



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

### COMMUNITY SUMMARY: CORSTORPHINE

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 CORSTORPHINE

The following focus-group discussions were held in Corstorphine:

1. Corstorphine Castle Chess Club
2. Craigmount Writers - retired
3. Extend Over 60 Exercise Class
4. Craigmount High School, S2 class

#### A. Findings from Focus Groups

##### 1. Favourite activities

Overall walking was by far the most popular activity; cycling was also popular.

*"I've walked with the Ranger at Cammo quite recently and he explained about the trees and everything about there, which was very interesting. I've also taken up cycling after years of never having been on a bicycle, and I've been on (Edinburgh cycle paths)...it was very pleasant, very nice". - Older person (over 60s), Corstorphine*

## 2. Things people dislike about the countryside

The principal things people disliked about the countryside and woodlands were: rubbish, vandalism and dog fouling.

## 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

People do not consider it safe to go alone into the woods on Corstorphine Hill; many older people did walk alone in years gone by but now will only do so if they have a dog and a mobile phone with them. Children also consider it unsafe to walk alone in the woods and Neighbourhood Watch and the police have reinforced this message.

*"We went (to the woods) when we were younger, without even giving a thought. You were on your own, it didn't bother you, but nowadays you are continually looking round to make sure..."*

*"I prefer to have company if I can because we have already, as a group, experienced several accidents, falls and that. People having slipped and we have had a broken ankle and a broken arm and we realised then it really isn't safe to walk solo, not at our age"*

– Older people, Corstorphine

## 5. Abuse of woodlands and forests

- Rubbish: Corstorphine is considered to have something of a litter problem, including bottles, cans, broken glass, plastic and other litter. The Water of Leith and the area of woods near Queensferry Road were particularly bad for litter. Adults were identified as culprits, as well as children, although generally Corstorphine is not as bad as some other areas.
- Vandalism: Youths were blamed for setting fire to trees and general vandalism but there is not generally a high level of damage.
- Alcohol abuse: Under-age drinking was mentioned as an activity in the woods.

## 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.

- 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.

*"We used to cook just at this little dip, and we used to play in it (Water of Leith). We use to get the swimming trunks on and we used to swim...It was very wild." - Adult, Corstorphine*

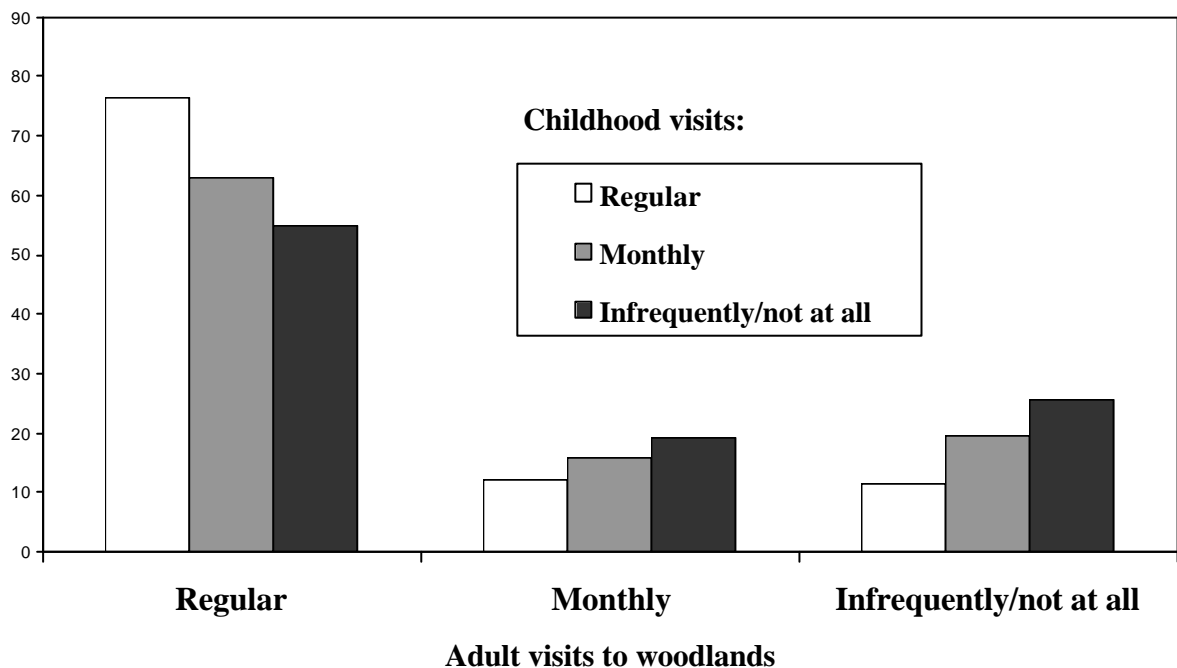
## 7. Improvements

- 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

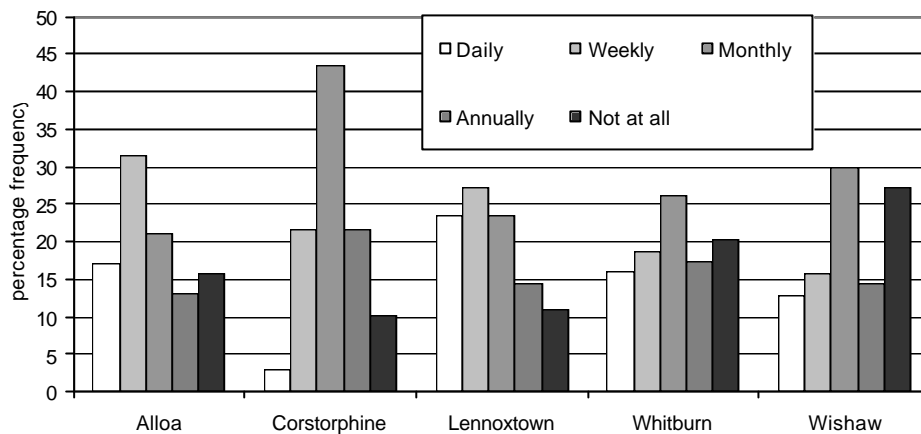
### Demographics

The questionnaire was used in all 5 of the study communities. From the overall 339 interviews, 69 were conducted in Corstorphine with 26 male and 43 female respondents. Corstorphine had the highest number (nearly 30%) of respondents over 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 Corstorphine has the highest level of monthly visits (43.5%), and of visitors overall, to any of the 5 sites.

**C. Findings from Site-based Observations around Corstorphine**

- Corstorphine Hill South: Well-used by people of all ages, many with dogs. Some mountain bikers and joggers seen. Evidence of fires and some spray-paint graffiti.
- Corstorphine Hill: Drum Brae Drive: High level of use, including older people, dog walkers, etc.. Fires, litter and fly-tipping in evidence, although Friends of Corstorphine Hill attempt to contribute to a positive level of litter management.
- Cramond: High quality footpath, suitable for pushchair or wheelchair use in some areas. High level of usage, including family groups and dog walkers. Some graffiti and garden rubbish.

**Interim Summary of Overall Project Results**

- Childhood experiences
  - Childhood experience of woods best predicts adult visits
  - Adults enjoy giving children the opportunities to experience woodland play
- 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.
- 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.
- 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
- 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)
- 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