



LOCAL OPEN SPACE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: CASE STUDIES OF USE AND ABUSE OF WOODLANDS IN CENTRAL SCOTLAND

COMMUNITY SUMMARY: LENNOXTOWN

This outlines some of the results of a research project into the use and abuse of forests and woodlands in the Central Belt of Scotland. It was carried out by the Landscape Design and Research Unit and OPENspace research centre at Edinburgh College of Art/Heriot-Watt University on behalf of the Forestry Commission.

Research Aims and Objectives

This research project sought to answer four basic questions:

1. How important are forests for people to use or abuse?
2. Which forests and woodlands do people choose to use or abuse?
3. Why do they choose these forests, are there some characteristics, which determine which forests people choose to use or abuse?
4. What are the design implications for forest managers?

These were based on seeking user-led response to the questions (hence use of 'woodlands' of 'forests' terminology):

- Initial discussion with forest managers and community groups to identify case studies
- 5 case study communities (Alloa, Corstorphine, Lennoxton, Whitburn and Wishaw)
- Focus groups – 3 to 4 per community
- Site-based observations
- Questionnaire to each of the communities

Research Methods

FINDINGS FROM LENNOXTOWN

The following focus-group discussions were held in Lennoxton:

1. Rising 3s Mother and Toddler Group
2. Retired Residents Association
3. Kilsyth Academy, S2-S4 Class

A. Findings from Focus Groups

1. Favourite activities

Overall walking was by far the most popular activity. Cycling was also very popular.

“Out walking one winter years ago, when I still had a dog...we had had a really heavy fall of snow down on the walkway and the trees were all really heavy... it was just like a tunnel with all the trees, and there was a stag down on the walkway. I remember that. It was so beautiful, so quiet.”(Mother with toddler – Lennoxton)

2. Things people dislike about the countryside

The principal things people disliked about the countryside and woodlands were: rubbish, vandalism, dog fouling and dumped or burnt out cars.

3. Most frequently visited forests

It is clear from the focus group discussions that woodlands are more likely to be visited if they are close to the community, preferably within 3 miles (5 kilometres).

4. Safety issues

The people of Lennoxton do not seem to share the same high degree of wariness about walking alone as some of the other study communities. They do, however, believe that it is best to go in company or with a dog; those who have lived in the area the longest said that it had never really bothered them to walk alone.

5. Abuse of woodlands and forests

- Rubbish: Lennoxton has a problem with general rubbish, including bottles, cans, broken glass, plastic and other litter. Despite the provision of rubbish bins, there is an on-going problem with litter.
- Fly tipping: people used to throw their black bags out into the woodland grounds of Lennox Castle.
- Dog fouling and horse manure: many of the respondents stressed that more disposal facilities were needed.
- Vandalism: young people are blamed for destroying plants and trees and trying to break things in the countryside. There are some burnt out cars in evidence, but not as many as there were at one time.
- Alcohol and drug abuse: Bylaws banning drinking in public have tended to make younger drinkers go to other places - like nearby woods - to drink. There are no signs of drugs in the woodlands, but the local people are sure there is a problem with this too.

"I will say that, yes, woods and drinking and smoking...there was always a certain crowd and that's what they did in my youth. You just knew that you don't associate with them and you don't go into the woods at night because any girl going into the woods at night was up to no good." (Mother with toddler – Lennoxton)

6. People's ideal woodland

There are a variety of ways in which people engage with the landscape; they can involve very powerful, and often very positive, sensory and emotional experiences, as the quotes from the discussion groups demonstrate.

"It's the noise I like. I like the trees, the rustling and the smells, and the water – the burn's on the walkway." (Mother with toddler – Lennoxton)

- For all: woodlands could be places where people can feel a sense of escape from the mundane world and its problems.
- For unemployed people: woodlands can offer a release and a relief that is clearly therapeutic.
- For children: woodlands can be special places for experiencing things that are out of the ordinary.

7. Improvements

- Maintenance: Most groups would like to see the forests and woodlands cleaned up, possibly by using a clean-up campaign. Footpath maintenance and improvement was also an important issue.
- Signage: Notice boards and information panels were thought to be a good idea.
- Facilities: Facilities for children were requested by many people. Several facilities for adults were also mentioned, like benches, which should be well positioned and well spaced out.
- Education: By educating the children about the environment, it is hoped to improve their behaviour in later life.
- Consultation: Local people expressed an interest in knowing about plans for their area.
- Woodland character: People indicated that they do not want to turn their woodlands and forests into commercialised theme parks; rather, they would like to keep them natural and informal.

B. Findings from Questionnaire Analysis

Demographics

The questionnaire was used in all 5 of the study communities. From the overall 339 interviews, 55 were conducted in Lennoxton with 24 male and 30 female respondents. The largest group of interviewees were between 45 and 64 years old.

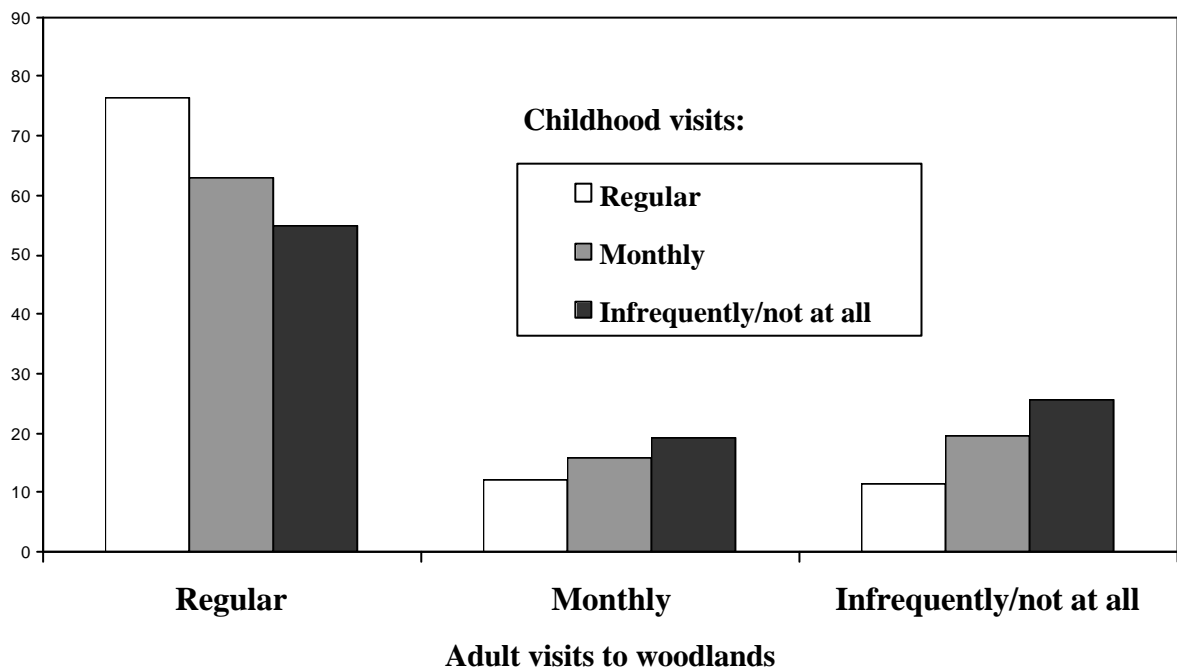


Chart A: Frequency of visits to woodlands: The graph shows clearly that the people who Regularly visit woodlands are the ones who used to go to woods frequently as children.

Chart B: Frequency of woodland visits by community

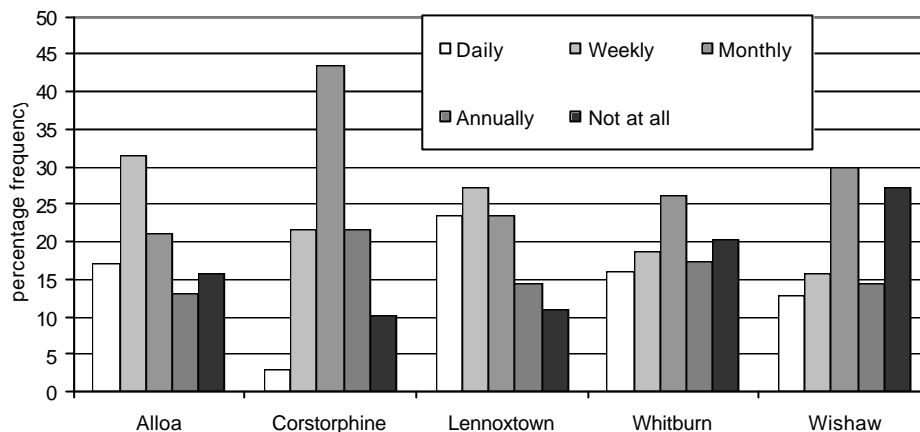


Chart B: Frequency of woodland visits by community: The graph shows that Lennoxtown has the highest level of daily visits (23.6%) of all 5 sites.

C. Findings from Site-based Observations around Lennoxtown

1. Lennox Forest and Castle: Used by walkers, mountain bikers and horse riders. Youths apparently hold drinking parties there. Fly tipping next to the entrances and burnt out cars. Lots of fly tipping in hospital grounds. Damage to trees and fires in the plantation.
2. Glazert Woodlands and Round-the-Moon Walk: Local walkers and dog walkers. Vandalism, litter, broken walls, fly tipping, burnt out cars, and fires.
3. Campsie Glen: Walkers and dog walkers. Some litter, small amount of graffiti,

Interim Summary of Overall Project Results

1. Childhood experiences
 - Childhood experience of woods best predicts adult visits
 - Adults enjoy giving children the opportunities to experience woodland play
2. Perceptions about woodlands
 - Regular users, especially those who visit weekly, have very positive views about feeling safe, at home and free from anxiety in woodlands
 - People who don't visit feel more vulnerable or fearful about visiting woodlands
 - Any negative perceptions must be overcome, or at least balanced, before people can enjoy positive woodland benefits.
3. What determines choice of woodlands?
 - Mainly proximity to where users live
 - Walking is the most popular activity by far, then cycling
 - Country or forest park facilities
 - Teenagers like places to hide out, be away from adult scrutiny.
4. What determines or predicts woodland use?
 - Frequency of childhood visits
 - Signs and information, woodland variety and tidiness
 - Walking on one's own
 - Easy access
 - Woodland activities, wildlife
5. What constrains use of woodlands?
 - Feeling vulnerable
 - Fear of physical accidents (e.g. falling, elderly people)
 - Fear of intimidation or being attacked (women and children)
6. What do people most dislike about woodland abuse?
 - Litter, evidence of fires, broken glass
 - Fly-tipping and car dumping
 - Vandalism and remains apparently left by groups of youth