of visitors had or planned to undertake another activity at the Laggan Wolftrax site with 8% walking and 3% pony trekking as their choices.

In addition 22% of visitors have plans to visit or have visited other mountain bike trail locations as part of their trip. Of those visiting other sites the most common were:

- Fort William 70%;
- 7stanes 23%;
- Learnie Red Rocks/Black Isle 17%;
- Others 17%;
- Aviemore 8%; and
- Cairngorms 5%.

4.2.7 Suggestions for Improvement

Suggestions for improvement have been separated into the technical aspects of mountain biking, the supporting infrastructure and marketing and promotion.

TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL

The main suggestions included:

- longer trails 30%;
- more trails/routes 30%;

- ongoing maintenance 8%; and
- updating trails to add variety 3%.

A few people had more specific responses including:

- Chicken wire on boardwalk;
- Skills area for practice; and
- Uplift further up the hill.

IMPROVEMENTS TO INFRASTRUCTURE

The common suggestions for improvements to the infrastructure included:

- better signage to trails from main road (A9) 7%;
- a campsite 5%;
- bike wash facility 2%; and
- better accommodation options 2%;

Where facilities already exist, suggested improvements included a larger café, better quality shower and toilet facilities and increased parking to cater for the increasing numbers of visitors. Interestingly, despite there being a bike wash facility onsite 2% of visitors gave this as a suggested improvement. Therefore, there may be a need to make the existence of this particular facility clearer to visitors. Better accommodation options cover types of accommodation that are available locally so enhance promotion of local accommodation providers should help to address this issue.

IMPROVEMENTS TO MARKETING AND INFORMATION

Suggestions to improve the marketing of the site included changing the address of the current website which at present can be found at www.basecampmtb.com; this is misleading for a lot of users and a web address incorporating Wolftrax is suggested.

Other suggestions include, as mentioned above in the infrastructure of the site, improved signage from the A9 clearly directing potential users to the trails.

4.3 WALKERS

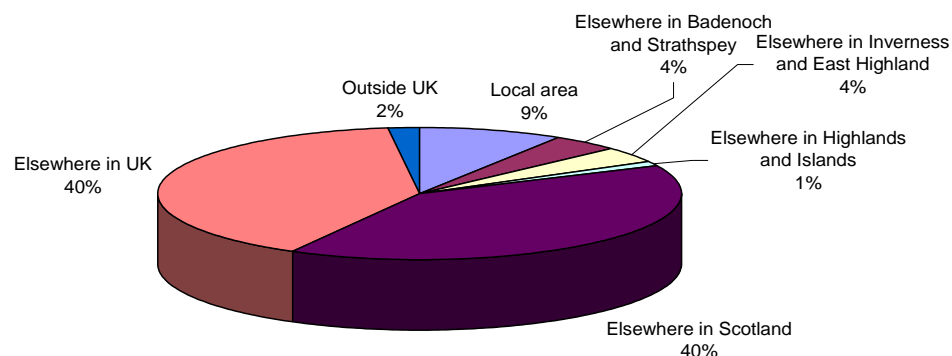
4.3.1 Method

Face to face surveys were undertaken with a total of 96 walkers during July and August 2006.

4.3.2 Visitor Origin

Figure 4.8 shows the origin of the visitors to the walking trails.

Figure 4.8: Visitor Origin



Some 81% of visitors are from outwith the Inverness and East Highland area, with the majority of visitors split between elsewhere in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK with 2% from overseas.

Of these visitors (excluding residents of Inverness and East Highland) 89% had visited Inverness and East Highland before with 11% visiting for the first time. Of those visiting for the first time, 78% live elsewhere in the UK, 11% live elsewhere in Scotland and 11% live outside the UK or elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands.

Three quarters (66%) were making their first visit to the walking trails. In the last year 11% had visited once a month or more while 23% have visited less than once a month.

4.3.3 Visitor Profile

As **Figure 4.9** below shows, the walking trails are most popular with two age groups. Two fifths of visitors were aged between 31 and 45 (39%) with a further two fifths belonging to the 46-60 age range. No visitors under 18 were recorded. The majority of visitors were female (60%) and in full-time employment (48%) with 27% working part-time. Nearly one fifth (19%) were retired with 6% stating they were housewives. Just over two fifths (42%) of respondents had children within their group. In addition 57% were walking a dog as part of their visit.

A large proportion of visitors were from the AB social class (45%), with over a third of visitors (36%) in social class C1 and 16% in C2 while 3% were unable to be classified.²

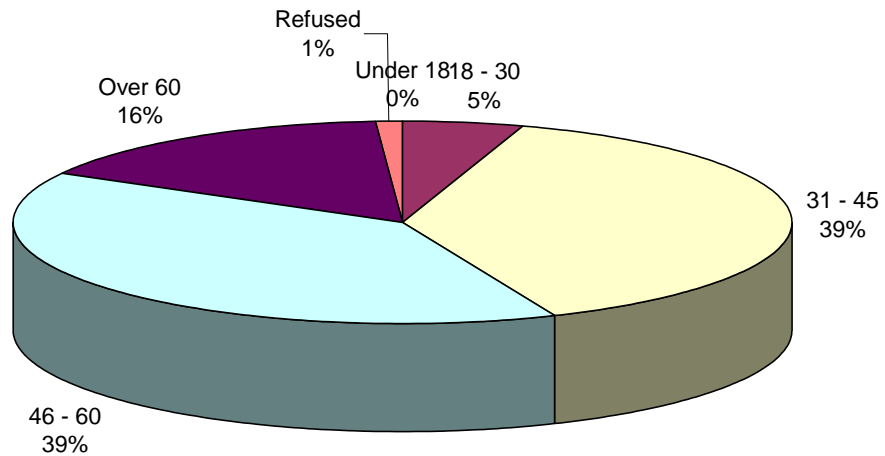
² AB is defined as upper middle / middle class (higher managerial, administrative or professional / intermediate managerial, administrative or professional)

C1 is defined as lower middle class (supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional)

C2 is defined as skilled working class (skilled manual workers)

D is defined as working class (semi and unskilled manual workers)

Figure 4.9: Age Profile



Visitors to the trails tend to participate in a number of other sports, the most popular being:

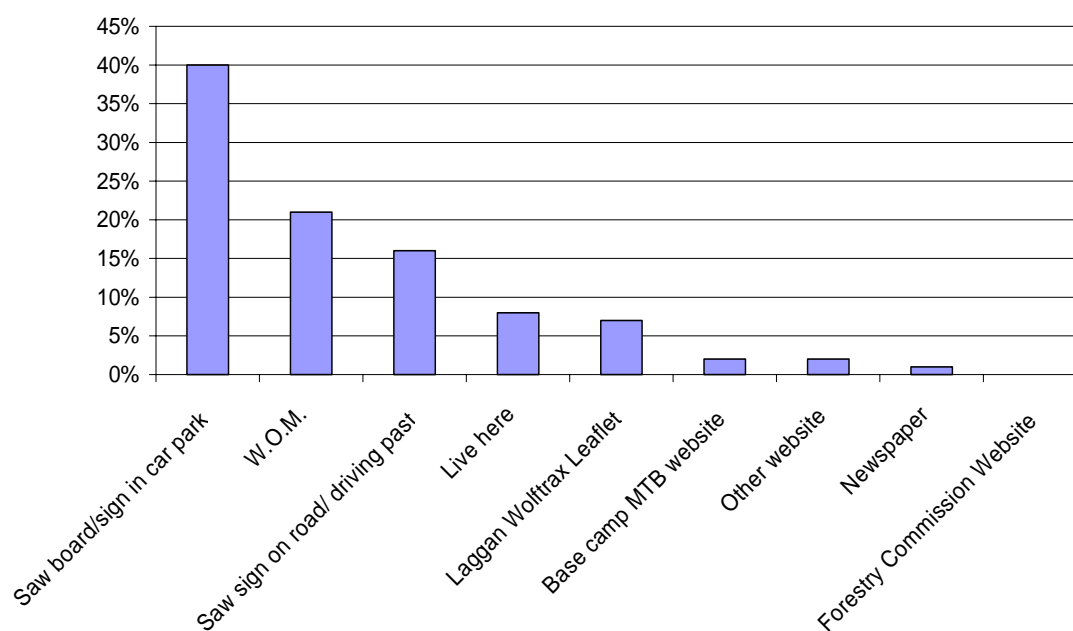
- hill walking (26%);
- road cycling (24%);
- skiing (20%);
- climbing / mountaineering (8%);
- canoeing / kayaking (8%); and
- mountain biking (8%);

Other sports mentioned included fishing, horse riding and running.

4.3.4 Awareness

Figure 4.10 shows that 40% of visitors became aware of the walking trail after seeing a board or sign in the car park and just over a fifth (21%) found out through word of mouth. A further 16% found out through signs on the road while driving past. Interestingly no one interviewed found out through the Forestry Commission website.

Figure 4.10: Awareness of the Laggan Walking Trails



The majority (76%) of visitors planned to spend between one and three hours on their visit to the walking trails. Some 75% were visiting for one day; 14% on two days; with a further 4% planning to visit the trails over three days.

Table 4.5 shows the importance of the trails in the decision to visit Inverness and East Highlands.

TABLE 4.5: IMPORTANCE OF WALKING TRAILS IN DECISION TO VISIT INVERNESS AND EAST HIGHLAND AREA (%)	
Only reason for visiting Inverness and East Highlands	8
One of the main reasons for visiting Inverness and East Highland	6
One of several reasons for visiting Inverness and East Highlands	14
Not a factor in decision to visit Inverness and East Highlands	73

The walking trails were not a factor for nearly three quarters of visitors (73%) in their decision to visit the Inverness and East Highland area. Over a quarter state it as the one of the reasons for visiting but only 8% said it as the only reason for visiting the area.

Table 4.6 examines what the respondents would have done if they had not visited the mountain bike trails.

TABLE 4.6: IF NOT VISITED WALKING TRAILS WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE INSTEAD? (%)	
Stayed at home/Gone to work	28
Visited Laggan local area anyway	17
Visited elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey	20
Visited elsewhere in Inverness and East Highlands	10
Visited elsewhere in Highlands and islands	10
Visited somewhere outside Scotland	14
Don't know	1

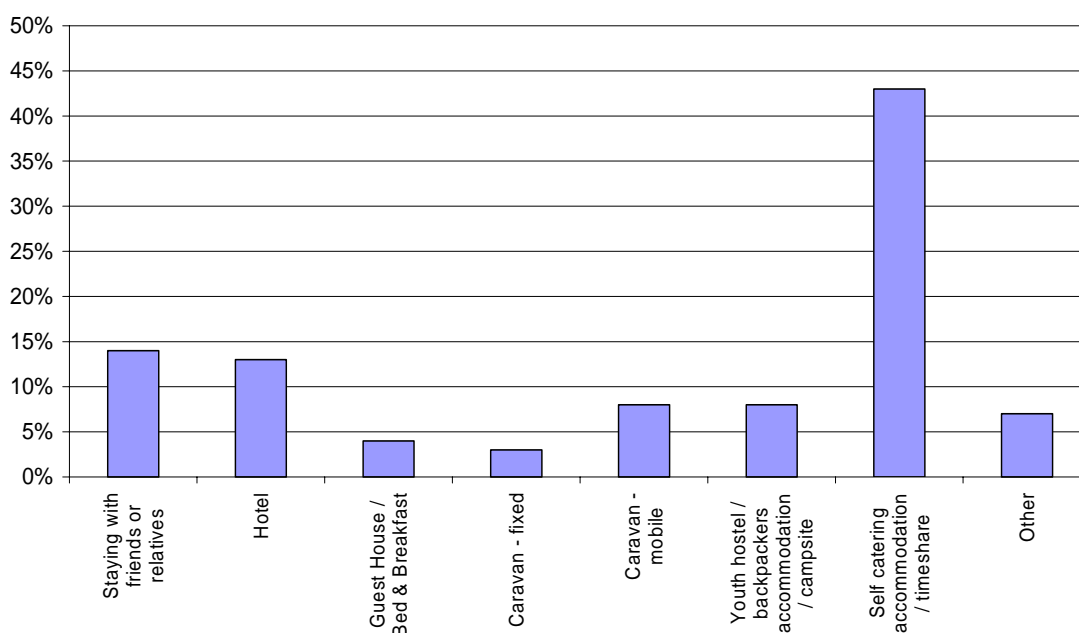
Over a quarter of respondents (28%) would not have visited the trails and gone to work or stayed at home. Nearly a fifth would have visited the Laggan local area anyway with a split of 10% each stating they would have visited elsewhere in Inverness and East Highlands or visited elsewhere in Highlands and Islands.

When we analyse this by origin we find that 20% would have been in the Laggan area anyway whilst 42% would have been in Badenoch and Strathspey.

4.3.5 Accommodation

Over three quarters (79%) were spending at least one night away from home. As shown in **Figure 4.11**, the most popular type of accommodation for visitors, with 43%, was self catering/timeshare accommodation. Staying with friends or relatives was next most popular with 14%, with 13% staying at a hotel.

Figure 4.11: Types of Accommodation

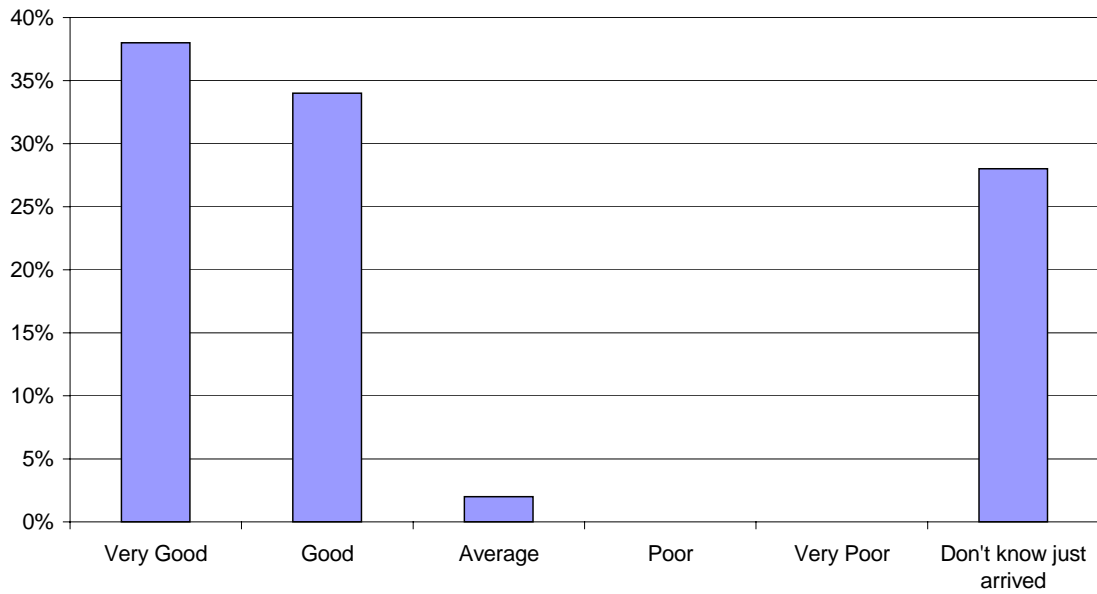


Over a quarter of visitors are planning to spend at least one night in the Laggan area with 32% planning to stay at least one night elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey. The most popular part of Badenoch and Strathspey to stay was Aviemore.

4.3.6 Ratings

Figure 4.12 shows an overwhelming majority of visitors rated the walking trails as very good (38%) or good (34%). Only 2% thought the trails were average with a further 28% unsure because they had not used it yet.

Figure 4.12: Quality of Walking Trail



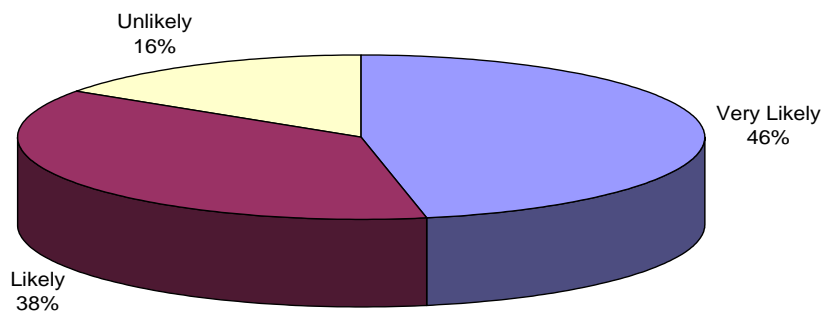
There were a number of different reasons for rating the trails very good. The most often quoted related to:

- Good paths/well maintained;
- Easy to follow/well signposted; and
- Beautiful views/scenery.

The most popular trails were Blackwood followed closely by Pattack Waterfall. A number of visitors were also planning to walk the bike trails.

As **Figure 4.13** shows, the majority of respondents (84%) are either very likely or likely to visit the walking trails again in the next two years with 16% stating that they would be unlikely to visit again.

Figure 4.13: Likelihood of Visiting Trails in Next Two Years



Only 23% of visitors have undertaken or plan to undertake another activity at the Laggan Wolftrax site with mountain biking being the most popular choice with pony trekking being the next most popular activity.

In addition 46% of visitors have plans to visit or have visited other walking trails during their trip including Cairngorms, Glencoe, Ben Nevis/Fort William area, Isle of Skye and Aviemore.

4.3.7 Suggestions for Improvement

Suggestions for improvement separated into the technical aspects of the supporting infrastructure and marketing and promotion.

TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL

There were only a small number of suggestions to improve the technical and operational aspect of the trails these included:

- better signs; and
- more bins; and
- more information about trails (length, time needed).

A number of respondents commented on the lack of signs leading to the trails and found the car park difficult to find.

IMPROVEMENTS TO MARKETING AND INFORMATION

Suggestions to improve the marketing of the site focused mostly on the provision of maps at the trails that people can take with them while on the trails. In addition advertising the trails more widely was suggested as a number of respondents were unaware of the trails existence until they came into the car park.

4.4 **PONY TREKKING**

4.4.1 Introduction

The owners of Haflinger Pony Trekking kindly agreed to take part in this study. A self completion survey of their customers was undertaken with twenty one completed questionnaires being received. For this section the analysis is in terms of actual numbers rather than percentages, unless stated.

4.4.2 Visitor Origin

TABLE 4.7: ORIGIN OF VISITORS	
<u>Origin</u>	<u>Number</u>
Local Area	0
Elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey	2
Elsewhere in Inverness and East Highland	0
Elsewhere in Highlands and Islands	0
Elsewhere in Scotland	7
Elsewhere in the UK	12
Outside the UK	0
Total	21

Table 4.7 shows the origin of the visitors. Some 19 of the 21 respondents were from outside the Highlands and Islands, with 12 being from outwith Scotland.

Three quarters (16 respondents) reported previously visiting the Inverness and East Highland area.

4.4.3 Visitor Profile

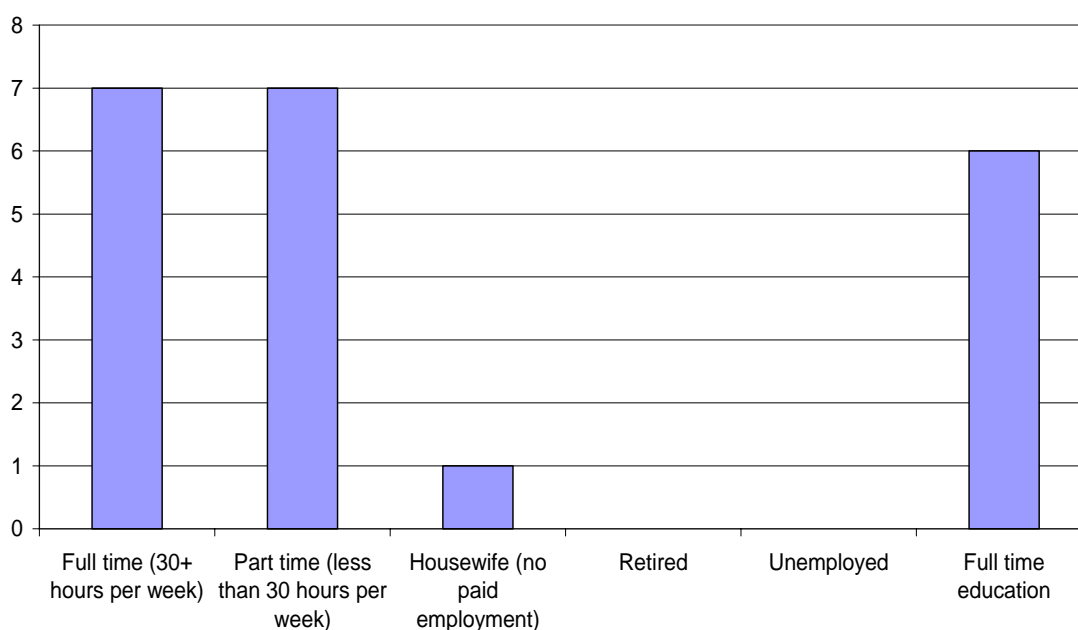
As **Table 4.8** shows, the pony trekking facilities are popular with a variety of age groups.

Age	Number
under 18	6
18-30	1
31-45	9
46-60	5
Over 60	0

Respondents were predominantly female, with only two of the twenty one respondents being men. There was a mixture of occupations for example GPs, carpenters and a police officer.

In terms of working status, two thirds of respondents were employed in either a full time or part time capacity as shown in **Figure 4.14**. Six others were in full time education, although this is not surprising given that these respondents were all under the age of 18.

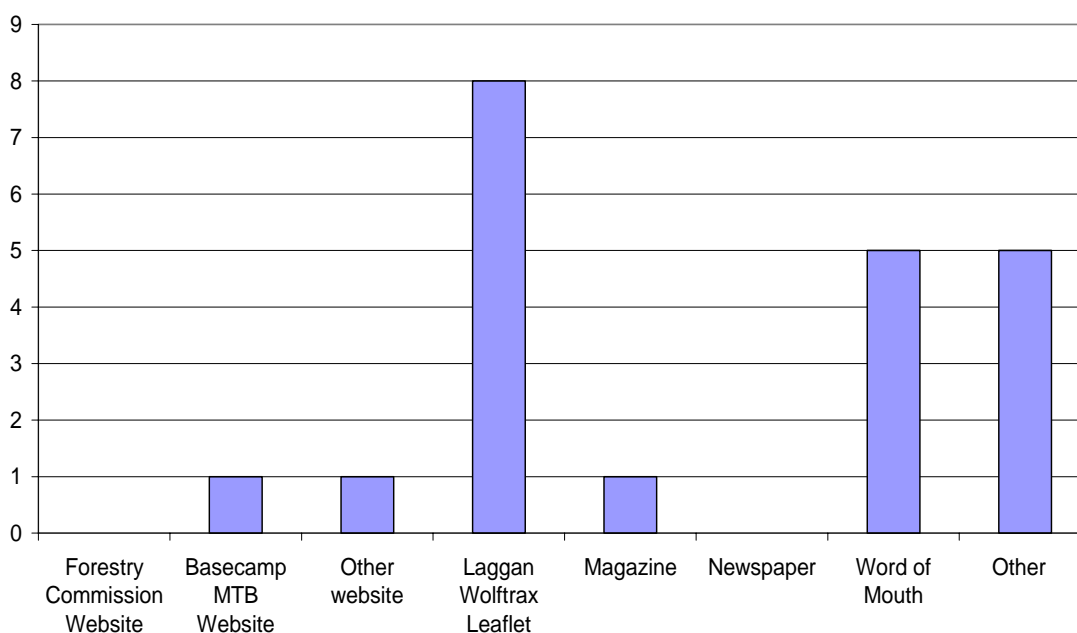
Figure 4.14: Working Status



4.4.4 Awareness and Motivation

Visitors were asked if this was their first visit to these pony trekking trails with 17 (80%) reporting that it was. They were then asked how they had first become aware of the trails. **Figure 4.15** shows that over a third of visitors became aware of the pony trekking trails from the Laggan Wolftrax promotional leaflets.

Figure 4.15: Awareness of Haflinger Pony Trekking



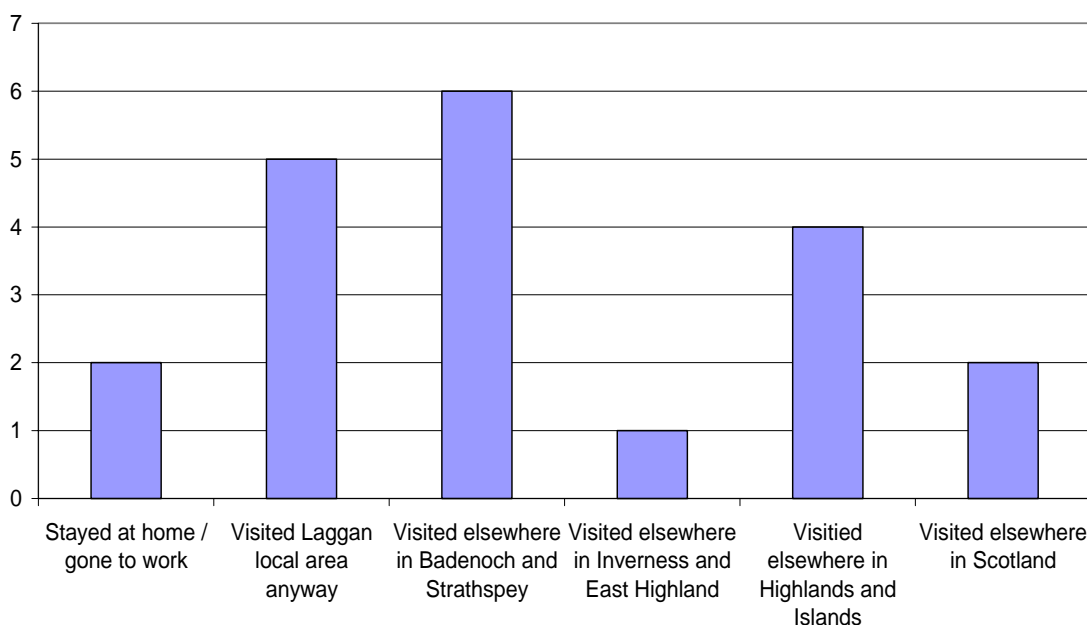
Other forms of awareness came from posters in shops and guest houses and also the signs on the roadside.

Only one person reported that the pony trekking facilities was one of the main reasons for visiting the Inverness and East Highland area. This is shown in **Table 4.9**.

TABLE 4.9: IMPORTANCE OF PONY TREKKING IN DECISION TO COME TO INVERNESS AND EAST HIGHLAND	
<u>Importance</u>	<u>Number</u>
Live in Inverness and East Highland	2
Only reason for visiting	0
One of the main reasons for visiting	1
One of several reasons for visiting	6
Not a factor in decision to visit	12

Visitors were also asked what they would have done if they hadn't decided to visit the pony trekking trails. This is shown in **Figure 4.16**.

Figure 4.16: Other Likely Activity



Around half of respondents said they would have visited the Badenoch and Strathspey area anyway. Only two said they would have stayed at home or gone to work, although these were the two respondents that live in the local area. Only five would have visited the Laggan local area anyway.

4.4.5 Accommodation

Visitors were asked whether or not they were staying away from home during their visit. Only two respondents were not staying away from home, but again, these were the two respondents who lived within Badenoch and Strathspey.

Visitors staying away from home were then asked where they were staying and what type of accommodation they were staying in.

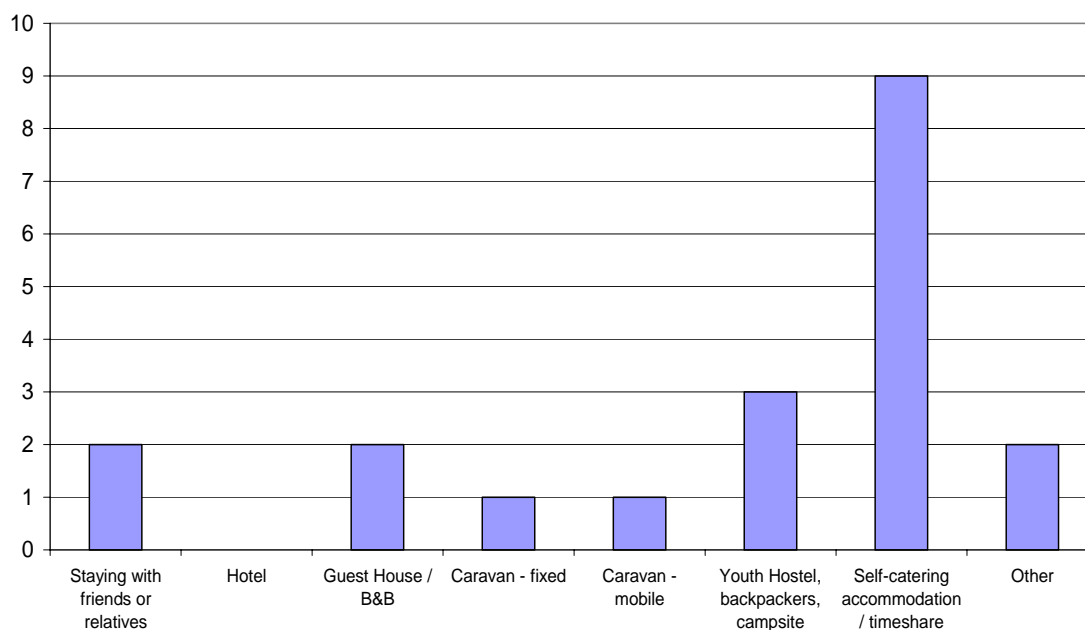
TABLE 4.10: LOCATION OF ACCOMMODATION DURING VISIT	
Location	Number
Laggan local area	11
Elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey	3
Elsewhere in Inverness and East Highland	3
Elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands	3
Elsewhere in Scotland	2

Note: Some respondents were staying in more than one place during their visit so the total is more than the number of respondents.

As **Table 4.10** reports, almost three quarters of visitors were staying in the Badenoch and Strathspey area, with the majority of those staying in the Laggan area. The most popular location was Newtonmore with 9 visitors staying there. Locations reported outside the Laggan area included Aviemore, Blair Atholl, Nethybridge and Fort William.

Various types of accommodation were being used, with self catering/timeshares providing the most popular option. This is shown in **Figure 4.17**.

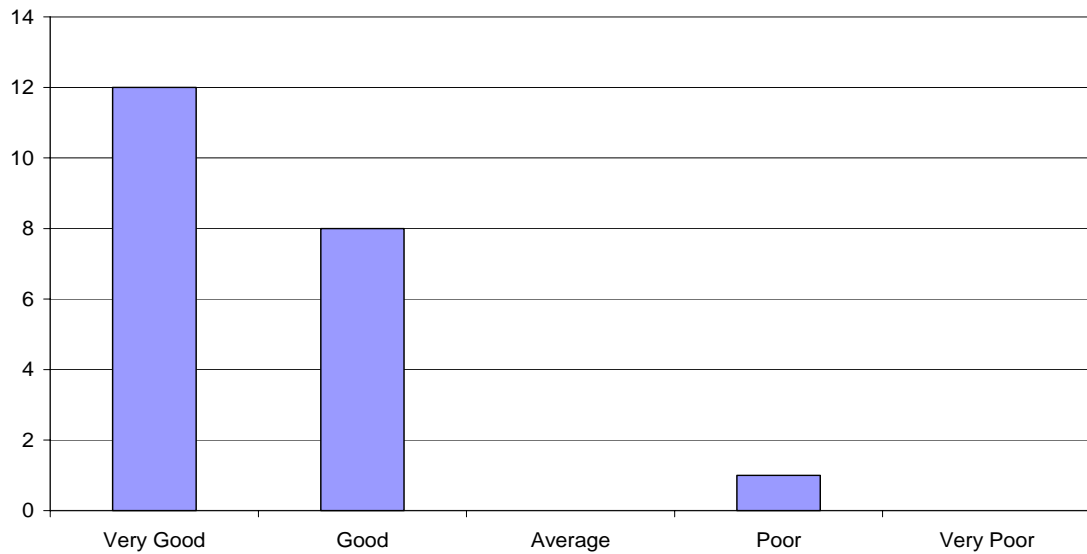
Figure 4.17: Type of Accommodation



The results for location of accommodation (Table 4.7) were then cross-tabulated against the results for other activity if they hadn't been pony trekking (Figure 4.16). This showed that five respondents staying in the Laggan local area would have visited somewhere outwith the area that day if the pony trekking facility had not been available. This means that although the pony trekking has limited influence in attracting visitors into the Inverness and East Highland area, it helps in attracting people into the Laggan local area and retaining them there.

4.4.6 Rating of the Facilities

Overall the visitors' opinion of the quality of the pony trekking trails was very positive with 20 of the 21 respondents giving a rating of 'Good' or 'Very Good'. Only one respondent gave negative feedback, claiming they found the trails long and boring.

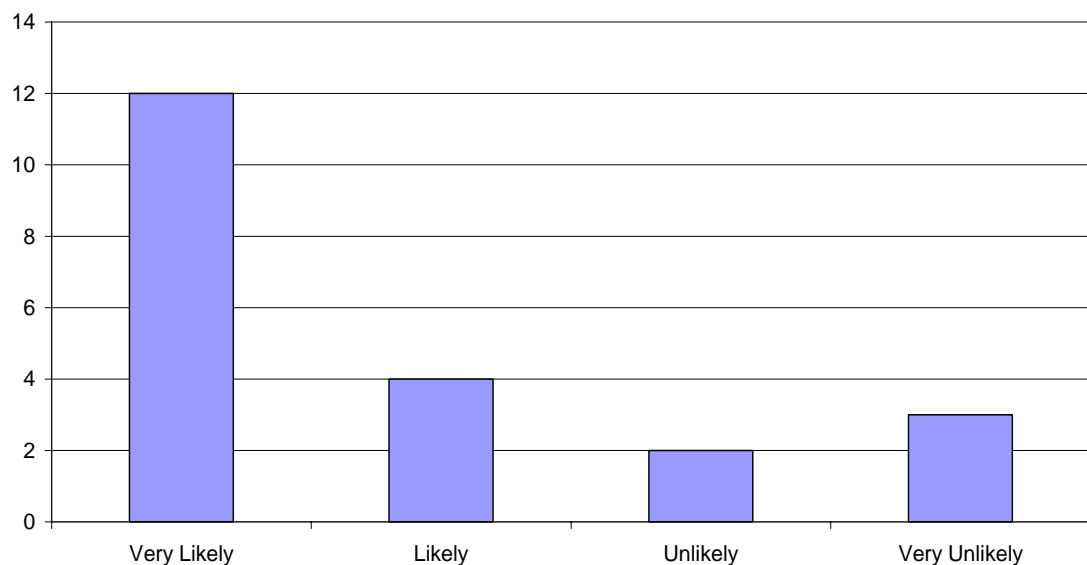
Figure 4.18: Overall Opinion of Pony Trekking Experience

Visitors elaborated on their rating by sighting two main positive reasons for enjoying their visit to the pony trekking facilities:

- the friendly and helpful staff; and
- the beautiful scenery the trails pass through.

With regard to prices charged for the pony trekking, the majority of visitors were very happy with it, claiming the prices were “just right”. Only three respondents thought the prices were too high.

This satisfaction with the pony trekking experience is further emphasised by the fact that sixteen of the twenty one respondents said they were ‘very likely’ or ‘likely’ to visit the pony trekking trails again in the next two years. This is shown in **Figure 4.19**.

Figure 4.19: Likelihood of Visiting the Trails Again Within the Next Two Years

4.4.7 Improvements

Generally, the visitors were very happy with the trails and the infrastructure at the pony trekking facility. Slight improvements suggested were focused around the signage at and around the facility. From a marketing point of view it was felt by some visitors that more signage on the roads around the facility would raise people's awareness of it. On the trails themselves, it was suggested that some information boards giving information on what could be seen from each point, e.g. scenery, potential wildlife etc would add to the overall quality of the trek.

Three visitors suggested that better toilet facilities would improve the area, while it was also suggested that more picnic tables outside the café would be welcomed.

4.5 **SUMMARY**

MOUNTAIN BIKERS

Visitors are characterised by a large non-local market, with 79% from outwith Inverness and East Highland and 74% from outwith the Highlands and Islands. The visitor profile is dominated by males in full-time employment who are between the ages of 18-45. The most common social class was C1 followed by AB and C2. A total of 30% had children in their group.

The most common way of finding out about the trail was word of mouth, which augurs well for the future given the high level of rating for the trails – 88% considering them to be either very good or good - although it does suggest the need for further marketing to attract a wider market. The main reasons for the high rating of the trails were the high technical level and quality of the trails and that they are well maintained. They were particularly impressed by the trail designs. The most popular routes were the red and blue with the majority of people using these, whereas just under half used the black route.

For a large proportion of respondents the mountain bike trails are the reason that they are in the Laggan local area and Badenoch and Strathspey. There is a high level of repeat visitation which concurs with the high rating given to the trails but also highlights the need to raise awareness within the wider market to increase visitor numbers in the future.

There is a high level of willingness to use the trails again. There were also some common themes coming from the suggested improvements adding more trails and making current trails longer.

A fifth of visitors had visited other mountain biking trails as part of their visit with Fort William being the most common.

In terms of marketing and information suggestions included renaming the website to include the name Wolftrax (i.e. the domain name is [www. basecampmtb.com](http://www.basecampmtb.com)), also better signage showing the trail location from the A9 as many commented that if you didn't know it was there you would drive right past it.

WALKERS

Visitors are characterised by a large non-local market, with 83% from outwith Inverness and East Highland and 82% from outside the Highlands and Islands. The majority of visitors are females, in full-time employment and between the ages of 31-60. The most common social class was AB followed by C1 and C2. A total of 42% had children in their group.

The most common way of finding out about the trail was through seeing boards/signs in the car park followed by word of mouth. The trails were rated highly with 72% considering them to be either very good or good. The main reasons for this rating were that the paths were good and well maintained with easy to follow signs.

Two fifths of visitors would have been in Badenoch and Strathspey even if they had not visited the walking trails but only 20% would have been in the Laggan area. Therefore the walking trails have a much greater role in attracting people into the Laggan area than into Badenoch and Strathspey.

There is a high level of willingness to use the trails again. There were also some common themes coming from the suggested improvements including better signage to the trails, as opposed to on the trails. Marketing and information suggestions included providing maps of the trails and advertising the trails more widely as many only discovered their existence when entering the car park.

PONY TREKKING

Overall, the pony trekking experience appears to be very positive with the beautiful scenery/trails and the friendly, helpful staff particular highlights. The issue therefore is around the marketing and promotion of the trails, so that more people become aware of them.

Although the pony trekking trails do not appear to be a main reason for the majority of people visiting the Inverness and East Highland area, it does appear to have a role in encouraging people to visit the Laggan local area and retaining them in the area once they are there.

Therefore, although it is not a key driver in itself, it does have a role to play in complementing the other visitor offer at Laggan Wolftrax and in the Laggan local area. It can help to expand the visitor experience and help to retain people, and their expenditure, in the local area. Of the 21 respondents 19 (or 90%) had children in their group compared with 29% for mountain bikers and 42% for walkers.

Therefore, the pony trekking could help to complement any aims to increase the family market visiting the site.

There are some very good aspects of the pony trekking on which to build, but there is clearly a need to increase the scale and role of the pony trekking aspect at Laggan Wolftrax, as discussed in greater detail in **Chapter 7**.

5. COMPANY SURVEYS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

This Chapter provides an analysis of the results of the surveys of the following organisations:

- cycle shop owners;
- accommodation providers/retailers;
- local estates;
- activity holiday operators/providers; and
- community groups.

5.1 CYCLE SHOPS

5.1.1 Introduction

Six cycle shops were consulted to assess the impact of Laggan Wolftrax on local businesses. All of the businesses, with one exception, were established prior to the development of Laggan Wolftrax and provided sales, hire and repair. One also offered guides / tours. They employed 20 full time, 3 part time and 8 seasonal staff between them and all had a turnover of £250,000 - £500,000, except one who had a turnover of £50,000 - £100,000.

5.1.2 Awareness

All of the cycle shops were aware of the Laggan Wolftrax facility and its trails, with only one shop not being aware of the walking and pony trekking trails. Awareness came from:

- local knowledge pre development / involved in consultation;
- involved in the team responsible for initial development; and
- met the BaseCamp owners.

5.1.3 Impact

All of the businesses reported an increase in business as a result of the Laggan Wolftrax facility. Two reported a larger footfall in their shops; two had seen an increase in turnover. One reported an increase in the sale of bigger and more expensive bikes due to the technical nature of the Laggan Wolftrax facility, while another noted a boost in the amount of bike repairs being undertaken, with repairs changing from an extra at the back of the shop into an integral part of the overall business. An increase in the sale of technical accessories and components such as body armour was also noted by the businesses.

Three of the businesses reported impact spread throughout the year, while one reported particular impact during the shoulder months.

5.1.4 Marketing

Five of the businesses reported participating in the Laggan Wolftrax demo day and all considered this a successful event allowing participants the opportunity to sample high spec bikes and giving them a taste for the trails. The internet and leaflets have also been used to positive effect, along with support for other MTB events in the area.

5.1.5 Strengths and Weaknesses

STRENGTHS

The great design and technically demanding nature of the trails was seen to be a key strength of the overall development. One shop stated that regarding the Black Run there “was nothing to touch it in Scotland.”

Other strengths noted by shop owners included:

- the facilities at BaseCamp: café, toilets etc;
- the scenery;
- the location and relatively easy access; and
- the all weather nature of the trails.

WEAKNESSES

All of the shop owners sighted the major weakness of the facility as the short length of the trails. Without a long distance route, users were only staying for approximately half a day. The lack of a longer Red Route was specifically mentioned as a weakness. The shop owners are concerned that developments elsewhere, e.g. Golspie, will take people away from Laggan Wolftrax unless the trails are upgraded and expanded.

5.1.6 Improvements

All six shop owners stated the need for a Phase II development at Laggan Wolftrax. Longer trails are required to create a full day experience that will keep people in the area. Some easier trails would also be of benefit to encourage new participants to the sport. The area opposite, in the Blackwood side of the forest, was seen by two shop owners to be the ideal location for long term development of the facility.

In terms of supporting infrastructure no real improvements were suggested, except for possible expansion of the café to deal with any increased demand, especially during events.

All the cycle shops felt that more investment was needed in marketing the trails to improve national recognition. The amount spent on marketing of 7stanes was seen to be far more effective than that at Laggan Wolftrax. The demo day was considered a good marketing tool and more of these were suggested along with attracting racing events. Two shop owners also stated that not enough Laggan Wolftrax leaflets were sent to them and that these needed to be sent out more regularly.

5.2 ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS / RETAILERS

5.2.1 Introduction

Consultation was undertaken with seventeen local businesses to gather information on the impact that Laggan Wolftrax has had on their business. Two accommodation providers were unwilling to go through the questionnaire as they felt the development had had no impact on their business at all. One business, though unwilling to do the full questionnaire, did provide some feedback. They had experienced less impact than they had expected from the Laggan Wolftrax development, although they did see that this could be partly explained by not marketing their business sufficiently. However, they were very positive about the development and were interested in marketing themselves more in the future, especially directly in conjunction with BaseCamp and Laggan Wolftrax.

The remainder of this section details the responses of the other fourteen businesses.

5.2.2 Business Profile

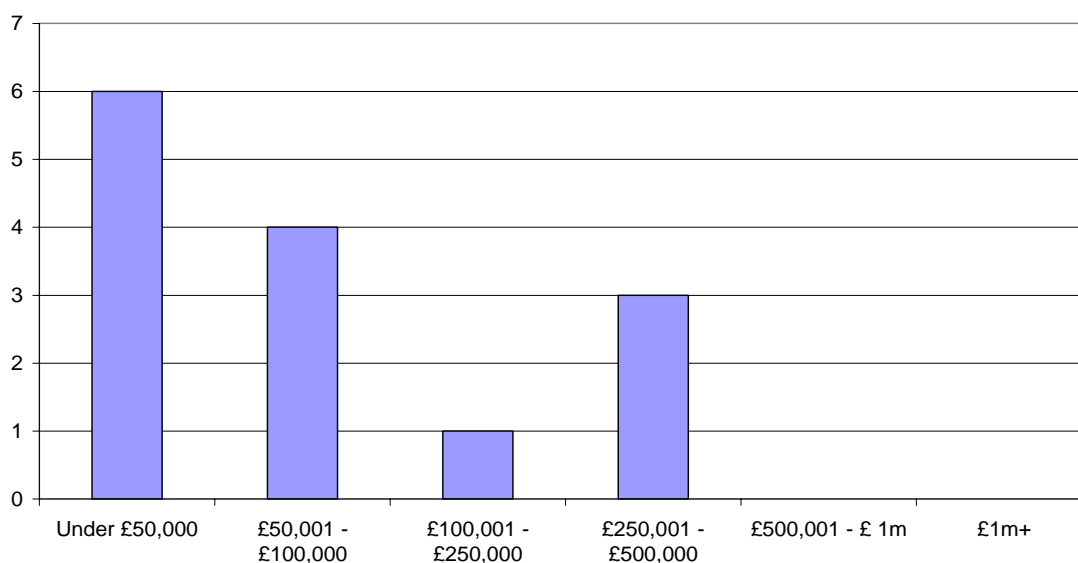
Thirteen of the businesses were a mixture of accommodation providers:

- caravan sites;
- bed and breakfast;
- self catering;
- hotels; and
- hostels.

Also included was a local retail shop.

The businesses employed a total of 33 full time staff, 17 part time staff and 26 seasonal staff though the summer months. The businesses had varying levels of turnover as shown in **Figure 5.1**.

Figure 5.1: Annual Turnover



As the graph shows, these businesses are relatively small, with only four businesses reporting turnover in excess of £100,000.

5.2.3 Awareness

All of the businesses were aware of Laggan Wolftrax and the mountain bike trails while only one of the fourteen businesses was unaware of the walking and pony trekking trails.

Their awareness came from:

- involvement with Laggan Forest Trust;
- living locally and thus knowing about the whole development;
- having brochures in their premises.

Two of the accommodation providers had recently moved to the area and said that the Laggan Wolftrax facility was one of the factors in their decision to purchase a business in the area as they saw potential in it for attracting guests. A number of the people consulted also reported using the facilities themselves, and this was not solely the mountain bike trails but also the walking trails and the café at BaseCamp MTB.

5.2.4 Impact

The businesses were asked whether the development of Laggan Wolftrax had had any impact on their business in terms of sales and employment.

Eleven of the businesses reported a positive impact in terms of sales although most found it very hard to quantify this. Two respondents claimed an increase of approximately 10% as a direct result of the development.

Three respondents reported a negative effect on their business as a result of the café facility at BaseCamp. This decline in sales had led to one of the businesses employing one less summer worker, although this was the only business to report any change in employment levels as a result of the Laggan Wolftrax development.

Those accommodation providers that had experienced an increase in sales reported that this increase was spread throughout the year with many mountain bike enthusiasts still visiting during poorer weather in the winter months. One accommodation provider, that normally only opened throughout the summer months, reported that they had got to know a number of these new customers and were now offering them accommodation through the winter months even though they are closed to the general public. The Laggan Wolftrax facility also appeared to be drawing in a variety of groups with no one type predominant. Groups mentioned included families, couples and groups of males aged 25-35. Most groups were usually small i.e.: 2 to 3 people, although one accommodation provider reported accommodating organised groups of up to fifteen at one time.

5.2.5 Promotional Activities and Future Development

Seven of the fourteen businesses spoken to reported undertaking some form of promotional activity aimed specifically at mountain bikers. This has taken the form of:

- mentioning Laggan Wolftrax on their website;
- setting up deals and joint marketing with BaseCamp MTB;
- advertising in Laggan Wolftrax promotional leaflets; and
- registered with cycling websites.

A further two accommodation providers planned to target mountain bikers in the future as they try to move away from coach tours and into other markets. Both planned to advertise in mountain bike magazines and promote themselves through VisitScotland. One of these also hoped to organise a holiday package in conjunction with Laggan Wolftrax whereby people came to stay in their establishment specifically to use the mountain bike trails.

A small number of the businesses reported also carrying leaflets promoting the pony trekking facilities and maps for walkers.

Many of those interviewed reported changing (or planning to change) their business to specifically target the needs of mountain bikers. Three accommodation providers already had storage facilities for bikes, while a further seven reported plans to introduce this in the future. Four also had washing and drying facilities for bikes and other equipment. The caravan site interviewed planned to increase the area they have set aside for tents as many of those camping are mountain bikers. One business also plans to open a shop within their business stocking mountain bike accessories.

5.2.6 Strengths and Weaknesses

STRENGTHS

The main strengths reported by businesses were with regard to the quality of the development. Seven of the businesses had used the facilities themselves and thought that the quality of design and technical nature of the course was seen as a great way of bringing mountain bikers into the area. It was also seen as a very good way of using the local forest.

Comments included:

- “Unique features provide an attractive challenge”;
- “Not many tracks as good as this in the country”; and
- “Most positive thing to come out of the woods”.

The staff at BaseCamp was also seen to be a key strength of the development with their friendliness and strong knowledge of mountain biking emphasised. One business said they “had done an excellent job”, while another said that “the advice they give to users is brilliant”.

None of the businesses felt that the development had deterred any other kind of visitors such as walkers. Instead, many felt that Laggan Wolftrax complemented the walking trails and helped to promote Laggan as a “centre for outdoor activities”. This was also the way they felt tourism within the Laggan area would develop in the future.

WEAKNESSES

The most common weakness of Laggan Wolftrax in the eyes of local businesses was the length of the trails. Seven of the accommodation providers interviewed said that the trails were not long enough for them to make any substantial gains in sales. It was felt that the visitors only stayed for approximately half a day and then left the area so businesses were not benefiting from the money they would spend. Although the technical nature of the trails was seen as a strength, it was felt by some businesses that the lack of any beginner routes was discouraging a section of the market.

Some businesses also thought that Laggan Wolftrax was not marketing itself as fully as it should.

5.2.7 Suggested Improvements

In terms of infrastructure there was general agreement between businesses that longer trails were a necessity so that they could gain more from the development. As mentioned above, it was felt that any expansion should also include some trails of a less technically demanding nature for children / amateurs.

Aside from the trails themselves other infrastructure improvements suggested were:

- a larger car park, especially for race events; and
- a more permanent building for BaseCamp, rather than portacabins.

An issue highlighted as both infrastructure and marketing/information was the lack of Laggan Wolftrax signage in the local area. It was suggested that more signs were required, especially close by the development as well as at the A9 Dalwhinnie junction and in Spean Bridge.

On the marketing side it was suggested that more flyers were distributed locally promoting Laggan Wolftrax, especially in the run up to events. One business felt it would be useful if a specific marketing person, with knowledge of the mountain biking industry, was employed to deliver marketing. Some did not see marketing as an essential concern as many felt that the quality of the development would lead to word of mouth promotion in the future.

It was also suggested that Laggan Wolftrax build closer links with local accommodation providers, in the same way that many golf courses do, so that promotion can be undertaken jointly.

5.3 LOCAL ESTATES

5.3.1 Introduction

Consultation was undertaken with the three Estates surrounding Laggan Wolftrax to gather their views on the perceived benefits and future development of the Laggan Wolftrax facility.

They estates interviewed were:

- Dalchully Estate;
- Ardverikie Estate; and
- Ben Alder Estate.

5.3.2 Perceived Benefits

Generally speaking the Estates were all happy and pleased with the development of Laggan Wolftrax and realised the benefit it was having in terms of bringing people to the local area.

The Estates were also happy that Laggan now offered their visitors designated cycling facilities. This was bringing benefits to the Estates as less visitors were using Estate routes / paths to cycle and instead would head to Laggan for an all encompassing experience. By focusing visitors in one place, this lessened the disruption to other activities on the estates such as grouse shooting and stalking.

The Factors could not pinpoint whether Laggan Wolftrax had any direct benefit in terms of increased accommodation demand for their self-catering units, however, all felt it helped to develop / raise the area's profile while ensuring sustainability for the local area.

5.3.3 Future Developments

The Estates felt the trails must be extended so that the maximum benefit can be gained from them. At present only a half-day experience is offered by the trails and it was felt that longer trails would encourage people to stay for longer periods of time. They also feel the café should try to target other markets such as passers-by / day tourists etc instead of focusing solely on mountain bikers.

In terms of future Estate development Ardverikie are keen to develop Loch Laggan Hotel into a retail and café facility. This will add to the service infrastructure locally, however, it will also raise competition levels for all suppliers.

Any future development is welcomed as long as it continues to have the same benefits as listed earlier; focused concentration of visitors in designated areas and no detrimental effect on grouse shooting / stalking opportunities.

5.4 **ACTIVITY HOLIDAY OPERATORS/PROVIDERS**

5.4.1 Introduction

The consultants, as part of this review, carried out telephone interviews with activity / mountain bike holiday operators. The purpose was to gauge their views on the Laggan Wolftrax development and the extent to which they had utilised and / or benefited from it. Feedback regarding how each group could / would use Laggan Wolftrax in the future was also sought.

5.4.2 Activity Operator's Profile

Traditional cross-country cycling holidays comprising package trips on well-known trails / paths is the most sought after form of cycling holiday in Scotland – not purpose-built single track trails like those at Laggan Wolftrax. Popular routes include Coast to Coast, Sustrans, The West Highland Way, Wilderness Highlands and Scotland's two National Parks with its many designated trails. Packaged holiday providers often include accommodation, daily itinerary plans, baggage handling etc. There was only one recognised purpose-built single track cycling provider MB7 that offers mountain biking holidays and accommodation across the 7stanes and Southern Scotland.

Holiday / mountain bike operators all offered cycling and walking adventures as part of their product portfolio. Of those interviewed however, none offered pony trekking holidays either exclusively or in part. Anecdotally, pony trekking was viewed as specialist and hard to package / link with other outdoor activities. Walking and cycling on the other hand were viewed as being complementary.

A number of other activities and provision were offered by the holiday operators as part of a holistic / all encompassing cycling holiday. For example sightseeing trips, visitor attractions, outdoor activities and cultural experiences were also offered as part of a 3-7 day week itinerary.

5.4.3 Marketing of Services

In the main, holiday operators sold their services via their own website, VisitScotland collateral, good word of mouth / reputation / testimonials and a high number of repeat visitors. Cross-marketing benefits from close links to accommodation providers in key areas were also noted i.e. one day guided tours / cycle itineraries etc.

Cycle holiday operators targeted mainly 35-65 year old A, B, and C1 markets. A number of customers booked individually and a large proportion of the market were from outside of Scotland with the majority coming from England and overseas.

5.4.4 Locations

Holiday operators offered cycling holidays to various popular locations throughout Scotland including The West Highland Way and well-known Coast to Coast trails. The real strength of these locations included: the scenery, the access, the quality and sustainability of trails / paths, and the ability to cycle in some of the United Kingdom's more remote and wild areas. The weakness of Scotland as a cycling destination included: the weather, transport costs, consistency of services / accommodation and the fact much of the single track trails are not appropriate for novice riders. It is perceived that this age group of tourists do not use purpose-built single track trails.

Respondents were asked to explain their reasons for deciding which locations they chose to mountain bike. Reasons included:

- proximity to accommodation and transport;
- quality of accommodation and service provisions / range of amenities;
- easy access to trails, ground conditions;
- proximity to key transport hubs i.e. train stations and airports;
- time constraints and accessibility;
- type of trails re either wilderness cross-country trails or purpose-built trails i.e. technical build; and
- remoteness.

5.4.5 Awareness and Usage

Although all holiday / mountain biking operators knew of Laggan Wolftrax, only a very few said they had ever used it. The majority of holiday operators / mountain bike holiday providers are not marketing or using Laggan Wolftrax as a cycling and / or walking destination. Cycling consumers are not enquiring / requesting itineraries about Laggan Wolftrax or any other purpose-built single track centre. Instead they prefer traditional cross-country wilderness cycles routes throughout Scotland.

5.4.6 Suggested Improvements

A number of pointers / recommendations were given by respondents and can be split into infrastructure and marketing. These included the following:

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Laggan Wolftrax needs substantial trail development; currently the trails are just too short. There is no recognised endurance trail, they are all short sharp trail experiences only, a larger 2-3 hour trail is required (20-25km in length);

- the trails need to be better linked to Laggan Village, the Corrieyairack Pass and other surrounding walking / cycling trails. It is currently viewed as a half-day experience, packaging it with more traditional cross-country trails would help to raise its profile as a cycling destination;
- Laggan Wolftrax needs easier trails. Generally the market using holiday / cycling operators does not seek extreme trails, but rather introductory / softer easier trails. The emphasis at Laggan Wolftrax is currently extreme / advanced; more green and blue graded trails are required;
- a skills area close to the central facilities and the car park is required;
- more attractive ascent trails are required. The current forest road ascent is said to be rather dull;
- Laggan Wolftrax is not viewed in the same manner as Glentress or the 7stanes developments in terms of reputation, quality of experience, choice / selection of trails scale etc;

MARKETING

- Laggan is still very much remote and not close to any large / substantial population centres therefore significant future market growth is hard;
- its profile and its exposure needs raised i.e. it does not have the reputation or the profile of the Nevis Range / Glentress; and
- a loyalty type system / deal between forest centres i.e. Laggan Wolftrax, Hub in the Forest, Grizedale MTB i.e. 4 hires for the price of 3 would help to attract more visitors to the sites and increase hire sales potential.

5.4.7 Role of BaseCamp

There is no doubt that BaseCamp is an important aspect of the Laggan Wolftrax experience. This is reinforced by the activity operator interviews who all saw central facilities as essential and integral to the overall site experience i.e. café, and hire provisions and to some extent retail.

Many of the respondents commented on the opportunity for BaseCamp to become more of an outdoor activity venue offering links / access to other outdoor activities providers and their provisions i.e. climbing walls, GO APE, water activities, forest adventure / paintball etc.

Holiday activity firms want to forge closer links with organisations like BaseCamp. They want BaseCamp to appeal to a wider range of markets. For this to be achieved BaseCamp must become more of an outdoor activity destination with better links to other activity / water-based products. This would have greater appeal to outdoor activity holiday providers.

5.5 COMMUNITY/SOCIAL USE

5.5.1 Introduction

In addition to activity / holiday providers, there are a number of groups using the facilities at Laggan Wolftrax for community / social purposes. Examples of some of these are discussed below.

Highland Council Outdoor Education Department uses Laggan Wolftrax as many as 20 times per year for groups of between 6 and 15 in size. The facilities are used to support programmes for disadvantaged kids / social excluded groups. Highland Council seek an activity which offers the complete package i.e. onsite bike rental / toilets etc, which is located in a safe and secure environment and is inclusive to all – Laggan Wolftrax offers all this.

A number of private schools (from the Edinburgh area) were also known to have used the facilities for day trips / excursions etc. The consultants also spoke with the secondary schools in the local Laggan area and found that the facilities were as yet, not being utilised directly by the schools, although teachers did note that privately kids were using the Laggan facilities. This would suggest a potential for school use in the future.

There was demand for Laggan Wolftrax from local residential activity providers who used the facilities on a frequent basis. These included Abernethy Trust Nethybridge and Ardeonaig, as well as Lagganlia Centre for Outdoor Education.

The markets staying at these residential centres included families, youth groups, children's holiday groups and university students.

5.6 OTHER USER GROUPS

Finally as part of the study research it has been identified that Laggan is being used, although not frequently, as part of the Scottish Mountain Bike Leadership Association certificate via Abernethy Trust and Glenmore Lodge. Laggan is used because of its relevance to today's changing cycling market i.e. the growing trend for technical single track riding. It is also understood that the Scottish Cycle Union is looking to bring out a personal performance module focusing on cycle competency. This module will have a strong technical theme and could be located at different purpose-built centres around Scotland. The module will be positioned between the Trail Cycle Leader and the Mountain Bike Leader. This module will be open and available to all.

5.7 SUMMARY

The cycle shop owners are all very positive about the development, but see the need to take it to a second phase. This should be used to extend the length and range of the trails available. They see the demo days and attracting race events as good ways to raise the usage level and profile of the site.

The majority of accommodation providers / retailers are positive about the development but also see the need to develop the length and range of the trails. They see this as crucial to extend the length of stay at the site and therefore the opportunity for them to increase the level of overnight stays and expenditure.

The local estates see Laggan Wolftrax as offering a focus for mountain bike and other activity in the area. This reduces the amount of potential conflict with other activities taking place on their estates.

The activity holiday operators were not really using the site to any great extent at the moment. Their suggestions for ways of developing the site would have substantial implications as it would mean developing into more of an outdoor activity centre.

Finally, in addition to the economic impact from visitors (assessed in the next chapter) the site is also providing a social function. A number of groups with a social remit are already making use of the facilities.

6. ECONOMIC IMPACT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter we present estimates of the economic impact of the Laggan Wolftrax project at the following geographic levels:

- Laggan Local area;
- Badenoch and Strathspey;
- Inverness and East Highland;
- Highlands and Islands; and
- Scotland.

The data we have used in estimating the impact has been drawn from the survey of visitors, which was reported in Chapter 3. This has provided information on:

- origin of participants;
- spend patterns;
- length of stay;
- counterfactual behaviour i.e. what they would have done if they had not visited the trails.

The number of visitors to the site has been derived through a combination of trail counters and the visitor survey.

6.2 VISITOR NUMBERS

The trails have been fully operational since November 2004. According to the trails counters a total number of 42,974 mountain bikes passed the counters between the late November 2004 and late November 2005. However, many of the mountain bikers will use the trails more than once. From the survey it was established that on average the mountain bikers used 3.5 trails (either different trails or the same trail more than once). It was considered that the average level of use is likely to be higher in the summer compared with the winter due to better weather and longer hours of daylight. It has been assumed that the average number of uses during the winter is 2.5, giving an average throughout the year of 3. If we apply the average number of uses to the counts this gives a total number of mountain bikers of 14,325 for that first year of operation.

In terms of calculating the number of visitors in the second year we had planned to use the trail counter data again.

However, FCS have highlighted to us concerns about the quality of data received from the counters during that year as some were not operational for parts of the year. The data from trail counters would seem to suggest a decline in visitor numbers whereas people's perceptions have been of an increase in activity.

The catering income at BaseCamp MTB has also increased during the second year of operation which would seem to conflict with suggestions of a decline in visitor numbers. Therefore, we have used the first year's visitor numbers and applied an uplift prorated to the uplift in catering spend. Using this method gives visitor numbers of approximately 16,000. It is important to realise that this is an estimate of the number of visitors based on the available data and for example applying a sensitivity analysis of +/-10% (i.e. visitor numbers had not increased from year 1 or the growth had been double that estimated) to this figure would suggest a range of 14,400-17,600.

6.2.1 Visitor Profile

Table 6.1 shows the breakdown of visitors by origin. Only 3.6% of visitors were from the Laggan local area while 90% were from out with Badenoch and Strathspey and just under three quarters from out with the Highlands and Islands.

Laggan local area	3.6%
Elsewhere in Badenoch & Strathspey	5.6%
Elsewhere in Inverness & East Highland	11.5%
Elsewhere in Highlands & Islands	5.4%
Elsewhere in Scotland	55.6%
Elsewhere in UK	16.7%
Overseas	1.4%
Total	100.0%

Overnight accommodation is a significant item of expenditure, therefore, it is important to distinguish between day visitors and those staying overnight. **Table 6.2** gives a breakdown of type of visit by origin.

Origin	Day Visitors	Overnight
Laggan local area	3.6	0.0
Elsewhere in Badenoch & Strathspey	5.6	0.0
Elsewhere in Inverness & East Highland	11.1	0.4
Elsewhere in Highlands & Islands	4.4	1.0
Elsewhere in Scotland	24.0	31.7
Elsewhere in UK	0.0	16.7
Overseas	0.0	1.4
Total	48.8	51.2

The total number of yearly visitors to Laggan Wolftrax has been estimated at 16,000. The survey identified that just under half were day visitors – suggesting 7,806 in total – and just over half overnight visitors – 8,194 in total.

6.2.2 Gross Expenditure

Average spend is given in the **Table 6.3**. The average daily expenditure of day visitors was £11.87. Average daily expenditure of overnight visitors has been broken down by Scottish, elsewhere in UK and overseas visitors as the expenditure levels of these groups vary considerably.

Day Visitors	£11.87
Overnight Scottish	£25.58
Overnight Elsewhere UK	£29.94
Overnight Overseas	£39.17

The survey recorded the number of nights spent by overnight visitors associated with a visit to Laggan Wolftrax. The average length of stay is given in **Table 6.4**.

	Scottish	Non-Scottish
Laggan local area	0.9	0.8
Badenoch & Strathspey	1.5	1.3
Inverness & East Highlands	1.6	1.4
Highlands and Islands	1.9	2.1
Scotland	2.0	2.3

Gross expenditure is calculated as follows:

$$GE = dv.ndv + ov.l.nov$$

Where GE gross expenditure
 dv average daily expenditure of day visitors
 ndv number of day visitors
 ov average daily expenditure of overnight visitors
 l average length of stay
 nov number of overnight visitors

Applying this formula produces gross expenditure figures³ as detailed in the **Table 6.5**.

Visitor Type	Laggan local area	Badenoch & Strathspey	Inverness & East Highland	Highlands & Islands	Scotland
Day Visitors	£92,663	£92,663	£92,663	£92,663	£92,663
Overnight Visitors	£192,999	£318,698	£341,131	£444,033	£475,367
Total	£285,661	£411,360	£433,793	£536,695	£568,029

Therefore, the total gross expenditure resulting from visitors to the Laggan Wolftrax ranges from £285,000 in Laggan local area to £570,000 in Scotland.

6.2.3 Gross to Net

To calculate the net impact of the Laggan Wolftrax it is necessary to take account of:

- additionality;
- displacement; and
- multiplier effects

³ Expenditure was broken down by visitor origin before applying the formula.

6.2.4 Additionality

Additionality refers to the likelihood that Laggan Wolftrax would have been undertaken without public sector support.

Mountain bike facilities such as Laggan Wolftrax are free facilities. The benefit accrues to businesses in the local economy rather than to the developer of the facilities. Although businesses onsite providing facilities e.g. café and bike sales/hire do derive income from the site it is not sufficient to initially fund the development. In these situations it is impossible for the project to be fully funded by the private sector rather it requires public sector intervention. Without this public sector support the project would not take place, therefore the level of additionality is considered to be **100%**.

6.2.5 Displacement and Multipliers

There is also a need to discount any benefits from the project that will displace economic activity that would have taken place anyway.

Displacement is an assessment of the extent to which the project has caused spending to be shifted from one part of the local economy to another.

The survey was used to ascertain the importance of the project in a visitors decision to visit the area. Visitors were also asked where they would have been if they had not visited the project. Using the responses from these two questions the level of displacement was estimated as set out in **Table 6.6**.

TABLE 6.6: DISPLACEMENT FACTORS (%)					
	Laggan local area	Badenoch & Strathspey	Inverness & East Highland	Highlands & Islands	Scotland
Day Visitors					
Laggan local area	85	95	95	100	100
Elsewhere in Badenoch & Strathspey	7	96	100	100	100
Elsewhere in Inverness & East Highland	2	5	96	96	100
Elsewhere in Highlands and Islands	0	0	5	95	95
Elsewhere in Scotland	2	3	4	5	98
Overnight Visitors					
Scottish	5	26	30	37	98
Elsewhere in UK	6	24	36	41	83
Overseas	6	24	36	41	100

6.2.6 Multipliers

The increase in economic activity as a result of the project will also have two types of wider impact on the economy:

- **supplier effect:** an increase in sales in a business will require it to purchase more supplies than it would have otherwise. A proportion of this 'knock-on' effect will benefit suppliers in the local economy; and

- **income effect:** an increase in sales in a business will usually lead to either an increase in employment or an increase in incomes for those already employed. A proportion of these increased incomes will be re-spent in the local economy.

The Scottish Tourism Multiplier Study (STMS)⁴ provides standard supplier and income multipliers for the tourism sector. This estimates that the combined on-site supplier and income multiplier for a remote rural location are as follows:

- Local 1.24;
- Scotland 1.80.

For this study there are five geographical levels at which the economic impact is being assessed. The STMS does not provide multipliers at these various levels, therefore we have applied the local to the Highlands and Islands and applied assumptions for the level of multiplier at the lower geographic levels – Laggan local area (1.05), Badenoch and Strathspey (1.1) and Inverness and East Highland (1.18).

Applying additionality, displacement and multipliers gives net additional expenditure as set out in **Table 6.7**.

	Laggan local area	Badenoch & Strathspey	Inverness & East Highland	Highlands and Islands	Scotland
Gross expenditure	£285,661	£411,360	£433,793	£536,695	£568,029
Less non-additional expenditure	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Less displacement	£18,213	£99,848	£149,449	£219,827	£530,046
Net Direct expenditure	£267,448	£311,512	£284,344	£316,869	£37,983
Plus multipliers	1.05	1.1	1.18	1.24	1.8
Net additional Expenditure	£280,821	£342,664	£335,526	£392,917	£68,370

6.2.7 Net Employment Impact

The net employment impact is calculated by applying an appropriate **output:employment** factor. We have applied output:employment factors derived from the STMS⁵. These are:

- £40,900 for the local area; and
- £33,000 for Scotland.

Applying these factors to the net additional expenditure figures gives an employment impact of:

⁴ STMS provides estimates of local (Highlands & Islands) and Scottish multipliers.

⁵ An inflator has been applied to bring the figures up to 2006 values.

- **6.9 FTEs** jobs in the Laggan local area;
- **8.4 FTE** jobs in Badenoch & Strathspey;
- **8.2 FTE** jobs in Inverness & East Highland;
- **9.6 FTE** jobs in the Highlands & Islands
- **2.1 FTEs** jobs in Scotland.

6.2.8 Cost Effectiveness Indicators

Table 6.8 shows the cost per job based on total project spend of £254,500⁶, of which £189,500 was from the Forestry Commission (this contribution included 100,000 from the Scottish Executive)

TABLE 6.8: COST PER JOB					
	Laggan local area	Badenoch & Strathspey	Inverness & East Highland	Highlands & Islands	Scotland
Cost per FTE					
Forestry Commission spend	27,600	22,619	23,100	19,726	91,466
Total public sector spend	37,067	29,899	30,535	26,075	120,909
Cost per Annual FTE					
Forestry Commission spend	2,760	2,262	2,310	1,973	9,147
Total public sector spend	2,760	2,262	2,310	1,973	9,147

The cost per job estimates are on the basis of a job lasting for 10 years, therefore it is also useful to analyse the cost per job on the basis of an annual FTE i.e. a FTE job supported for one year. The table provides estimates of the cost per job at this time, if the project is able to increase the number of visitors and/or the length of time and expenditure in the local area this would lead to a reduction in the cost per job over time. These issues are discussed later in the report.

6.3 SUMMARY

In summary, it can be seen that gross expenditure resulting from the Laggan Wolftrax ranged from approximately **£285,000** at the Laggan local area level to **£570,000** at the Scottish level. Taking account of additionality, displacement and multiplier effects, the net expenditure that resulted from Laggan Wolftrax has been estimated at ranging from **£280,000** at the Laggan local area level and **£68,000** at the Scottish level. The employment impact to date has been estimated at ranging from **6.9 FTE** jobs at the Laggan local area level to **9.6 FTEs** jobs at the Highlands & Islands level.

The total project cost to date was £250,500 of which £185,500 was funded by the forestry Commission. The cost per job to date for total spend range from **£37,000 (£3,700 per annual FTE)** for the Laggan local area to **£26,000 (2,600 per annual FTE)** for the Highlands and Islands, while for Forestry Commission spend they range from **£27,600** for the Laggan local area to **£19,700** for the Highlands and Islands.

⁶ Includes £4,000 maintenance spend

The aim for the project in the future in economic development terms is to generate a higher level of additional economic impact. This can be achieved through increasing the number of visitors and encouraging longer lengths of stay. Encouraging signs from an economic impact perspective are the high proportion of non-local visitors and the high level of net additional visitors i.e. those that would not have been in the local area if Laggan Wolftrax did not exist. This gives a good base from which to develop into the future.

7. LAGGAN WOLFTRAX MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the management and delivery of Laggan Wolftrax in terms of development and operation, health and safety and trail maintenance.

7.2 DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION

At present, Strathmashie Forest is part of the National Forest Estate under the stewardship of Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and is managed and monitored by Inverness Forest District.

7.2.1 Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)

The role of FCS at Strathmashie Forest in recent years has changed. Today the emphasis is on promoting recreation and enjoyment in the forest, maximising economic and social benefits to the local community rather than just harvesting timber (as previously sought). FCS still maintains very strong environmental roles, protecting the natural, built and archaeological heritage within the Forest and liaising with other national bodies on these issues.

In 1998, FCS entered into a partnership agreement with Laggan Forest Trust (LFT), a limited liability company with charitable status, for the day-to-day operational management of the Strathmashie Forest (see LFT section). Laggan Forest Trust Forestry Company (LFTFC), the trading arm of LFT, is contracted by FCS to employ a forest foreman who was at the time of writing on a temporary reduced hours contract with FCS. LFTFC are hopeful his working hours will return in the near future to full time. In the meantime he has been able to carry out other voluntary LFTFC duties.

FCS has led the new recreation drive for Strathmashie. Indeed, they championed and controlled the construction of the mountain bike development. They instigated trail design, surveys, costing, construction, planning and led funding bids. They were also heavily involved in the day-to-day management and control of the product evolution during the mountain bike construction process, ensuring quality was met, environmental issues resolved and agreed development costs adhered. They worked closely with the trail designer and construction team.

It is vital for FCS to continue to control product development in the future at Laggan Wolftrax. This central (national) control mechanism is extremely important to ensure that mountain bike product development and its evolution / approach is consistent and delivered to a high standard throughout FCS Estate. Trails must meet International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) guidelines and be graded within the evolving Scottish mountain bike trail grading systems⁷. It also means that national policies and issues such as health and safety, maintenance, risk assessment etc can be better adhered to.

In addition to leading the trail development at Laggan Wolftrax, FCS were also instrumental in sourcing temporary buildings, agreeing terms and appointing the lessee for the central facilities operation café, toilets, changing facilities, bike shop / hire (BaseCamp MTB) as well as sourcing the pony trek buildings and providing a temporary parade ring.

⁷ Forestry Commission, *Evolving Strategy for Mountain Biking and Forest Cycling in the National Forest Estate*

The BaseCamp central facilities are temporary, with formal permission of use, granted for a period of five years from September 2004. This onsite temporary accommodation will have to be replaced by a permanent solution in 2009.

7.2.2 Laggan Forest Trust (LFT)

LFT was set up out of an action group to safeguard local community interests, when FCS announced a possible sale of the forest to private ownership. The objectives of the Trust in the early years were to purchase the forest for the community.

Since 2000, the Trust has gone through a number of structural and objective changes, at present the structure allows for nine Trustees (although currently only eight are in position). These are unpaid voluntary positions. The Trustees include representatives of the Laggan Community and FCS. A more detailed breakdown of the Trust and its structure is as follows:

- a formal five year agreement between LFT and FCS was signed in 1998 for community involvement in the management of the forest;
- in 2004, the partnership agreement was reclassified and a longer term, 25 year partnership agreement signed;
- LFT is a limited liability company with charitable status. It has an operational trading arm (LFTFC) which was set up in 1997;
- the Trust comprises eight / nine volunteer Trustees. The operation of the LFTFC is overseen by two volunteer directors;
- since 1997 most of the work in Strathmashie Forest has been carried out through LFTFC using local labour. Work includes timber harvesting, ground preparation, planting & maintenance, and deer control;
- the Trust have identified four pieces of land within Strathmashie Forest that they wish to purchase from FCS through the National Forest Land Scheme for future development:
 - Gorsteane (4.3 hectares) development opportunities; woodland burials;
 - Auchduchil (0.8 hectares) permanent visitor / business units, activities hub to add to and replace existing temporary facilities;
 - Blackwood (13 hectares);
 - Feagour – low-cost, energy efficient dwellings.
- a draft business plan has been prepared by LFT to support the purchase and development of the four sites in Strathmashie Forest. The draft business plan set out a strategy / vision and objectives for the Trust together with an indication of development funding requirements for the future;
- in recent years the annual turnover of LFTFC has been in the region of £140,000. the contract with FCS allows the Company to employ a forest foreman and a part-time administrator.

LFT has gone through a number of changes in recent years. Currently the Trust has a good professional relationship with FCS and lines of communication are good between the Trust and the Forest District Manager. This informal system works well due to the personalities involved both within the Trust and FCS. However, partnerships evolve and individuals change particularly in the voluntary sector. If the existing personalities change, then there is a risk that the informal system / arrangements may break down. It is suggested, through discussions with LFT and recommended by the consultants, that, prior to any further recreational development in the forest, a more formal and detailed action plan and detailed modus operandi / operational management plan should be drawn up between the Trust and FCS.

This document should clearly outline the objectives and responsibilities of each organisation as well as the responsibility of the lessees and cover such issues over the longer term as:

- health and safety;
- future mountain bike, pony walking trail development and mixed uses;
- trail and forest maintenance and its funding;
- development funding responsibilities;
- environmental management statements / practices / liaison / advice;
- planning submission and liaison guidance;
- insurances – public liability etc;
- development control;
- preparation of supporting responsibilities;
- development information;
- marketing and branding; and
- quality.

A more formal documented management operating action plan will avoid confusion. It will give a clear and more consistent approach in light of any particular future personnel changes, clearer future direction for the Trust, increase transparency and help to gain better community buy-in.

However, Laggan Wolftrax is also an important and growing part of FCS' outdoor recreation provision and must continue to be controlled and managed in the future by FCS. It must be positioned to conform to the changing national picture e.g. FCS must continue to control trail development, visitor experience, quality, maintenance, health and safety etc.

As suggested FCS' role in the future will be to continue to be a catalyst to recreation and business development within the forest and that they will also provide an essential management and advisory role supporting the recreation product and its future evolution. Their current and potential future roles would include:

- FCS continue to lead the second phase planning permission for expanding the trail product at Laggan Wolftrax;
- FCS continuing to provide professional / operational and development advice to LFT;
- ensuring that trail quality standards meet FCS guidelines and that they are part of the national grading system;
- ensuring health and safety standards and appropriate risk assessment inspections are carried out;
- ensuring all trails are well maintained and policies and procedures adhered to;
- FCS may be part of a larger pot of funders, but they are unlikely to lead future funding efforts – this needs to be championed by the community.

7.2.3 BaseCamp MTB

BaseCamp MTB lease and manage the retail, catering and toilet facilities at Laggan Wolftrax. The proprietors, Lindsay and Gail Carruthers, provide operational management on a day-to-day basis. They provide helpful friendly advice and service and help to create the informal 'club type' atmosphere synonymous with mountain bike sites throughout Scotland. Most of the time both proprietors are working full-time onsite, this demonstrates commitment and direction to this growing business. In any event the business at present cannot afford other full-time staff.

A review of the visitors' book has revealed that: visitors enjoy the trails, the mix between the technical black, fast flowing red and blue. However the biggest criticism is that the trails are too short and need to be made longer. The home baking, the bike hire, uplift and the friendliness of the staff are reported as being key assets of the facility.

It is the consultants' opinion that although the atmosphere is 'informal' the facilities are professionally managed.

7.2.4 Haflinger Ponies

The business has been on 'site' / using the forest for some seven to eight years – six years before the mountain bike trails emerged.

At present the business operates in a building on site owned by FCS and let to the business. The operating season is from Easter to November. They offer pony trekking to individuals (i.e. to join an organised trek) or they attract groups of children and young adults.

The feedback from visitors to the pony trekking were very positive and the focus should therefore be on identifying ways to encourage more visitors in the future.

There is an opportunity for this business to be more closely linked to the other activities on offer onsite – mountain biking and walking.

7.3 HEALTH AND SAFETY

FC's UK team are looking at mountain bike health and safety at a national level. New policies and procedures are being investigated and developed that includes improving the flow of communication of health and safety to the general public. As part of this review the consultants had a number of meetings with the national health and safety team. The team are still formulating their conclusions and recommendations however they have yet to be adopted nationally. The consultants recommend that Laggan Wolftrax revisit its onsite health and safety policies and procedures in the future, inline with the evolving national position.

7.4 TRAIL MAINTENANCE

At present there has only been maintenance carried out on the mountain bike trails as the equestrian trails had just been completed at the time of this study, but these will be maintained as required in the future.

Responsibility for mountain bike trail inspection and maintenance is carried out by BaseCamp MTB. Lindsay inspects the trails on an informal basis every two weeks or after a severe storm. After each inspection there is evidence of trail maintenance requirements. The urgency of this trail maintenance is then ranked on a scale of 1 to 5 [immediate (1) and (5) when money is available]. If possible Lindsay carries out the maintenance himself or will organise alternative arrangements if necessary. The cost of trail maintenance at Laggan Wolftrax, up to June 2006 was estimated at about £4,000.

The repairs so far have tended to be fairly obvious – erosion, breaking berms, corners and potholes. There have also been some design tweaks in the first operating year. This trail inspection and maintenance regime has worked well in the first operating years.

It is recommended, in the future, that a more formal audit of trail features is carried out and this is cross-referenced to both maintenance and health and safety issues. As a result of rising health and safety concerns a more formal / regular trail inspection and record keeping process will be necessary even down to individual trail feature record keeping.

It is recommended that as part of any new build proposals in the future, all key manmade features should be fully and individually catalogued and maintenance and management regimes drafted, in particular fun parks / freeride / jump parks. This should also give an indication of the likely regular maintenance cost for different features.

Once new trails have been built there should be a formal design sign-off procedure before they are handed over to the Forest District (see evolving FCS National Strategy). We understand this procedure is already in place at some locations (see Learnie Red Rock trails). In the short term the trail inspection and maintenance procedure is adequate.

The consultants believe that the true annual mountain bike trail maintenance costs far exceed the estimated £4,000 spent during the 'first year' of operation. FCS needs to build up a more formal picture of the longer-term annual maintenance liability. The 'National Strategy' suggested annual maintenance costs could be around £0.50 to £0.60 per metre of built single tracks per year and recent discussions at Glentress have reconfirmed the annual maintenance cost to be around this 'ball park' range.

However experience has shown that this maintenance cost varies depending on grade, terrain, features, type of trail etc. Sections of trail with intense features i.e. fun park / freeride areas require more maintenance. Based on the information gleaned from research carried out during the preparation of the National Strategy the estimated annual maintenance liability for Laggan Wolftrax (approximately 10km single track of trail) could be between £5,000 and £7,000 per annum. This level could still be understated and needs verification through better record keeping / charging systems, etc. As yet there is no indication as to the likely cost of maintenance required on the horse trails.

8. MARKET AND PRODUCT POSITIONING

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the market and product positioning of the Laggan Wolftrax development including marketing/sponsorship/promotion, and current and proposed product development.

8.2 MARKETING / SPONSORSHIP / PROMOTION

Neither FCS nor BaseCamp MTB has a formal annual marketing budget for Laggan Wolftrax. Marketing to date has been informal through word of mouth / personal recommendation and through articles in UK trade press, particularly just after the facility officially opened. The visitor survey identified the importance of word of mouth recommendation, particularly in the mountain bike market, as a key awareness raising tool. However, some key 'traditional' marketing tools have been put in place.

Discussions with BaseCamp MTB have revealed that in the last two years they have spent about £10,000 on marketing activity: signs, website, flyers, events, sponsorship, vehicle graphics, activity guide, press / magazine adverts, branded clothing etc.

The current level of marketing at about £5K per year is lower than general tourism industry norms but in line with current levels of revenue generated at Laggan Wolftrax. Facilities in the early years of operation require higher marketing budgets.

A brochure and trail map were produced, and funded, through the project partners. This brochure / map is now in its second print-run and was funded by FCS. The brochure also includes a flyer promoting local businesses and accommodation suppliers, which was paid for by the businesses. FCS' public status does present issues over the extent to which they can promote local businesses directly. However, there needs to be some more direct marketing and promotion of local businesses and the village from the Laggan Wolftrax site to reinforce links and increase average length of stay and spend opportunities. This was recognised in the business interviews carried out as part of this study.

When the facility first opened BaseCamp MTB sent flyers to individual mountain bike clubs and there was promotion on the Single Track Website. The Single Track World is a quarterly magazine available in bike shops and bike cafés. It also has a website and is the recognised mouthpiece of the mountain bike industry. It is a user / industry interface and contains news, forums, adverts etc.

On 29th April 2006, BaseCamp MTB organised a demo day amongst local bike shops. This event attracted some 400 people and nearly 300 bike demonstrations were undertaken. Local bike shops reported that this event was well received and very successful and should be repeated one or two times per year, say April and October. The event in 2006 included distributors from as far a field as Manchester, Gloucester and Plymouth.

In 2006 Laggan Wolftrax also held a round of the Scottish Cross-Country Championships. This event had 200 competitors and there were an estimated 400-500 people at the event.

There is an opportunity, particularly if further trails are developed, for Wolftrax to become more important as an events venue, particularly for competition style events. It must complement the national events destination – Witches Trails / Leanachan Forest. However, one of the issues is the events tend, in effect, to shut down the rest of the trails given the facility layout. In reality however, the trails are always open to the general public during events unless the event organisers apply for a Section 11 exclusion order from the access authority. Therefore given the current layout of the site, the timing of events and communication with general visitors is important.

BaseCamp MTB has a good website outlining the facilities available, opening times, downloadable map and links to community and other websites, but it is not as well visited as the FCS website. Consultations suggested that the BaseCamp domain name should have Wolftrax in the title. There may be issues over a private company using a publicly owned domain name but this should be investigated further.

FCS has recently developed a mountain bike website portal which showcases all the recently developed mountain bike sites on FCS land including the 7stanes. This is an extremely useful 'one stop shop' for FCS mountain biking in Scotland. However, it needs to develop links to other sites promoting related facilities.

If the user of the internet searches under 'MTB Scotland' or mountain biking in Scotland then www.sevenstanes.gov.uk is the first website on the list. FCS' portal is number four. The third website is the VisitScotland website adventure in Scotland / earthsport / mountain biking. This VisitScotland website has links to the 7stanes website but there needs to be direct links to the new FCS mountain bike portal. The VisitScotland website does not have direct links to Laggan Wolftrax. The BaseCamp MTB site is accessed via the Laggan Community website.

VisitScotland have also developed a mountain bike brochure to promote all the key mountain bike venues across Scotland. This brochure is aimed at independent, overnight and day visitors and has just been extended and revamped.

At present there is little demand from tour operator groups – the only tour group operator promoting purpose-built mountain bike trails is MB7.

It is important in the future that Laggan Wolftrax promotes the linkages with other centres – Learnie Red Rock, Moray Monster Trails, Leanachan, Balnain, Golspie etc.

Discussions have revealed that it is unlikely that FCS will develop sub-regional brands, as outlined in the 'National Strategy', to complement the 7stanes in Central and Northern Scotland. The master brand will remain as FCS Forest Cycling and Mountain Biking. FCS is presently grappling with a system of categorisation to increase visitors' awareness, understanding of facilities on offer at different Centres, originally conceived as national / regional / local (gold / silver / bronze).

There are potential opportunities for manufacturer and equipment suppliers to sponsor the trails at Laggan Wolftrax. It is understood that BaseCamp MTB, FCS and LFT are in discussion with a number of potential trade sponsors.

The consultants recommend that a strategic approach to future potential trade sponsorship of the facilities be considered. However there is a need to take account of possible sponsorship deals nationally as well as local opportunities. The Whistler approach to sponsorship should be considered to help maximise opportunities i.e. bike sponsorship is broken down into parts such as a:

- frame manufacturer;
- shock manufacturer;
- brake manufacturer;
- wheel manufacturer;
- chain set manufacturer; and
- pedal manufacturer etc.

In addition there are opportunities for specialist and general outdoor clothing, safety gear etc.

At present FCS Scotland have tendered for consultants to examine the commercial potential of recreation on the National Forest Estate and it is likely that this study will consider potential commercial sponsorship routes as one of a number of solutions to future commercial optimisation. Although this study has yet to be commissioned it is understood that reporting will be during the summer of 2007. Consideration must be given as to how sponsorship and other commercial recommendations from this study may be implemented and impact on Laggan Wolftrax. However the consultants believe that Laggan Wolftrax together with Glentress are in an ideal position to influence this.

Aviemore and the Cairngorms Destination Management Ltd have launched Scotland's first privately managed rural Destination Management Organisation (DMO). The organisations brand is – Aviemore and the Cairngorms the natural adventure. The consultants understand from discussions with the DMO that they are fully supportive of the Laggan Wolftrax development. They feel Laggan Wolftrax to be absolutely critical / fundamental to the overall brand and perception the DMO are trying to portray i.e. Aviemore and the Cairngorms as Scotland's capital of outdoor adventure. The DMO are keen to develop more events for the area and Laggan is seen to be at the fore of these. The DMO are keen for Laggan Wolftrax to grow and prosper through development of Phase II of the project.

8.3 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

The 'National Strategy' positioned Laggan Wolftrax as a key regional facility for the Cairngorms National Park and the current thinking is that Laggan Wolftrax should indeed strengthen its role as a high quality facility with a wide range of facilities and links to other centres to create a weekend experience.

Laggan Wolftrax, in the future, will continue to attract day visitors and local residents from within a 1-1½ hour's drive time from the forest. As other centres are developed around Scotland and existing centres upgraded, day visitors from further afield may reduce in proportion.

There is some concern that Laggan Wolftrax has had its 'honeymoon period', particularly in terms of its double black trail. Other trails at Learnie Red Rock and the black trail at Highland Wildcat (Ben Bhraggie) will increasingly attract more visitor interest, particularly in the short term.

The consultants, as part of the research for this project, have visited both Learnie Red Rock and the new regional centre at Golspie. The Golspie trails are impressive and have been extremely well designed (by Pete Laing). The black trail, in particular, is challenging with a number of mandatory air features but alternative easy options 'chicken runs' are also given. The Red Trail is smooth and fast flowing and has good views. The forest structure is also interesting and varied. The first development phase has a wide range of interesting and varied trail features – slabs, rock chutes, drops, beams, table tops, Northshore etc. In the lower parts of the descent the red and the black trail shares the same trail bed but with different lines and obstacles. The Golspie trails are only an hour north of Inverness and will definitely compete for a local market. Visitors staying overnight in Aviemore may also be able to visit Laggan Wolftrax one day and Golspie the next. Over the next year or two Golspie will be the 'new kid on the block', the trail to do!

The Golspie trail network (Phase I) is more extensive than Laggan Wolftrax so visitors will be more inclined to stay longer i.e. for a weekend. Golspie however, does not have central facilities – refreshments are supplied by village facilities.

Early indications, although the trails have not officially opened, are that the mountain bike trails are causing congestion in the village car park – a solution in the forest needs to be considered although the local community are concerned economic spin-off in the village will be reduced.

In the National Strategy TRC positioned Laggan Wolftrax as a venue for cross-country enthusiasts with an opportunity, due to the fun park, to strengthen the freeride credentials. The visitor survey identified a need for longer trails, particularly of intermediate level, to increase the length of stay and attractiveness of the venue.

Over the summer months research has demonstrated that there is a greater emphasis on family cycling and this market has been growing in the last two years. A need is being more firmly established to develop routes for this growing market. The whole theme of the National Forest Cycling and Mountain Bike Strategy is to provide a greater number of safer routes for novices and beginners as well as providing better multi-user access.

Whilst Laggan Wolftrax is recognised as having a high level of appeal for intermediate and advanced riders, it should increase and build on its credentials for novices and families – this opportunity for families also increases the links and need to develop a more accessible range of other products for these markets – short walks and pony trekking, etc.

Whilst at present the number of formal / recognised groups using Laggan Wolftrax is limited, there are opportunities for greater use by schools / youths groups and others in the future. This will be helped by Sportscotland who are introducing a recognised skills assessment / achievement for mountain biking. Laggan Wolftrax, through association with Glenmore Lodge, will be in an ideal position to benefit from this.

It is suggested that if Laggan Wolftrax is to compete effectively over the next 3-5 years, it must expand and 'complete' its facilities. As a regional centre it must appeal to a wide market base and promote overnight stays to visitors. With good links to the village this will promote added economic benefit to the local community.

The centre must also continue to develop its horseriding credentials and this will be achieved both with further trail development, but more importantly the Haflinger Pony business must develop, grow and operate on a more professional footing.

8.4 PROPOSED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

It was recognised, in the preparation of the National Strategy, that Laggan Wolftrax must continue with its development if it is to be positioned as a regional centre for forest recreation. This development includes completing horse trails, walking trails and the mountain bike product.

The visitor survey and the third party intermediary consultation confirmed the need for longer trails and a greater integrated experience. It was recognised by most that extended red grade trails were of the highest priority.

If family and novice markets are to be better satisfied then trails of green and blue grade are required. Increasing concern over the safety of fun parks and freeride areas mean that new trails will have to be developed i.e. blue descent trail etc. At a national level it has been suggested that in future trails should be diverted to incorporate skill areas.

The proposed development Phase II currently being submitted for planning permission is a total of an additional 8.5km of purpose-built trail and is summarised as follows:

- Option I an easy 2km blue route from the top of the existing fun park / drop-off aimed at families / beginners / groups;
- Option V is the development of an intense skills area for all cyclists to improve their skills – novice to expert;
- Option VI skills loop is located halfway to Gorsteane – this would be on the same alignment as the improved 'route to schools' all abilities trail proposed, planned by Laggan Wolftrax;
- Option VII construction of about 2km of trail, an easy return route (green grade) from the skills area to BaseCamp;
- Option VIII develop, 2.2km of additional red grade single track descent from the Wolf's Lair viewpoint. The ascent to the Wolf's Lair is of red grade only (although classified currently as double black route). This short addition would in effect give an additional 6km, almost doubling the length of the existing red trail (utilising the forest road ascent twice).

TRC believe the proposed development, Phase II, addresses the health and safety requirements, the changing FCS national policies and procedures and visitor requirements for the intermediate, family and novice mountain bike market.

Ideally the skills area should be positioned closer to the central facilities area to help maximise use and promote added visitor spend in café, etc (for example Whistler skills area). The proposed skills area is rather out on a limb and not integrated well into the development (see previous issues with Glentworth skills area). The consultants suggest that serious consideration be given to better linking the skills area to the red route along the present forest road. In order to achieve this, a small section of the green trail would have to be made wider for two-way use (see 'locate to school' or recent Golspie development). This would not only allow for better integration of the skills area but also increase the number of route options – extending visitor stay potential.

8.4.1 Increased Route Options

Intermediate Cross-Country Rides:

- old and new red route;
- new red and new blue route;
- new red and fun park;
- new red, old red, skills area and green return;
- new red, old red, skills area and old red return.

Novice / Beginner / Family Options:

- green loop route and skill development;
- blue route descent;
- 'route to school' – out and back.

Experienced and Freeriders:

- existing black route;
- existing black, red consideration;
- fun park.

The proposed Phase II development will increase the appeal of Laggan Wolftrax in light of growing competition and it will increase propensity to visit (repeat visits), increase length of stay and ultimately visitor spend.

However the Phase II still does not address the market need for a much larger intermediate red route, say 20km to 25km (see visitor survey and visitor book analysis).

The consultants are aware of a potential longer route along Black Craig Ridge but this is not proposed at this stage. At present this is an informal route using the existing forest road and footpath networks. There would be potential conflicts with walkers on part of this route. In the medium term a longer route will be required to meet market expectations. For there to be a realistic possibility to achieve this – timing and costs would need to be put in place soon.

In the longer term it is understood that LFT wish to purchase 0.8 hectares of land at Auchducal, west of the current site, further into the forest to provide a permanent site for the central visitor facilities and secondary car parking. A permanent facility will be required within the next three years or so. It is understood that a new facility will be positioned to attract a wider forest recreation market with interpretation of the natural and activity assets of Strathmashie Forest and the surrounding area as well as a larger café, retail, bike hire and pony trekking facility.

Whilst this facility has the necessary ingredients for future success, some serious concerns have been expressed to the consultants with the proposed location and the current plans of LFT, including the:

- central facilities developed on the site proposed will be in danger of losing passing trade, reducing sustainability of the business;
- existing trails will have to be remodelled to finish at the Centre and this may be difficult / costly;
- proposed skills area will be even more remote from the central facilities;
- visitor facilities should be at the bottom / entrance / exit of the experience (no back tracking or uphill finish) – if not it will reduce average spend potential and site cohesion / visitor flow; and
- main car park must be located around the Centre keeping the existing car parking as the main car park and a new centre ‘half-way’ up the hill will not work operationally, visitors will continually be back-tracking for changing facilities / toilets / bike hire etc.

It is the consultants’ opinion, formed through various discussions / consultations, that the new facility is not being considered with the needs of the users in mind but with the issues of the community as the main driver i.e. it is not fully ‘market-driven’.

If these plans are a serious consideration, the trails currently proposed in Phase II must be redesigned now to accommodate this longer-term picture else costly trail extension and re-siting of facilities in the future may be required. New visitor facilities must keep the ambience and atmosphere, which has built up at Laggan Wolftrax. Important visitor feedback is that future development is kept simple and not over ‘corporate in nature’ (see Glentress Phase II feedback⁸).

It is important that serious consideration is given by all parties to the future location of central facilities so that these issues can be fully discussed and addressed.

⁸ TRC (2006) *Review of Glentress Visitor Proposals*

9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter we present the conclusions and recommendations from the study. These have been organised around the objectives of the study.

9.2 CONTRIBUTION TO PARTNERS OBJECTIVES

The project although led by FCS included a number of other partners – Laggan Forest Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, HIE Inverness and East Highland, CNPA, Highland Council and VisitScotland. Consultation with these partners and analysis of their respective strategy documents has identified that the project is helping to contribute to the objectives of their organisations. It is contributing across three broad strands – economic (generating additional economic activity, particularly within a peripheral area), environmental (allowed development within a less environmentally sensitive area) and community (helping to support a rural/fragile community).

The level of emphasis that is placed on these three strands varies by partner but the project is achieving an appropriate balance across the three.

Indeed, the partners feel that the high quality of the product developed together with provision of onsite facilities has made for strong product offering that is helping to encourage people to visit a more peripheral part of the local area. FCS management was also considered a key strength together with the strong links to the community. Importantly, the site is seen as environmentally robust and therefore an appropriate area for further development in the future.

The key weaknesses identified were that there is a need for longer trails, a wider range and more signage. This would help to attract more visitors as well as longer visitor stays. An additional weakness identified was the lack of public transport, however, this is a much wider issue for the local area and it may be difficult for the project to address this on its own.

9.3 PROFILE OF USERS

9.3.1 Mountain Bikers

The mountain bike visitors are dominated by a non-local market, four fifths were from outwith Inverness and East Highland and three quarters from outwith the Highlands and Islands. The visitor profile is dominated by males, in full time employment who are between the ages of 18-45. A total of 30% of visitors had children with them.

The most popular routes were the red and blue with the majority of people using these, whereas just under half used the black route. The most popular level of expertise was proficient accounting for half of visitors but there were also 21% expert and 2% elite. While there was 18% intermediary there was only 11% novice.

The most common way of finding out about the trail was word of mouth. This does augur well for the future as four fifths of visitors considered the trails to be very good or good. There is also a high level of repeat visitation, which concurs with the higher rating. However, both these factors do suggest the need to undertake further marketing to attract a wider market.

The main reasons given for rating the trails so highly were the technical level and quality of the trails, variety of trails and the fact that they are well maintained (the need to maintain the trails in the future is discussed in greater detail later in Section 9.6). In terms of suggested improvements these were dominated by the need for longer trails (30%) and more trails/routes (also 30%).

A fifth of visitors had visited another mountain biking trail during their trip with the most common being Fort William. However, this may increase in the future as more sites are opened.

Half of visitors were overnight visitors and half day visitors. Of those staying overnight, half were spending at least one night in the Laggan local area, although the length of stay was very short at an average of one night. This is linked to the fact that the majority of visitors only planned to visit the cycle trails on one day. A third of visitors were staying elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey with the most popular location being Aviemore. The most popular forms of accommodation were youth hostel/backpackers accommodation/campsite followed by self-catering.

Some 63% of visitors would not have been in Inverness and East Highland if it was not for Laggan Wolftrax, while 76% would not have been in Badenoch and Strathspey and 93% would not have been in the Laggan local area. Therefore the project has a high proportion of net additional visitors to the local area.

The focus for future development of the project should be on broadening the appeal to a wider market, this would be achieved through future product development as discussed in detail later in Section 9.7).

9.3.2 Walkers

As with the mountain bikers the walkers are characterised by a large non-local market i.e. 83% from outwith Inverness and East Highland and 82% from outwith the Highlands and Islands. However, the proportion of net additional visitors to the area is lower than for the mountain bikers at 46% that would not have been in the Inverness and East Highland area without the project (48% in Badenoch and Strathspey and 80% in Laggan local area).

Some 60% of visitors were female and four fifths were aged between 30-60 (with an even split between the 31-45 and 46-60 age groups). A total of 42% of visitors had children with them.

The most common ways of finding out about the walking trails were from signs in the car park, signs on the road and word of mouth.

Four fifths of walkers stayed overnight, with one quarter spending at least one night in the Laggan local area. A third were staying elsewhere in Badenoch and Strathspey with the most popular location, as with the mountain bikers, being Aviemore. The most popular form of accommodation used was self-catering accommodation.

The suggested improvements include advertising the trails more widely and better signage to the trails.

9.3.3 Pony Trekkers

Overall the responses to the pony trekking experience appear to be very positive with the scenery/trails and friendly, helpful staff particular highlights. The issue is therefore around enhanced promotion of the trails so that more people are aware of them.

The pony trekking trails do not appear to be a main reason for the majority of people to visit the Inverness and East Highland area, however it does appear to have a role in encouraging people to visit the Laggan local area and retaining them in the area once they are there.

It can also help to expand the visitor experience. Some 90% of visitors to the pony trekking trails had children in their group compared with 29% for mountain bikers and 42% for walkers. Therefore it could help to complement aims to increase the family market visiting the site.

9.3.4 Complementary Aspects

The mountain biking facilities are the key driver for bringing additional visitors to the area, however the walking and pony trekking trails do have a role to play in expanding the visitor experience and retaining visitors in the area for longer. To date the focus has tended to be on the mountain biking trails which is understandable as this was where the majority of investment had been concentrated and the factor that gave the area a unique selling point. However, having recently invested in trails for use by the pony trekkers there is a need to raise the profile of this and the walking routes in the future. This will be more important as the project aims to develop a broader market and encourage more families.

Recommendation 1: *Develop a broader marketing approach for the trails that includes all users - mountain biking, walking and pony trekking.*

9.4 ECONOMIC IMPACT

One of the key objectives of the project was to generate economic impacts in local economy. The key results from the economic impact analysis are:

- 96% of mountain bikers were from outwith the Laggan local area, 90% from outwith Badenoch and Strathspey and 80% from outwith Inverness and East Highland;
- 93% of visitors would not have been in the Laggan local area if Laggan Wolftrax did not exist, 77% would not have been in Badenoch and Strathspey and 63% would not have been in Inverness and East Highland;
- the split between day visitors and overnight visitors is broadly even;
- average spend for day visitors was £11.87 for day visitors and ranges from £25.58 for overnight visitors from Scotland to £39.17 for visitors from overseas;
- average length of stay associated with the Laggan Wolftrax development was relatively short ranging from 1-1.5 nights in the Laggan local area and Badenoch and Strathspey, respectively;
- the development has generated net additional annual expenditure ranging from £280,000 in the Laggan local area to £390,000 in the Highlands and Islands;
- the development is currently estimated to be supporting employment in the local area ranging from 6.9 FTEs in the Laggan local area to 9.6 FTEs in the Highlands and Islands; and

- cost per job estimates range from £37,000 (£3,700 per annual FTE) at the Laggan local area level to £26,000 (£2,600 per annual FTE) at the Highlands and Islands level. The cost per job levels are similar to 7stanes (£27,000 at the South of Scotland). As with 7stanes there are opportunities to reduce the level of cost per job over time.

While one of the aims for the project in the future would be to increase the level of visitors, there should also be a focus on encouraging longer lengths of stay and therefore higher expenditure. (See Recommendation 6 development of longer trail network). This will lead to an increase in the level of economic impact and a reduction in the cost per job. What is very encouraging at this stage are the high levels of net additional visitors i.e. low level of displacement, providing a good basis on which to build.

9.5 DISTRIBUTIONAL IMPACTS

BUSINESSES

The cycle shop owners are all very positive about the development but feel that a second phase is required in order to realise the greater potential of the site. This second phase would involve extending the range and length of trails available. They also felt that there is a need to enhance the profile of the site through more demo days and attracting race events.

The majority of local accommodation providers/retailers are positive about the development but also believe that the range and length of trails need to be developed. They consider this to be crucial in helping to retain more people in the area for overnight visits and generating additional expenditure.

A few local businesses have experienced a negative impact from the development of the trails. Whilst a large proportion of the visitors attracted to Laggan Wolftrax are additional i.e. they would not have been in the area if Laggan Wolftrax did not exist, some visitors to the site are people that would have been in the area anyway. The facilities, while currently heavily geared towards mountain bikers, will pick up an element of passing trade.

However, the businesses experiencing negative effects may be in a position to benefit from the project in the future as it develops its appeal to a wider market and encourages longer stays so that visitors investigate other parts of/facilities in the local area. However, we would raise a note of caution here about the way that the facilities may develop onsite. At present the facilities include a café and retail facilities very much tailored to the needs of cyclists. Were the catering facilities to develop for example into evening provision, then while generating additional expenditure onsite it may displace activity from other operators in the area. Similarly were the facilities onsite to branch out into a wider retail market i.e. outwith cycling then this may displace activity from other retailers in the area.

One of the objectives of the project is to help generate additional economic activity in the local area and this would extend beyond facilities onsite. Therefore, there would need to be careful consideration of the types of facilities that are developed onsite in terms of catering and retailing to ensure that they are not simply in direct competition with other local providers. However, even with this in mind, it is important that any new facilities in the future are sustainable, so location on site, style and quality of any new facilities are also key considerations.

Recommendation 2: *Development of additional catering and retail facilities to be assessed against their potential sustainability, viability, but also current local provision before being supported by public sector.*

Activity holiday operators are not really using the site to any great extent at the moment. Their suggestions about ways of developing the site so that they would use it more would have substantial cost implications and would involve developing the site into a more of an all round outdoor activity centre. At this stage the focus of future development should be on the mountain bike trails and co-ordination between this and the walking and pony trekking trails to promote a wider experience. Development of other outdoor activities would need to be market tested before being considered as part of future developments.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

The site is also being used by some community groups for example Highland Council Outdoor Education Department which use it as part of their programmes to support disadvantaged children/socially excluded groups. The site is also being used by local residential activity providers, including: Abernethy Trust Nethybridge and Ardeonaig; and Lagganlia Centre for Outdoor Education. This type of activity is helping to contribute to the aims of the Scottish Forestry Strategy particularly relating to improved access and enjoyment of woodlands that in turn supports physical and mental well-being.

There is scope for greater community use and Laggan could also become more involved in formal assessment of mountain biking skills in the future i.e. links to Glenmore Lodge (see Cycle Scotland, CTC and British Cycling).

9.6 FUTURE MANAGEMENT AND DELIVERY

FCS, in the future, must continue to control / manage product development and product quality. National policies such as grading, health and safety, maintenance and risk assessment will become increasingly important issues, which they will continue to be directly involved in at a local and national level.

It is recommended that a more formal management and operating action plan is drawn up between FCS and LFT. This will clearly set out the responsibilities of each organisation as well as those of the lessee. The FCS role in the future will be as a catalyst to recreation and business development within the forest. They will provide an essential management and advisory role.

Recommendation 3: *FCS to continue to control /manage product development but to develop a more formal management and operating plan with LFT and BaseCamp MTB.*

An opportunity to generate more benefit from the pony trekking activities was identified earlier, however, if this is to be realised it will need to be in conjunction with growth in the Haflinger Pony Trekking business. In order to achieve this the Haflinger Pony business needs direct business development advice and help with preparation of a coherent growth strategy.

Recommendation 4: *HIE Inverness and East Highland to take the lead in providing business development support to the Haflinger Pony Trekking Business.*

Both in terms of health and safety and trail maintenance, improved record-keeping and greater detail is required, linked to a formal audit of trail features. Future trail plans should provide maintenance and management requirements for individual trail features, as an integral part of the future plan for development.

If future trails cannot be maintained to a high standard, it is questionable whether they should actually be developed in the first place. A clear understanding and quantification of the likely ongoing financial liability for maintenance of the entire trail network is required together with how these costs will be funded on an annual basis. Consideration should be given to introducing a car parking charge of £2.00 in the future. The amount raised from car parking should contribute towards trail maintenance and renewal. It is important that the fact that the car parking charge goes towards trail maintenance and renewal is clearly communicated to site users. They are more likely to be willing to pay it if they believe that they will benefit directly from the money raised. In 2006 this could have generated about £10,000, which could have been put towards trail maintenance. (assuming 16,000 visitors and 2.4 per car - see Glentress - and a 75% honesty rate.

Health and Safety policies are evolving at a national level and Laggan Wolftrax will have to respond / comply with these. As a fully managed site, albeit by the lessee, a full range of trail types will be possible, meeting Health and Safety requirements. This will continue to give Laggan Wolftrax a competitive edge, with a high quality trail product.

Recommendation 5: Develop health and safety procedures in line with evolving national policy. Also develop a maintenance strategy that clearly identifies ongoing financial commitments and annual funding requirements.

9.7 FUTURE MARKET AND PRODUCT POSITIONING

Visitor survey and related business consultation highlighted that Laggan Wolftrax needs to provide a wider range of trails aimed at different user levels and longer trails, thus increasing the length of stay and spending opportunities.

There are two key areas of development that are required – trails for intermediate riders (red level) and novices / beginners (green and blue level trails). The current planning application, if implemented, should address these development areas in the short term. Additional links between the proposed skills area and the existing trail network will further enhance the visitor experience.

Recommendation 6: Proceed with the developments set out in the current planning application.

In the medium term, consideration should be given to extending the intermediate mountain bike trails even further. This will probably entail the development of routes off the immediate site, but careful consideration is needed as to how this might be achieved, given other forest users / links to the village etc.

A permanent visitor reception facility is required, but before a site is identified / bought and plans are agreed, market testing of the location / style / facilities is required to ensure the correct facilities are developed in the correct location. It is essential that this is a market-driven development.

Recommendation 7: Undertake market testing before developing a larger permanent visitor facility. Careful consideration should be given to location, style, size and range of facilities for development.

An overall development and management plan for forest recreation in Strathmashie Forest over the next 5 to 10 years is required, before any further development proceeds. This should consider future trail links, locations, central facilities, and identify development phases, timing etc.

Recommendation 8: *Establish a development and management plan for forest recreation in Strathmashie Forest covering next 5 to 10 years.*

The most effective marketing tool is word of mouth and new product development should give increased opportunity. However, Laggan Wolftrax cannot afford to become too over reliant on word of mouth. There is also a need to increase the level of investment in formalised marketing. An annual marketing budget and plan should be devised for Laggan Wolftrax, particularly in light of the new development proposals.

Recommendation 9: *Develop an annual marketing plan and budget.*

Local businesses should devise ways of linking and marketing more directly with Laggan Wolftrax to improve direct benefit as these opportunities should increase as a result of further development of the trails.

The plethora of websites and key linkages needs consideration and the BaseCamp MTB website should consider the introduction of Wolftrax in its address.

While new premises and an improved trail network will allow business growth, BaseCamp MTB also needs to consider events and sponsorship in the short term.

There is considerable opportunity for sponsorship and the project partners should devise an acceptable strategic approach. Increased sponsorship should include opportunities to expand the number of demo days and events, which Laggan Wolftrax hosts.

Recommendation 10: *Develop a strategic approach to identifying and securing potential sponsorship. This should be linked to an annual programme of events.*

Improved signage to the site, clearly stating the various activities on offer, would help to capture passing trade and possibly generate interest in future visits.

Recommendation 11: *Improved signage to the site (if possible signs on the A9, however we realise that there have been issues about achieving this in the past).*

9.8 MEETING TARGETS AND OBJECTIVES

9.8.1 Current Targets and Objectives

Some partners have noted that it may have been more appropriate to undertake market research development prior to the original development. However, that is now in the past. In terms of future development this study suggests that there is demand for an expansion in the mountain biking trails and greater promotion of the whole site in conjunction with the walking and pony trekking trails. There are other potential future developments being mooted i.e. visitor attraction/centre, however, the success to date of development and findings from this report should not be considered as carte blanche for all possible developments proposed for the site.

Rather proposals outwith the mountain biking, walking and pony trekking aspects would need to be properly market tested before considering embarking upon them.

One of the key objectives for the project was to develop a high quality product so as to place the development firmly on the mountain biking map. Based on survey respondents from mountain bikers this has been achieved.

Almost four fifths of respondents rated the quality of the trails as very good or good. In fact when we break this down further we see that 73% rated them very good and 15% good.

Only 1% rated them as average while the other 11% could not provide a rating as they had just arrived. The most often cited reason for the high rating was the technical level and quality of the trails.

The development has also taken place within a less environmentally sensitive area and the robustness of the site in environmental terms will allow further development.

While costs were higher than anticipated FCS were developing a project within a relatively new area of activity and experience gained from this will be very beneficial in terms of future phases, including the budget allocation required. Also a large proportion of the over spend was on the car park and ancillaries which will obviously benefit future phases of development on the site.

At the outset the aim was to achieve 20,000 visitors to the site. The current visitor level is estimated at 16,000 up from about 14,000 in the previous year. This gives a good basis on which to develop the site further and increase the visitor numbers in the future. It is recognised that further development will be required in order to appeal to a larger market with recommendations on how to achieve this having been set out above.

In aiming to increase the number of visitors and expenditure within a more peripheral part of the local area, the project has generated additional visitors to the Laggan local area of just under 15,000 and net additional expenditure of £280,000.

In employment terms the focus was on the creation of two full time equivalents on-site. The project has achieved this but the potential impacts for a project of this kind are always going to be greater off-site, elsewhere in the local economy. The analysis has identified that the project is currently supporting employment levels ranging from 7 FTEs in the Laggan local area to 9.6 FTEs in the Highlands and Islands.

9.8.2 Appropriateness of Targets for the Future

The main aim of the project in terms of market positioning was to place the development firmly on the mountain biking map by providing a high quality, well designed product and well maintained trails. As discussed above this has been achieved to a certain extent, however, the focus going forward is in terms of expanding the product offer in order to widen the market appeal. Whilst it will be important to maintain the high level of design and build quality (a key objective going forward) the type of trails required will be technically less demanding. To date, the amount spent on maintenance each year has been relatively small, as the trails are still new. In the future, maintenance costs will certainly rise. Experience elsewhere demonstrates that annual maintenance costs can be 5% to 10% of single track build cost each year. In the future, there will be an ever-increasing challenge to fund maintenance.

Other objectives/targets should be to increase the number of visitors and their expenditure, broaden the range of visitors and increase the length of stay in the local area. The amount to be invested in future development of the site should then be directly linked back to these targets.

Whilst the site is considered to be relatively environmentally robust, key partners with an environmental remit should be consulted on the appropriateness of future development at the site.

Targets for future development at the site should include estimates of the likely additional employment both on-site and off-site that will be generated.

There are also a number of recommendations set out in this report, which should be implemented.

9.9 ENHANCING FUTURE IMPACTS

The key to enhancing the economic impact of the project is the development of a wider range of trails and longer trails in order to increase the length of stay and expenditure opportunities. This should also present greater opportunities for local accommodation providers to benefit from overnight stays and to promote their businesses, including more direct marketing with BaseCamp MTB and package deals.

There a need to promote the development as a wider visitor experience highlighting the walking and pony trekking trails. However, there is also a need to promote other activities on offer in the local area. This will become more important as the project aims to develop more into the beginner/novice and family markets. For these visitors mountain biking will only form one part of their visitor experience. Two factors could be used to help support this promotional activity – its location in the National Park and Laggan's position as a gateway to the Park. Stronger links to other activities/attractions in the National Park could be developed by including more of their promotional material at the facility and vice versa. Other information relating to the special qualities of the Park, access etc could also be provided at what would be a gateway point into the Park.

Bunkhouse accommodation/campsite accommodation is the most popular type of accommodation used by mountain bikers. Therefore there may be opportunities for joint promotion between those providing this type of accommodation and those providing evening meals in the local area. Also 5% of mountain bikers gave the need for a campsite as a suggested improvement. Therefore, there is an opportunity to work with local campsite owners to enhance their promotional activities and develop the type of facilities required by mountain bikers. However, future opportunities will not be limited to that market as the aim is to broaden the appeal of Laggan Wolftrax to a wider market, which should generate greater demand for other forms of accommodation.

Recommendation 12: Work with accommodation providers to enhance the marketing of the visitor experience. This should include familiarisation visits for local accommodation providers.

As trails are opened elsewhere - Learnie Red Rocks, Golspie etc there will be greater choice for the mountain biker. The issue for Laggan Wolftrax is to be able to develop its market position in order to maintain and grow its visitor numbers and to differentiate its offer.

For part of the market these new sites will be the 'must do' activity that is why it will be important for Laggan Wolftrax to broaden its market appeal and develop the product further. In addition, there is a good opportunity for Laggan Wolftrax to market itself with these other mountain bike venues. This will create a critical mass of facilities, boosting overnight visitors and increasing length of stay.

9.10 FUTURE MONITORING

In some ways it requires a study of this type to identify the full range impacts that are generated by a project such as Laggan Wolftrax and monitoring on an ongoing basis will never remove the need for that. However, there is still a need for ongoing monitoring to help to ensure that the project is moving in the right direction.

There are a number of recommendations in this report, which should be implemented by the project. A timescale for achieving each could be established and then progress on meeting these monitored.

There are some monitoring aspects that are required to ensure the maintenance of the site (particularly important if the quality is to be maintained) and to meet health and safety requirements. These have already been set out above.

At present the number of visitors to the site is assessed using trails counters, however there have been technical problems with these trails counters and consideration should be given to whether they should be replaced so monitoring visitor numbers can be more accurate in the future. The addition of car park counters may help.