

MSc Environmental Management

Assessing Outdoor Recreation demand in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB

On behalf of

The Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust CCGHT

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Declaration

I certify that this is my own original work (unless otherwise specified) and does not exceed 20,000 words (excluding references, and appendices).

Signed..... Date

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Abstract

Research has shown that outdoor recreation is continually changing with more people participating for various reasons and more activities emerging. This research topic sets out to examine outdoor recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB on behalf of the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT). The rationale for this investigation was that the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB is considered to be the least popular area for recreation activities compared to the Causeway Coast AONB and the Binevenagh AONB. A review of the relevant literature showed the main reasons why people participate in recreation and also how factors such as access to land can create barriers to participation for the area in question. The research has also shown that the area has great potential for the further development and promotion of three outdoor recreation activities: walking, mountain biking and mountaineering. These activities were established as being priority activities in the area from a recreation survey conducted within the AONB and interviews carried out with key stakeholders involved in recreation. Ultimately, the research has highlighted the main motivating factors influencing participation in the area, as well as those activities that should be developed in order to establish the location as a popular recreation venue. In the longer term the general consensus was that the area could only benefit from the improvement and development of outdoor recreation, especially the three priority activities.

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Introduction

Outdoor recreation activities are characterised by their use of and access to the natural resource. Each year, some 1.5 billion day visits are made to the UK countryside and seaside, and 2.5 billion day visits are made to urban parks (statistics taken from the CRN report “A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing”). Outdoor recreation is therefore a major rural industry with an increasingly important role in sustaining rural areas and landscapes. With this in mind, this thesis is centred on investigating the current recreation activities taking place in the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and more importantly what potential there is for an increase and further development of recreation in the area. Important therefore for this investigation is the issue of access to land in the AONB for recreation activities as this plays a crucial role in determining what activities can or cannot take place. As well as this and in relation to the Antrim Coast and Glens, recreation as a single issue will be addressed in terms of the main factors that encourage people to take part in recreation and how these factors are continually changing.

This thesis and investigation will be undertaken on behalf of the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT), who are responsible for the three AONBs: Antrim Coast and Glens, Causeway Coast and Binevenagh. In relation to outdoor recreation in these three areas, it is clear that the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB is the least popular out of the three. This is understandable as the Causeway Coast AONB has always been the most popular due to the World Heritage site at the Giant’s Causeway and the coastal route on the North Coast. With this in mind and from the guidance of the CCGHT, the focus for this investigation will be on the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB due to the belief that it the area has huge recreational potential but this is not being fully realized to the same extent of the other AONBs. With this in mind, this thesis sets out to establish exactly what recreational activities are taking place in the area and so the empirical investigation is important to establish those activities most popular. Linked with this is the visitor surveys carried out in areas within the AONB to determine the three priority recreation activities to be further investigated. This empirical research will therefore

reveal a strong demand for recreation in the area, but a lack of promotion in some cases prevents further development. The main aim of the thesis therefore is to establish those recreational activities existing within the AONB that are priority activities in terms of potential and growth and how they are ultimately affected by issues such as access and motivations for participating.

In order to fulfil the main aim of the investigation, a detailed review of the relevant literature is important so as to identify and compile a comprehensive background to the areas of outdoor recreation, reasons for participating in outdoor recreation and recreation as a whole in the Antrim Coast and Glens. This approach, centred on desk-based review and analysis of existing sources of literature, will therefore influence the empirical research and field work to be undertaken in order to establish the recommendations and conclusions in relation to recreation activities in the AONB. The literature being used for this study will be a range of academic, policy and web-based literature which focuses on the main social, economic and environmental factors influencing recreation participation. This includes the main drivers of recreational demand; for example motivational drivers (pursuit of relaxation and achievement and skill) as well as economic drivers (leisure time or disposable income). By focusing on these issues of what makes people take part in recreation activities will allow for a better understanding of how recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens could be enhanced.

Encouraging greater participation in outdoor recreation is a key objective for the U.K and especially Northern Ireland. In general, the most likely trend in future outdoor recreation is an increasing diversity of activities concentrated in smaller range of the most accessible locations. There will also be less time for recreation as people become busier and the current financial crisis may also affect recreation. Therefore, a key implication, especially for an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens, will be the need to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, infrastructure and services, particularly as it is close to places of work and residence, for encouraging and managing access for a diversity of uses. Therefore, this literature is focused on recreation as a whole and is therefore important to address literature based upon recreation in Northern Ireland and especially in the Antrim Coast and Glens. This

will be mostly literature from previous reports on recreation in the AONB and also will address the issue of access for recreation. This is an important issue in relation to outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland as many of the activities that take place do so with agreements from landowners. It is a chief concern in many areas, especially upland areas in Northern Ireland like the Antrim Coast and Glens, controlling recreation access during a period of increasing demand for open air outdoor recreation. Ultimately, in order for the Antrim Coast and Glens to enhance its recreation appeal, this issue is vital in achieving better status as a recreation destination.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the project was to deepen understanding of the most popular outdoor recreation activities in the AONB and to determine what factors influence these activities in terms of access to them and also motivating factors and barriers regarding people's recreation use. Particularly, to understand how these factors can determine how the area is viewed in terms of a growing recreation market.

The principal objectives of the investigation are:

1. To review and confirm the motivating factors that determines recreation participation
2. To establish priority recreation activities taking place in AONB from empirical research (survey, interviews and fieldwork)
3. Investigate these activities and highlight how they should be developed in the AONB in order to establish the area as a recreation venue.

Approach

A brief background into the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and the role the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust plays in promoting and establishing the AONB will be covered in the next section. As mentioned, this will be followed by a literature review focusing on the issues of participation in recreation which will ultimately highlight main factors that have worked to influence recreation demand. Included in the literature review will be the issue of access to land for recreation as

this too can create growing conflicts between the landowner and those taking part in outdoor recreation.

An important part of the investigation, which will be highlighted in the methodology section, is the questionnaire and survey that will be undertaken to determine current trends and demands in recreation in the AONB and so providing the study with up to date data regarding this issue. The methodology section of the study will therefore show how this part of the investigation was undertaken in relation to the methods of data collection and the interviews carried out. Here, the design and methods of study will be addressed and explained in order to highlight the validity of the results gathered from the survey and interviews. Furthermore, this section allows for an evaluation of what was needed for the investigation in terms of resources and ultimately allows for the recognition of whether or not it is feasible and limitations it had.

Important to this section is the field work that was carried out as it is ultimately the outdoors that is being investigated, how recreation activities currently use the outdoors and how more recreation activities could be introduced. With this mind, site visits were undertaken so as to see first hand the types of locations being used in the AONB but as mentioned previously, those sites that also have potential for recreation. This therefore allows for more valid conclusions and recommendations to be made along with the results from the data collection.

The next section of the study will be the results where the data collected from the survey and interviews will be presented with the main arguments and interpretations of the findings. As this study is comprised of a mixed method approach of both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data, this section will be in two parts. The data collected from the survey will be analysed using a quantitative approach to present the data in graph form and so statistical conclusions and recommendations can therefore be made from this. As well as this, by carrying out interviews, these will be analysed in a qualitative manner, again providing insight into the area of study and so providing meaningful information for the conclusions.

After presenting the results from the investigation, the next sections will focus on what the data shows in terms of recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. Ultimately it is in the discussion of the results that conclusions and recommendations can be made, while it is also important to recognise how valid the results are and how they might be interpreted in different ways. Furthermore, what is crucial for the investigation is how appropriate linkages can be made between the discussion of findings and the review of literature and the theories put forward. With this in mind, the last sections of this study will focus on both the conclusions and recommendations that will be made from the results and information gathered. It is important in this section to highlight how the investigation has contributed to the topic of recreation in the AONB and how the data collected can ultimately be used to produce recommendations in order to enhance the area. It is also important to include in the concluding section the limitations of the research undertaken and therefore suggestions can be made regarding further research. Ultimately, an important part of this investigation is what recommendations should be made regarding the AONB fulfilling its potential as a recreation destination. This section therefore will highlight the main areas that were found to be the most relevant for further development and improvement and what action could or should be taken to realise this. These recommendations will be consistent with, and supported by, evidence contained throughout the investigation.

Ultimately, the overarching rationale for this investigation is that the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB is considered to be the least popular area for outdoor recreation compared to the other two areas, despite the fact that the area boasts huge potential for recreation to be developed. This investigation therefore sets out to establish the main recreation activities that take place in the AONB and importantly highlights areas where more recreation could potentially take place. In addressing issues regarding participation in recreation and drivers in recreation, it will allow for recommendations to be made as well as issues regarding access to areas of recreation, which will allow for realistic conclusions to be made.

Chapter 1

Background- The Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and Recreation

“There is a lack of ‘recreation demand’ to provide justification for programmes and investment...There is a need to continue to identify and develop this area for subsequent progress on outdoor recreation.”(Northern Ireland Countryside Recreation Strategy 1998). From this statement it is clear how recreation is viewed by many in Northern Ireland and how it is ultimately something that constantly needs addressing. Therefore, in this chapter, the main organisations that govern outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland will be covered, as well as the AONB area itself. In doing so, this will allow for a better understanding of the complexities of recreation and the numerous groups that are involved in an area like this.

Outdoor recreation activities are led and organised by the voluntary sector through the numerous clubs and societies that exist. Generally there are no rules governing the activities and it is the clubs and societies of the individual activity that make the rules and guide their members. Exceptions to this would be in the case of angling in respect to closed and open seasons and on catch limits; field sports in respect of allowed seasons when it can take place. Ultimately, it is the local authorities that are empowered to provide for recreation for people in their district and they are assisted by a number of organisations in Northern Ireland including the Department for Education, the Sports Lottery Fund and the Sports Council. Together these organisations have important duties in respect of asserting and protecting public rights of way in the countryside and are authorised to create and establish new access. Open space for recreation is an increasing demand and councils are under pressure to provide this space within their council area. In the past, following local demand for recreation facilities, Councils have been inclined to provide built facilities for indoor activities like swimming and gym work, while outdoor facilities have played a limited role in provision for outdoor recreation.

Within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, the Forest Service is seen as the most significant provider of outdoor/countryside recreation through key provisions such as the well-used Forest Parks (e.g. Glenariff Forest Park). Following the establishment

of the Forest Service, its vision has tended to respond to demands from customers in its provision to develop the areas for public use. However, ultimately the overarching main concern for the Forest Service is still the production of timber and so recreation in these areas are not a priority compared to the business of timber production.

Recreation NI, formerly known as The Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN), was formed in 1999 to manage programmes towards outdoor recreation provision and management, and attempts to bring together the main bodies with an interest in the area. As mentioned previously, an important issue in relation to outdoor recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens is that of access to land for the activities as the majority of countryside recreation either actually or potentially take place on private lands with a range of leases or agreements between farmer and or landowner and the club or organisation. With this in mind, relationships need to be actively managed and controlled at a local level and to this end both local District Councils and Recreation NI look to continually establish relationships with farmers and landowners to ensure proper management and good relationships.

In relation to outdoor recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens, encouraging and promoting greater participation in recreation is a key aim of policy in Northern Ireland, and is set against a backdrop of already changing patterns of leisure and recreation being experienced by all western economies. With this in mind, this study is also aware of the growing changes in recreation and what they might mean for future activities in the area in terms of recommendations being made from the results of this study. Ultimately, outdoor recreation can provide a range of social, economic, and environmental benefits to participants, such as improved quality of life, health and well-being, greater care and understanding of nature, and sustainable transport and tourism development opportunities. Furthermore, the importance of Northern Ireland's countryside as a lynchpin of tourism marketing and potential for increased provision for activity tourism is an important issue in relation to the Antrim Coast and Glens.

To conclude, in terms of management and provision of outdoor recreation opportunities in the AONB, it is important to highlight the positive benefits

mentioned above, whilst also addressing potential negative impacts, such as environmental damage. Ultimately, this has to happen against the backdrop of societal, economic and environmental change which shapes the distribution of outdoor recreation. Patterns of outdoor recreation have been changing in Northern Ireland, as in all western economies, for example, with the rise of more commodified and ‘adventure’ based activities (Cloke & Perkins, 2002; Greenwood *et al.*, 2007). However, the processes involved and what they might mean for future outdoor recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens have hitherto been insufficiently investigated.

For the purpose of this investigation, it is important to highlight the area of study and to give an indication of the other AONB's in Northern Ireland. Figure 1 below shows the location of the Antrim Coast and Glens; it also gives a good indication of the size of the AONB compared to the Causeway Coast and Binevenagh.

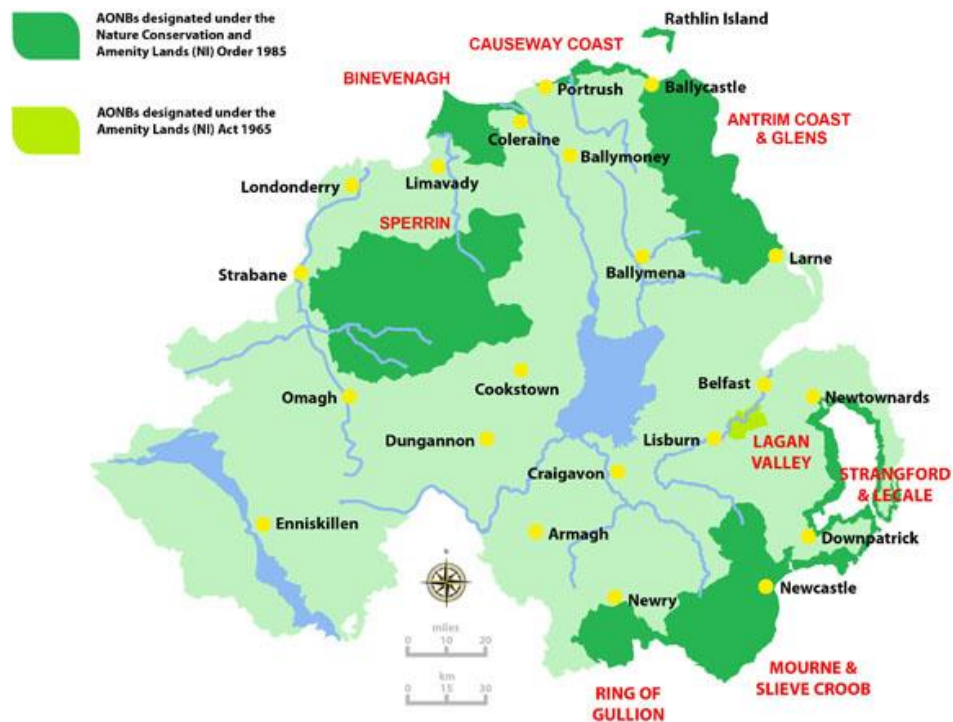


Figure 1: 8 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Northern Ireland. Source: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (www.doeni.gov.uk)

The Antrim Coast and Glens AONB was designated in 1988 under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) Order. It includes Rathlin Island, the Glens of Antrim and the coastal area between Larne and Ballycastle. The area encompasses the Glens of Antrim and the Antrim Plateau which reaches its highest point of 550 m above sea level and comprises 706 square kilometers. The CCGHT describes the location as *“an area of contrasts with gentle bays and valleys, dramatic headlands, farmland and the wild open expanse of moorland.* (CCGHT, 2012). Ultimately, with the expanse and variety of land in the AONB, it is clear that recreation in the area is something that should be successful and demanding.

Chapter 2- Literature Review

Review of why people participate in Outdoor Recreation

It is important to recognise what attracts people to take part in outdoor recreation in order to establish realistic recommendations in relation to recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens. With this in mind, a range of academic, policy and web-based literature will be used to identify some of the main social, economic and environmental drivers of recreation, with respect to the Northern Ireland and the U.K in particular, and western economies in general. The review of literature identified a number of reasons for taking part in outdoor recreation which are highlighted below:

Motivational- pursuit of relaxation, achievement and skill; close to nature; adventure; place attachment; health and well-being.

Economic and Logistical- leisure time availability; commercialisation of outdoor recreation; convenience of access for recreation.

Lifestyle and Cultural- culture and identity; growth of recreation; recreation information on internet; media; events; access; participation in other forms of physical activity.

Environmental- respected environments; management of land; climate change.

Motivational Recreation

The motivations stated here influence participation in different types of outdoor recreation in different ways and ultimately at different times and for different people. Common motivations for taking part in outdoor recreation include the pursuit of relaxation, solitude and the idea of freedom or escape from daily routines and responsibilities of people's everyday lives (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006; Schmidt & Little, 2007). The drive and ambition to achieve goals and the feeling of skill is also important, and are ultimately associated with the feeling of doing something that is challenging. Furthermore, it has been stated that the associated fusion of mind, body and action in outdoor recreation lead to feelings of control and power, as well as the sense of enjoyment, satisfaction, exhilaration and creative accomplishment (Boniface 2000; Hardy, 2003). As well as these feelings experienced when participating in

outdoor recreation, there is also a growing recognition in the importance of nature. The idea of 'nature' has emerged in many societies where there is an importance on valuing it, which is significant in relation to the recreation taking place in the Antrim Coast and Glens as many people may feel this way regarding the outdoors. There is a growing desire to engage with the natural world in a number of ways, such as using images of nature in advertising and being in the natural environment (Macnaghten & Urry, 2000; Henley Centre, 2005). Ultimately, the natural environment and being in the outdoors features heavily in most people's thoughts on why they enjoy outdoor recreation. These thoughts include the sense of being at one with nature; feeling part of it, observing wildlife; and the engagement with the outdoors (Kearsley, 2000; Pigram & Jenkins, 2006; Schmidt & Little 2007).

Outdoor recreation is also seen as providing the feelings of adventure, risk and excitement which are significant drivers for participation in many recreation activities (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003). Ultimately, taking part in adventure based activities is seen as a challenge, exposing oneself to danger and the possibility of failure which adds to the attractiveness for many individuals of outdoor recreation. Risk taking is also seen as an important motivation for participation, and one that is ultimately opposite to today's modern rational and risk-averse society (Lewis, 2004). Risk has been highlighted in media representations of extreme sports and activities, however there are many participants that do not take part in activities because of the risk involved. Many people actually are unwilling to take part if risk is involved and are concerned with minimising potential risks through judgements based on knowledge and experience (Robinson, 2008).

Socially, taking part in recreation is linked with relationships between people and the sense of belonging one experience when taking part in outdoor recreation (Wheaton, 2004; Robinson, 2008). Furthermore, it has been said that a sense of collectiveness can arise through the experiences of a recreational group while people coming together and sharing their interest, participation and commitment to the specific activity has been described as 'subcultures' (Wheaton, 2004). Ultimately, these subcultures are present in many recreation areas with so many differing groups associated with different activities, not least in the Antrim Coast and Glens. In

relation to the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, place attachment is another important issue in determining reasons for participating in outdoor recreation. People value relationships they have with particular places, which may be the case for the area in question. They form emotional ties with places and gain a source of identity from that place and so the familiarity and the sense of belonging to a certain place are strong motivators to take part in outdoor recreation (Williams, 2002). Furthermore, it has been identified that globalisation and the advancement of technology has made it easier for people to move from place to place and so has changed the way people associate themselves with particular places. Williams (2002) states that globalisation may make people's association with a place less important as more people want to escape the modern urban landscape and experience more rural settings for leisure and recreation, something that is important for the Antrim Coast and Glens with its very rural setting.

The final motivational driver associated with participation in outdoor recreation and something once again that is important in relation to recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens is that of health and well-being. Ultimately, in recent times there is a growing awareness of the role outdoor recreation can play in improving the health and well-being of participants. There are a range of associated benefits including improved circulation, lower blood pressure, stress relief and greater self-esteem (Bischoff, 2007) while physical activity in particular has been shown to play an important role in reducing more serious illnesses such as diabetes and premature mortality (Hardman & Stensel, 2003). Ultimately, the awareness that outdoor recreation can lead to healthier lifestyles has led to a greater participation in many activities with health initiatives in walking groups for example. The Henley's Centre (2005) study also suggest that the media has increased the awareness of the health benefits of physical activity and outdoor recreation, which is ultimately important for increasing participation and activities, especially for an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens. Importantly, Bird (2004) found that nature and the outdoors increased people's motivation to exercise and take part in outdoor recreation activities and also physical and recreation based activity has been said to be a recognised treatment for illnesses as it decreases the reliance on medication (Faulkner & Biddle, 2001). Overall, the many motivations and drivers for participation in outdoor recreation

mentioned here are important for the AONB and for Northern Ireland as a whole. Especially when many people now participate in recreation for the health benefits alone, the recreation potential of an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens is important for providing the outdoor recreation that is needed.

Economic and Logistical Recreation

Looking now at how outdoor recreation can be influenced by economic and logistical drivers in terms of the overall convenience of outdoor recreation to the busy lives of the modern society. Ultimately, in terms of leisure time, availability and flexibility most western societies have a culture which is driven by increasing pressures on time (Henley Centre, 2005). People are always trying to fit in many different activities into their busy lifestyles and so low participation in outdoor recreation is often down to time pressure and low levels of motivation. With this in mind, people are instead looking for easier options of leisure and recreation that will allow them to keep fit and have fun at the same time (Yeoman *et al.*, 2008). Recreation for these people has become shorter and therefore more local as many people can not afford the time to travel for recreation. In doing so more convenient options, such as the gym, especially for people living in urban areas, is a more desirable option. Many people, who do not take part in outdoor recreation, give the reason of time required to organise a recreation trip in a rural area as the main restriction (Henley Centre, 2005).

As well as this, the growth over the last 20-30 years in the creation of recreation venues and activities into one resource and their use in the market (commercialisation) affects outdoor recreation as well as the facilities available (Roberts, 2004; Rojek, 2005). Ultimately as income grows, the orientation of outdoor recreation also grows which allows those in higher economic groups to increasingly buy a higher standard of recreation. In response to this growth, recreation providers have started to 'brand' the outdoor recreation experience, in respect to such aspects of adventure, action, risk, nature and extreme sports (Bennett *et al.*, 2003). This activity, nature and adventure recreation is an expanding market in the U.K (Kane & Tucker, 2004) and is something that the Antrim Coast and Glens has potential to facilitate.

An important issue in relation to the commercialisation of outdoor recreation is the issues of cost and exclusivity as something that would lead to less participation. Ultimately, this concern varies depending on a number of factors, with young people, young families and older people being more worried with the cost of recreation than others (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006). Ultimately, it is obvious that undertaking certain activities increases costs on transport, the purchase of equipment and maybe tuition or use of the facilities at the particular venue. Furthermore, the commercialisation and packaging of outdoor recreation creates certain expectations of a more 'guaranteed' experience where everything is available, like easy followed trails, facilities and guidance from experts. With this in mind, this may lead to a decrease in interest and confidence in outdoor skills and therefore a decrease in the use of the wider outdoors like the Antrim Coast and Glens as more people rely on newer forms of recreation closer to urban areas.

Another economic and logistical factor that effects outdoor recreation is that of the distance, cost and convenience of access to recreational locations. The ease or difficulty of getting to and from recreational sites is seen as a factor shaping who takes part in outdoor recreation. This is ultimately based on the distance and connectivity that determine the time, effort and cost of associated journeys (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006). It is obvious that any increase in times, distance and travel costs generally decrease the amount of participation in outdoor recreation. This may be the case for the Antrim Coast and Glens as it is such a rural area of Northern Ireland compared to other recreation areas like the Causeway Coast where major activities are located in a smaller area. However, such views on distance travelled for recreation varies on the mode of transport and the type of recreational activity, as the quality of the journey can matter as much as its length; as some people see the experience of the journey itself as part of the recreation experience (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006). Recent times have seen the growth of personal mobility, with an increase in car ownership and better roads. Indeed, it is the increase of the car and transport as a whole that is credited with the growth in outdoor recreation in the first place (Greenwood *et al.*, 2007).

However, it is important to recognise that there is a difference in the people that have enjoyed such mobility. Having access to a vehicle has been identified as an important influence over outdoor recreation participation because it affects the type of location, trip duration and journey time (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006). Furthermore, it also affects the type of recreation activity because of the need of transporting equipment from one location to another. However, there are still many people who do not have access to a vehicle, and public transport links to recreational sites tend not to offer the same levels of comfort and flexibility. Issues like these are important for the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB again as it is sparsely populated in a rural location, public transport to potential recreational sites could be limited.

Lifestyle and Cultural Recreation

Lifestyle and culture plays an important role in outdoor recreation, for participation and also for the types of recreation. Ultimately, sport and outdoor recreation lifestyles are increasingly seen as important to the expression of identity (Rojek, 2005), which is important for any area with recreation potential as the lifestyle choices of the individuals will shape the type of activity they take part in. Outdoor recreation as a whole is constantly growing with new developments, such as in mountain bikes, recreation technology, mountaineering, navigation, and climbing equipment. These improvements have expanded the range of outdoor activities, made it easier and faster to access outdoor activities and have helped people to go further for outdoor recreation (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006). Furthermore, there are always new activities being invented, while existing and well-known activities continue to grow and expand. Also, the development of different forms of climbing for example, such as sport climbing and the introduction of indoor walls, has led to an increase in certain outdoor recreation activities and better accessibility.

In recent years, the growth and expansion of adventure, extreme sports and outdoor recreation as a whole has occurred on a global scale and is seen as one of the fastest growing parts of the leisure market. Some of the most popular activities include mountain biking, mountaineering, cycling and cross country running (Wheaton, 2004). However, participation in these activities varies, from the casual participant to the more serious amateur or professional. In order to take part in extreme outdoor

recreation activities like mountain biking and mountaineering, people need the money, time, knowledge and access to specialised equipment and most importantly direction from others who have experience. Despite the growth of these activities, most of these types of recreation remain exclusive activities (Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004).

With the growth in many of the recreation areas, there has also been a growth in the information available regarding outdoor recreation and the activities it entails. Increasing information allow more leisure opportunities to be considered within a decreasing time-budget. There is more and better information available about outdoor recreation than ever before (Henley Centre, 2005; Pigram & Jenkins, 2006). The majority of this information is on the internet; on blogs, official websites of local authorities, national parks, and national bodies like 'WalkNI' and 'CycleNI' or local club websites. Many of these websites are specially dedicated to activities and allow users to share information, for example about routes or weather conditions. These are seen to be popular for activities like mountain biking, mountaineering, rambling and hill-walking which rely on weather conditions that are favourable for participating in the activities. Material is also being more widely circulated by organisations like national parks and recreation providers, in the form of magazines and guidebooks. As well as this, there is more information available for different users, such as people with disabilities, which highlight what to expect at different recreation venues. With this in mind, it is important to recognise that although in recent times there is an obvious increase in outdoor recreation, in many areas the lack of information is still seen as a barrier to greater use and participation in outdoor recreation.

As well as the increase of information on the internet, media representations also play a part in promoting outdoor recreation and events. Little and Wilson (2005) suggest that 'adventure' outdoor recreation tends to be portrayed in the media through quite a narrow range of extreme activities. However, many people tend not to participate in the very extreme recreation activities; although risk taking activities usually get the most coverage in the media and are only for a small minority, but they do cause the growth and participation in less extreme forms of outdoor

recreation or adventure activities. The growing media coverage of outdoor recreation-related sports in Northern Ireland, such as the Walk the Glens Festival, Ulster Grand Prix Bike Week and the Carnlough Lake Water Festival, may have an influence on outdoor recreation, especially for an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. Certainly, certain events like these do contribute to Northern Ireland's branding as a destination for outdoor recreation. In terms of the media, Bennett *et al.*'s (2003) study shows a growth in the media interest surrounding action sports and outdoor recreation over the past 30 years due largely out of the sporting images and advertising.

An important aspect for attracting people to participate in outdoor recreation, especially for an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, is that of organised events; locally and internationally. Organised events can act as a catalyst to greater participation in outdoor recreation, especially for attracting new participants. The number and popularity of mass-participation challenge, charity and competitive events has seen a notable increase in recent years (Tivers, 2008) and include off-road running, biking and triathlon. Professional and international events can also play an important role for greater participation for example, when sales of tennis equipment increase around the time of Wimbledon. This is certainly the case for cycling as the popularity of the Tour de France and the Olympics cycling has been seen to increase participation in this activity. Ultimately, with London hosting the Olympic Games in 2012, it may have a legacy in terms of both facilities and inspiration to participate for the whole of the U.K.

However, with the attraction of events like the Olympics, attention must be paid to alternative ways of spending leisure time that ultimately compete with or substitute outdoor recreation (Cushman *et al.*, 2005). Outdoor recreation may compete with other forms of physical and leisure activity, such as sports like football or tennis and gym based activities. As well as this, the growth in popularity of indoor versions of outdoor recreation like climbing walls and gym work (Howell, 2008) also have an affect on how outdoor recreation is perceived. Indoor versions of the activities are seen as less risky, less weather dependant and a lot more suitable which links back to

the idea of outdoor recreation being one resource, in which activities become less reliant on space and can be done in smaller areas and not in the 'outdoors'.

As well as participation in other leisure activities like those mentioned above, it has been recognised that outdoor recreation has to compete with home-based leisure, especially in modern times. It can be said that outdoor recreation may have to compete with inactive leisure pastimes with the growth in home based leisure opportunities- including T.V and DVD, computer and internet. All these have created an increase in the inactive leisure choices available today, such as playing computer games, watching films and shopping online. Furthermore, with the increase in T.V coverage of sports and recreation, concerns have been raised that involvement is increasingly based on watching rather than participation (Greenwood *et al.*, 2007). Ultimately, this is important in relation to the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB as it is important that recreation in the area is capable of competing against the other forms of leisure activities mentioned. Although it may not be relevant for the U.K and Northern Ireland, research has seen the growth in computer use as a leisure activity, with studies showing for the U.S how an overall decline in physical activity levels in the last 40 years has followed the growth in industries associated with more inactive lifestyles (Strum, 2004). However, it is important to recognise that other studies find no significant evidence to suggest that increased computer use has affected recreational activity. Indeed, there is some evidence that suggests heavier computer use being associated with slightly greater participation in outdoor recreation and that activity levels have changed little overall (Lewis *et al.*, 2007).

Environmental Recreation

The final driver in relation to outdoor recreation participation and factors affecting recreation as a whole is the environment, importantly a valued environment. Outdoor recreation depends on both the availability of an appropriate environmental resource base, and the ways in which people view it. It is stated that people taking part in recreation look for certain environmental characteristics, which reflect their varying capacities and desires (Edensor, 2006). Ultimately, these desires might relate to practical features that help with recreation in the area like the appropriate signage and design of paths, or they might relate to other qualities that enhance the

recreation experience, such as perceived naturalness or wildness, or the layout of an area that make up a landscape's character (Goosen & Langers, 2000). This is also an important issue in relation to the Antrim Coast and Glens as it is vitally important how people view the area in terms of recreation, especially visitors.

Another important recreational factor is the land management and ownership in the recreation area as agriculture and land management practises influence recreation in a number of ways. Ultimately, they shape the type of land cover, its condition, as well as the type and intensity of its use. With this in mind, outdoor recreation is made possible by keeping paths maintained for example, and limited in turn by avoiding areas where livestock will be harmed or in turn where people will be harmed. Furthermore (Burton *et al.*, 2005), recognises that the cultural heritage of certain agricultural features attracts recreational visitors to the area. Also, in contrast to the negative impacts agriculture and forestry can have on recreation, recent trends in agriculture tend to favour multifunctional use and therefore recreation as a resource (Wilson, 2007). For example, this is seen in many parts of the U.K through Land Management contracts that include measures relating to access and facilities as well as the biodiversity of a certain area in order to allow recreation to continue alongside agriculture.

As well as the environmental factors mentioned, an important factor in relation to outdoor recreation and the environment, especially for an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens, is the impact of climate change. Climate change is of growing concern (Stern, 2006) and is increasingly seen as a major factor that may affect the use of outdoor areas for recreation worldwide (Richardson & Loomis, 2005; Shaw & Loomis, 2008). Globally and on a local scale, in relation to the Antrim Coast and Glens, many potential impacts could cause existing recreational opportunities to disappear including: increase in temperatures; sea level rise; increase in storms; habitat destruction (Richardson & Loomis, 2005; Shaw & Loomis, 2008). Changes in climate affect outdoor recreation in a number of ways, mainly influencing: feasibility of certain types of outdoor recreation- like those reliant on water (rivers, kayaking, canoeing); availability and access to particular sites; weather - especially the nature and length of summer and winter seasons. Ultimately, weather conditions

have been identified as important in affecting quality of recreational experience (Richardson & Loomis, 2005) as well as affecting how often people take part in recreational activities and how long they actually spend doing so.

With this in mind, the trends forecast for Northern Ireland's weather up to 2080 predict: warmer, wetter and cloudier winters; warmer, drier summers, and; more extreme weather conditions (Defra, 2012). A suggested positive outcome is that higher temperatures and a longer summer period could actually increase outdoor recreation. However, on the other hand, this would ultimately be affected to some degree by loss of land and recreation areas, more extreme weather in terms of precipitation, storms, and flooding. Ultimately, certain recreation activities will be affected, especially those that rely on certain conditions to be successful. Lower water levels on rivers and loughs could limit a variety of water based recreation activities, although on the other hand new water bodies and reservoirs would add to the water recreation base. With an increase in summer temperatures, an increased fire risk in forests would be an important issue, especially for upland areas like the Antrim Coast and Glens where many areas rely on the forests as a recreation base.

It has also been recognised that such changes in outdoor recreation demand because of different climate conditions, would also have an international and larger dimension as illustrated in research conducted for Defra (McGuire, 2006). At the moment, Northern Ireland and the U.K as a whole, can use the year round availability of many outdoor activities like mountain biking and golf, as an advantage compared to other countries that experience extreme winters. However, recreational visitors and tourists may not come to Northern Ireland if they have better availability of recreation resources at home, for example if colder countries experience milder winters. On the other hand, predicted warmer summer temperatures in mainland Europe may increase the number of tourists wanting to carry out outdoor recreation in the cooler temperatures of Northern Ireland. Furthermore, such changes in climate will ultimately lead to climate change mitigation and this also plays an important role in recreation. Recreation may be affected by measures taken to combat climate change such as afforestation and wind farms which may decrease recreation areas. All these factors are important in

determining factors that influence and affect recreation in Northern Ireland and more importantly the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. It is important to recognise these factors, as outdoor recreation is based upon how people view the social, economic and environmental side of recreation and so any potential the AONB has for recreation, these issues are important.

To conclude, in reviewing the reasons why people participate in recreation and also the limitations to participation, it can be seen that there are many issues that can ultimately affect activities. It is important to recognise these issues affecting recreation; motivational, economic, lifestyle and environmental, as they are linked with the activities being investigated in the AONB. This chapter set out to explore these issues of recreation and this has been achieved in order to inform the empirical investigation to establish the priority activities in the AONB and how factors such as these influence them.

Chapter 3

Recreation Access and the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB

Patterns of outdoor recreation are influenced by people's confidence in where and how they are entitled to go as well as their interpretation of their access rights (Brown *et al.*, 2008). From this statement, it is clear that recreation is subject to important access issues especially in areas like the Antrim Coast and Glens and in Ireland as a whole, increased public access for recreation presents challenges to policy makers concerned with tourism and rural development. Outdoor recreation activities mentioned previously such as mountaineering, walking and cycling can contribute to the regeneration of rural areas and ultimately enhance residents' quality of life, especially in a rural setting like the Antrim Coast and Glens. However, access to common and private farm land also generates conflicts between recreationists and land owners. The main concern regarding this issue is how to govern recreational access to upland landscapes during a period of increasing demand for open air outdoor recreation, especially in an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens. This chapter sets out to explore these issues of access that may affect recreation in an area like the AONB.

Despite its outstanding recreational appeal, Ireland has very few designated public rights of way in both the north and south and access to recreational areas relies on access to areas such as private farm land, common land and public forests. Landowners therefore have been faced with increased costs affecting their business activities and with difficulties prohibiting recreationists. Also, there is a problem in Ireland with the perception of walking in the upland areas as a free good because of the permissive attitudes of landowners regarding common land. Ultimately, this has caused conflicts between landowners, policy makers and recreation groups and it has also had a negative impact environmentally on the Irish upland ecosystems including increased erosion (Flegg, 2004).

The growth of outdoor recreation and increased public access to upland areas in Ireland involves a number of complex effects on the rural economy and on the rural population, especially in a study area like the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. As

stated previously, tourism development is important in areas like the Irish uplands where other opportunities for development and growth are limited. In particular, given the low population density and scenic quality in these areas, they provide good opportunities for recreational tourism. This is clearly seen in Northern Ireland, where there were 149,000 visitors whose main purpose was recreational walking alone in 2009 (NITB, 2012). While in the Republic of Ireland the number of overseas participants in hiking and walking amounted to 359,000 during 2009, of which 32% were engaged in hill-walking and they spent an estimated €271 million while in Ireland (Failte Ireland, 2012). As previously mentioned, the health benefits from recreation activities are increasingly recognised and highlighted by a number of campaigns. As well as this, traditional uses of the landscapes such as agriculture are in decline in upland areas like the Antrim Coast and Glens and areas like it throughout Ireland. In the 1960s, a third of the population in Ireland were involved in agriculture, forestry or fishing. In 2011, farmers made up less than 6% of the working population in Ireland (CSO, 2012) and constituted 7.2% of the working population in Northern Ireland (DARD, 2012). Therefore with this in mind, the decrease in traditional agriculture practises in an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens has led to the development and increase in public access to upland areas for recreation. However, despite the potential economic benefits to the rural economy, public access has become an increasing problem for many people involved in rural development (Flegg, 2004). Ultimately, it has been stated that recreationists generate a number of conflicts which inflict costs on other users like farmers and dwellers and so economically recreation can have a negative impact (Pearman *et al*, 2003).

In areas like this, conflict can arise for a number of reasons but the main conflict is usually due to an infringement of property rights from increased pressure placed on farmers to accommodate the demands by recreationists from nearby urban areas. Ultimately, this may lead to landowners stating their right to prohibit recreation users from their land while the users also claim that their rights are infringed through the assertion by the landowners. An increase in walkers and other forms of recreation impose costs on the landowners including a negative impact on business. An example of this would be increased costs affecting farm business activity and the

legal costs associated with property rights enforcement as well as a decrease in the quality of the land and the value of it. Furthermore, recreationists also impact on each other in a negative way when walkers, for example, impose costs on other walkers due to congestion in recreation hot spots in these areas. This issue is important for the recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, especially if it is to develop as a recreation attraction, issues like this would need to be fully addressed.

It is important to address some of the background regarding property rights in Ireland and the issue of access to the countryside as it is significant for outdoor recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens. Ultimately, all land in Ireland both north and south is owned, either by private individuals or state bodies and recreationists actually do not have the right of entry to land. Furthermore, as Flegg (2004) recognises, in Ireland, there are very few designated formal public rights of way and areas that are developed specifically for providing and ensuring recreation access are very limited. Although rights of way do exist as well as traditional paths, these are not protected by law and so any conflict over access regarding them would be difficult to prove. Furthermore, many of the rights of way have become un-used over time and landowners have re-claimed them and much of the recreation walking is done on public roads which are not the best walking experience. Although slightly outdated, the Irish Sports Council found that of the 850 trails in Ireland (north and south), 55% of walks were on country roads and half of all the walking on long distance way-marked ways were on public roads (ISC, 2009). As well as rights of way, Flegg (2005) identifies that outdoor recreation also depends on by-product access. This ultimately means that some access is available on public land but this down to the ownership of the land and its purpose- for example the Forest Service in Northern Ireland, protected land and private farm land (commonage).

An important issue for outdoor recreation is the land which is not managed by the state but owned by farmers and private land owners, commonage land. Commonage land and outdoor recreation access are linked because most of the areas of high recreational value are found in mountainous or coastal areas which are part of the commonage land. Ultimately, commonage has been an important resource for

outdoor recreation participants because a freedom of access by the public to commonage has developed. It has been said that the idea of open access to commonage has arisen due to the poor economic value of the land; the difficulty of property rights enforcement and therefore a permissive attitude by landowners. Furthermore, recreational access to open commonage land for such activities like walking and mountaineering usually requires no payment and therefore can be characterised as a public good (Flegg, 2004). However, although in many cases this has led to the belief of public access and the right to roam on commonage land for recreation; it is actually the landowner who owns the commonage grazing rights. Any individual accessing commonage for recreation challenges this ownership and may be told by the landowner to leave. Recreation access to commonage land is therefore not an enforceable right, and landowners display signs prohibiting trespassing on commonage (Rafferty, 2005). Therefore, and it is also the case in the Antrim Coast and Glens, the advantages of access favour the public for outdoor recreation but in other instances, access is usually permitted although the property rights are the exclusive right of the landowner (Flegg, 2004).

Having open access for recreation, especially for activities like walking and mountain biking is an important issue for an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens. Ultimately, under open access, recreationists do not have much reason to contribute towards the cost of maintaining the trails and footpaths. The maintenance of quality walking routes involves significant investments for drainage, signage, and construction of structures like fences and bridges and environmental interpretation. Flegg (2004) therefore suggests that from the high costs involved in excluding recreationists from trails, subsequently leads to landowners having no incentive to invest in access provision. Furthermore, in upland areas like the AONB, the high costs of monitoring recreation behaviour such as damage to fences, trails, littering, harm imposed on livestock ultimately discourages landowners to invest in access provision for recreation. Therefore, if an area is to be a popular destination for recreation, incentives for sustainable open access have to be in place, if not; little incentive will exist to contribute to trail enhancement and maintenance, resulting in the decline in quality of trails. Poor trail quality and recreation initiative therefore

fails to attract visitors to the area and reduces the numbers that use the area for recreation.

In conclusion, it is quite clear that access to recreation is an important issue in the Antrim Coast and Glens as it can ultimately determine if activities take place or not. The literature examined here again will inform the empirical investigation for this thesis in terms of recreation access in the Antrim Coast and Glens. Ultimately, it is difficult to determine whether awareness of access rights and confidence in using them has improved in Northern Ireland. It is important to recognise that better cultural embedding of access rights may serve to encourage greater participation in the future and increase the range of settings and activities.

Chapter 4- Methodology

In order to achieve the aims and objectives stated previously, the three methods of primary research conducted were; a survey questionnaire (Appendix 1) undertaken by 200 recreation users, semi-structured interviews and a photographic survey. The photographic survey was undertaken to further add to the investigation in order to record recreation activities in the area and also the potential in the area. The photographic survey was based upon the results of the recreation survey and involved visiting areas where the most popular activities are currently taking place but also areas that are seen as having potential in developing more outdoor recreation. Also included in the photographic survey were examples of how certain activities are successful in other areas, e.g. Mourne Mountains. In carrying out a photographic survey, it allowed for detailed visual interpretations to be made while also linking with the views of the interviewees regarding outdoor recreation in the area.

Both the questionnaire and the interviews were the main sources for gauging the outdoor recreation activities that are currently taking place in the AONB, which are the most popular and also where is there potential for promoting more activities that currently do not exist or exist unofficially. As well as this, the questionnaire also determined the main drivers for participating in recreation, as mentioned in the literature, so as to gain an understanding of people's perceptions of recreation in this area. This was achieved through the questionnaire design which was made up of mainly closed questions. Information which is important to gain from the questionnaire included; what recreation activity the person is participating in and also what their motivation for participating in outdoor recreation is. From this it was possible to gauge what recreation activity or activities are the most popular but also which activities have potential for further growth in the area. Being a closed question, the options available for the participant to select were taken from a past report by the Causeway Initiative: *Causeway Coast and Glens-Countryside Recreation Strategy 2002*. Priority recreation activities were identified using this literature and were used as a structure for the questionnaire. It is important to note here that as the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB covers such a large area, it was

impossible to designate one area to carry out the questionnaire. Therefore, the questionnaires were carried out within three areas of the AONB; Larne Promenade, Glenariff Forest Park and Ballycastle Forest Park. This allowed for a greater spread of participants throughout the AONB.

A piloting study was carried out with a small number of questionnaires being handed out in order to mainly identify if any of the questions were posing a problem, mainly this identified if any of the questions should be worded differently in order to make them more clear and avoid confusion. The pilot survey also identified whether the questionnaire flowed well and also enabled the length of time it takes to administer to be recognized and therefore enabled changes to be made so that the final questionnaire was not too time consuming. The questionnaires were carried out in summer 2012 in the areas previously mentioned. However, it should be acknowledged that the questionnaire was not without its limitations; e.g. the areas used were sites where the main recreation users were walkers due to current restrictions in provision of other recreational activities. Nevertheless, this provided an opportunity to explore the recreation potential and needs in the AONB.

In terms of the sampling strategy for the distribution of the questionnaire, the goal was to use a method of probability sampling where every unit in the population had an equal chance of being selected. Therefore, the best form of probability sampling for this investigation was a simple random strategy where every member of the population participating in outdoor recreation had an equal probability of being selected. This method of sampling therefore minimised bias and ultimately simplified the analysis of the results as it was a large sampling frame. Ultimately, for this research topic, an unbiased random selection of individuals was important so that the sample represents the population participating in recreation and allows one to draw externally valid conclusions about the population based on the sample. Furthermore, this sampling technique was seen as the most appropriate for the investigation as it is free of classification error and it required minimum advanced knowledge of the population, other than they were all recreation users. Therefore, this technique best suited the investigation as there was not much information

available about the population and so data collection could be efficiently conducted on randomly distributed cases.

As well as this quantitative approach to the investigation, a qualitative approach was used as it was important to observe and gather opinions from people involved in outdoor recreation in the AONB. This approach for the research topic was the most relevant for the topic as it was more interpretative and allowed for a better engagement with the participants and the literature and ultimately aided in highlighting the impetus for the investigation and drawing meaningful conclusions. This research approach is broadly defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), “Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials- case study, personal experience, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts.” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; p.2). A qualitative approach for the research allowed the study to be carried out in a way that assumed the different multiple and dynamic issues associated with the topic. Furthermore this method allowed the research to be carried out in a natural and uncontrolled setting with the researcher being the instrument in a more inductive approach. Ultimately, as well as using the quantitative approach, this qualitative approach allowed the research to embrace an ontology that rejects the existence of external factors and so allowed the research to be constructed by those participants that were interviewed. Using a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to interact with the object of research and ultimately affect that object. Therefore, findings were created through interaction between the researcher and the interviewee and the issue being investigated. This research approach was important for this topic as it allowed for a close interaction with the respondents through observations, interviews and content analysis of documents.

The research approach and design for the investigation took the form of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in outdoor recreation in the area. This semi-structured pro-forma was constantly piloted and as more information was gathered from the interviews, knowledge grew and new issues that emerged could be deleted or amended. Three council areas are part of the AONB:

Moyle Borough Council, Larne Borough Council and Ballymena Borough Council; interviews were undertaken with the Countryside Officers from both Ballymena Council and Larne Council. The Countryside Officers were key people for this investigation as they are involved with outdoor recreation in their local areas, so gaining knowledge and information from them was important so activities with potential could be identified. Furthermore, these interviews also established how outdoor recreation in the local areas has changed in recent times and how they see it changing in the future, in relation to the literature previously mentioned. Interviews were also carried out with recreation organisers and groups that included a representative from *Trailbadger.com*- an organisation that provides information on places to ride for mountain bikers all over Ireland and that encourages and develops the recreation activity of mountain biking. This was key as mountain biking is seen as an important activity in the area, so information from a group like TrailBadger allowed for an up to date opinion on the activity in the area. As well as this, an interview with the president of Queen's University Mountaineering Club was also undertaken in relation to rock climbing, as this activity too proved to be popular in the area. Also, the Product Development Manager from Recreation NI was interviewed as they are involved in identifying and delivering a range of outdoor recreation projects across Northern Ireland. Also, the Manager of Cairndhu Golf Club was interviewed as the activity of mountaineering is conflicting with the golf club's views in the area. This variety of interviews ultimately gave different viewpoints regarding the issue of outdoor recreation in the AONB.

As mentioned, these interviews took the form of semi-structured interviews so it allowed one to explore the answers and responses further as May (2011) has stated, "These types of interviews allow people to answer more on their own terms than the standardized interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability." (May 2001: p.135). By interviewing those individually in the semi-structured manner benefited this investigation as it enabled comparisons as there was variation in the quality and meaning of the information gathered in each interview: "Inevitably, some interviews will provide more useful information than others...Only by comparing a series of interviews can the significance of any one of them be fully understood." (Gerson and Horowitz 2002: p.211). With this in mind, the interviews

as well as the questionnaire results related to issues that were informed by the literature.

For the purpose of this research topic it is important to recognise the difficulties in carrying out qualitative research. In particular there is an element of bias built into the qualitative research approach and it is sometimes unavoidable. Furthermore, the knowledge produced from the qualitative method may generalise findings to other people in that it may only be unique to those taking part in focus group or interview. Time was also an important issue in relation to the methodology for this research topic as a qualitative approach takes more time to collect and analyse data (i.e. interviews) compared to quantitative data. At times it proved difficult to gather the required information from the participants in a short space of time. In this instance, follow up interviews were necessary as well as phone interviews and contact via email played an important role in this investigation. To combat the issue of bias it is important to define the goals of the investigation, select participants, establish rapport and initiate and encourage free discussion. By doing this, the discussion was guided towards the main goals of the investigation; both what activities are taking place in the area and what activities have potential for growth and so this importantly avoided contaminating the discussion with bias.

In conducting interviews and for the purpose of this research topic, ethical issues were important and one of the main concerns and so confidentiality was given. For this research topic, confidentiality was given to those participants taking part and none of the questionnaires contained any personal information such as names addresses or phone numbers. It was unlikely that any of this personal information was acquired anyway, due to the fact that people who are willing to undertake a questionnaire were more than likely participating in a recreation activity and gave an anonymous response, and therefore did not need to give any addresses or contact numbers. The same is true for interviews, with the name of the person who was interviewed not being present anywhere within the research; they shall be identified only by their job title and the organisation which they are representing. They were also informed before the interview if they had any objections to the interview being recorded and transcribed. They were also made known that the information they

provide will be used as part of this research. In terms of the photographic survey, all possible attempts were made to avoid the inclusion of members of the public within pictures taken. However where this was unavoidable they were made aware of it and asked if they had any objections. In terms of the interviews, the ethical issues that were addressed can be summarised by the following points:

Explain Purpose: Explain the purpose of the investigation to the participants;

Reciprocity/Mutual understanding: What the respondent gained from the investigation;

Risk assessment: How the interview might put the respondent at risk;

Confidentiality: The information and views gained from the respondents will be used only for the purpose of the research topic and this will be made clear to those taking part in the interviews.

In summary this research set to examine outdoor recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens; current activities taking place and how the area has potential for greater outdoor recreation with the increasing demand mentioned in the literature. This was carried out by undertaking a photographic survey of the area, along with semi-structured interviews with key personnel involved in recreation. Questionnaires were undertaken as the main source of information in terms of identifying the most popular recreation activities in the area and also those with the potential for growth, as well as information on the motivations for participating in outdoor recreation. The most popular activities were identified and used as priority activities to be investigated and promoted for the AONB and to fulfil the aims and objectives.

Chapter 5- Results: AONB Questionnaire

As this study comprises of a mixed method approach, this section will present the results from the questionnaire and also the responses gathered from the interviews carried out as well as evidence from the photographic survey. These elements of the investigation will serve to provide information regarding recreation in the area, especially regarding which activities are the most popular, which have potential for growth, and also issues about access in local areas to recreation. The significance of the results will be explored in the next section of the study, the discussion section.

In summer 2012, the questionnaire was carried out by 200 participants within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB in three different locations. As mentioned previously, as the AONB covers a large area, carrying out the questionnaires in the different areas proved to be a lot more feasible but also allowed for a better representation from the whole of the AONB.

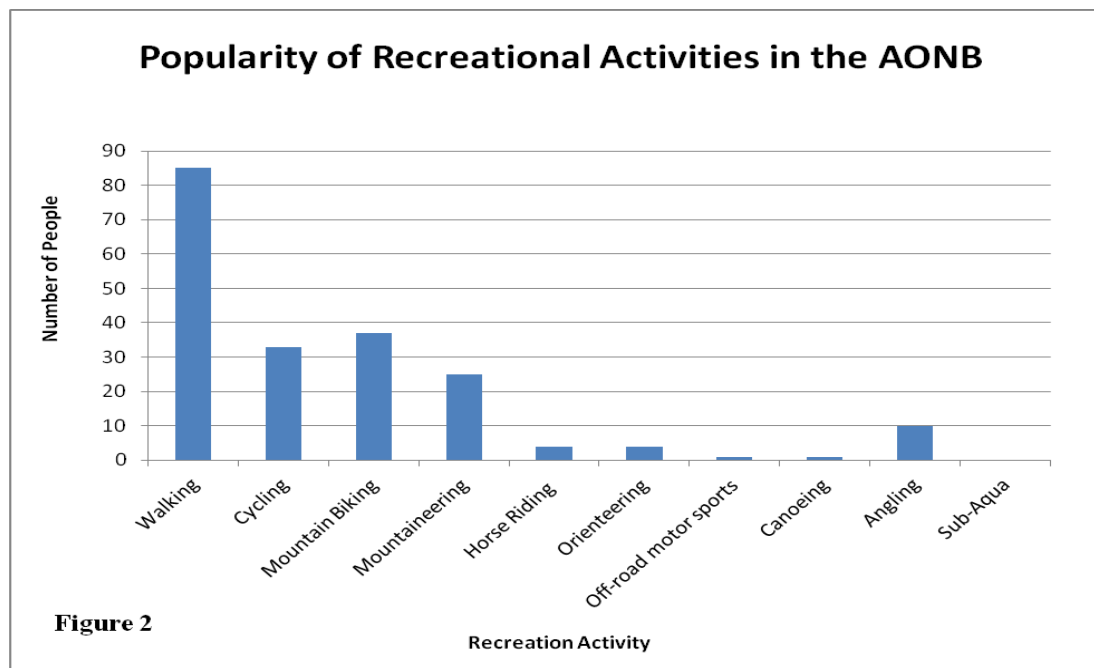
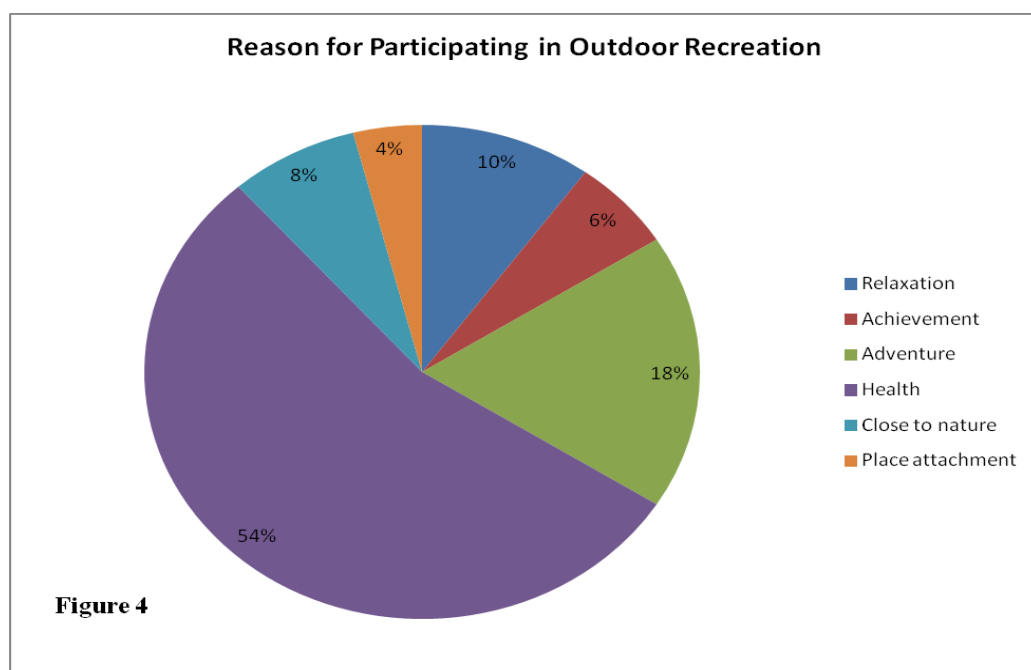
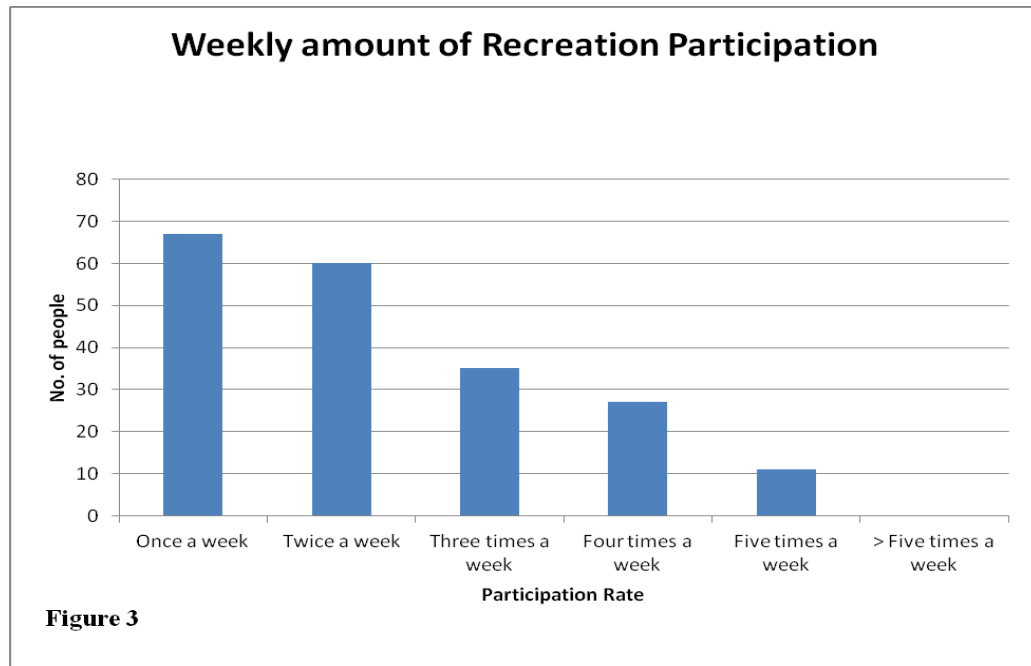


Figure 2 shows how the majority of people when questioned regarding what outdoor recreation activity they participate in within the AONB stated walking (85 people). The next most popular activity was mountain biking (37 people) followed by cycling (33 people), mountaineering (25 people) and angling (10 people). It can be seen from Figure 2 that the remaining recreation activities in the questionnaire were not as popular as those already mentioned. Both horse riding and orienteering received 4

responses each while off-road motor sports and canoeing only received 1 response each and sub-aqua as an activity did not receive any responses. Ultimately it is quite clear from this part of the questionnaire that walking (42%) as a recreation activity is the most popular in the AONB which was expected and highlights that there is obviously a popular walking infrastructure in the area which attracts people. It is also important to recognise the significance of responses for both mountain biking and mountaineering, as these two recreation activities are seen as areas to be promoted, especially as extreme sports like these are highlighted in the literature as being important for future recreation trends. Ultimately, these most popular recreation activities identified will serve as priority activities for this investigation and those that need to be developed further.

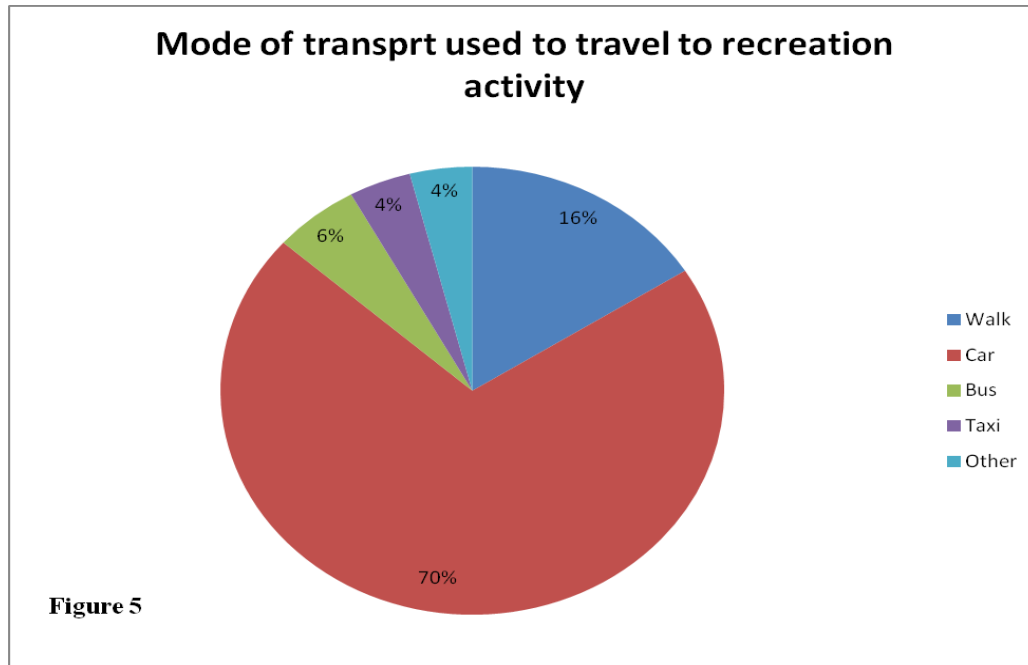
Figure 2 highlights the important factor of the most popular activities in the AONB and those that have potential for growth. However it is also important to recognise other issues that arose in the questionnaire such as the frequency of participation in recreation in the area and also the reason for participation. This is ultimately informed by the information gathered and explored in the literature regarding what motivates people to take part in outdoor recreation and secondly the logistical and economical side of determining how often one participates, as highlighted by the Henley Centre (2005). Figure 3 highlights the weekly amount of outdoor recreation participation from the 200 respondents of the questionnaire. It is clear to see that participation in recreation in the AONB is limited to only 1-2 times a week with 33% of respondents answering once a week and 30% answering twice a week. As mentioned in the literature, modern times has led to a busier lifestyle for many so with only 14% participating four times a week and only 6% five times a week it can be said that people's busy lifestyles limits recreation to once or twice a week. Furthermore, Figure 4 highlights the main reasons why people take part in outdoor recreation in the AONB recreation, again informed by the literature it can be seen that as expected health and well-being plays an important motivating role for participation. 54% of respondents stated health as the reason for taking part in recreation while the second largest proportion stated adventure which links with activities like mountain biking and mountaineering. Surprisingly, place attachment and being close to nature received low responses; 4% and 8% respectively.



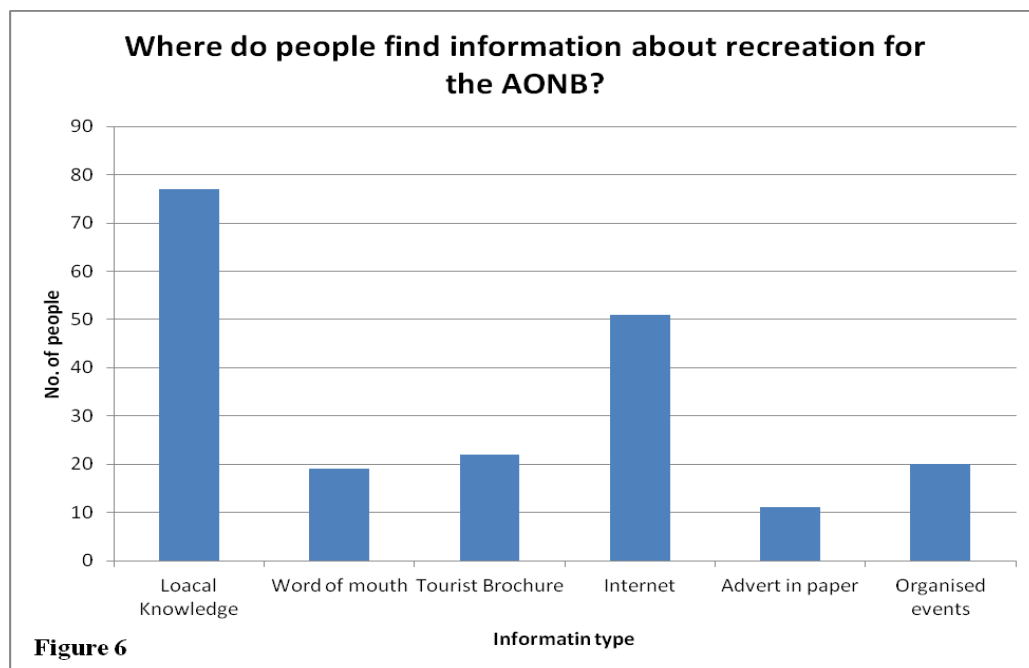
As mentioned in the literature and also important for recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens is the issue of travelling to the recreation locations and the ease of transport. Figure 5 highlights what was expected given the ever increasing mobility in modern times and the availability of the car for travel.

70% of the 200 people who completed the questionnaire stated car as their mode of transport for travelling to participate in recreation in the AONB. This is an important issue as parking facilities for recreation activities in the area are vitally important and with the growth of personal car ownership resulting in an increase in

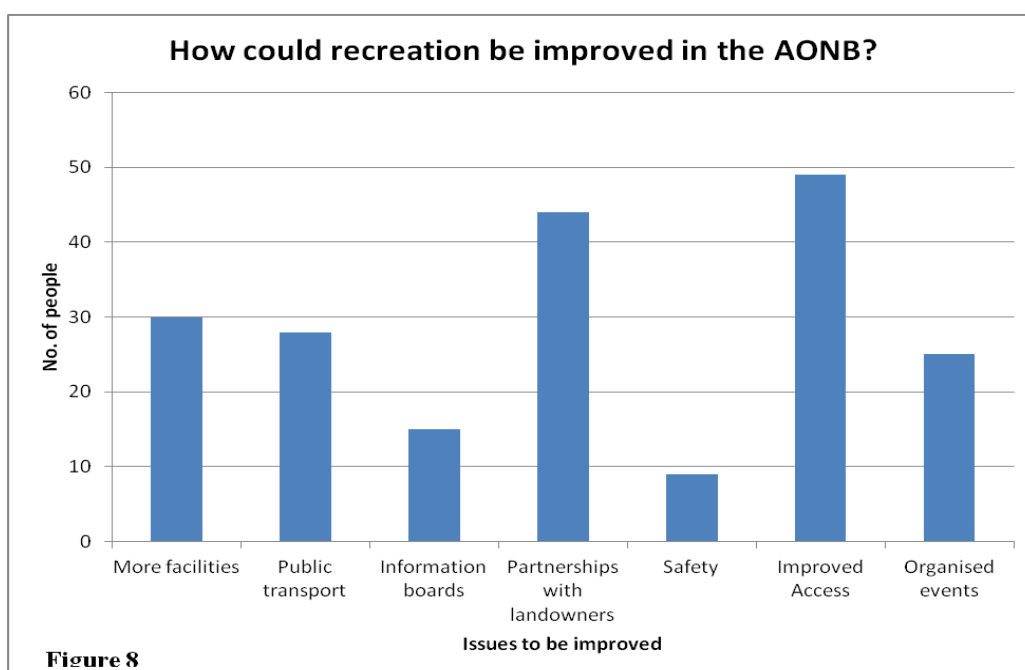
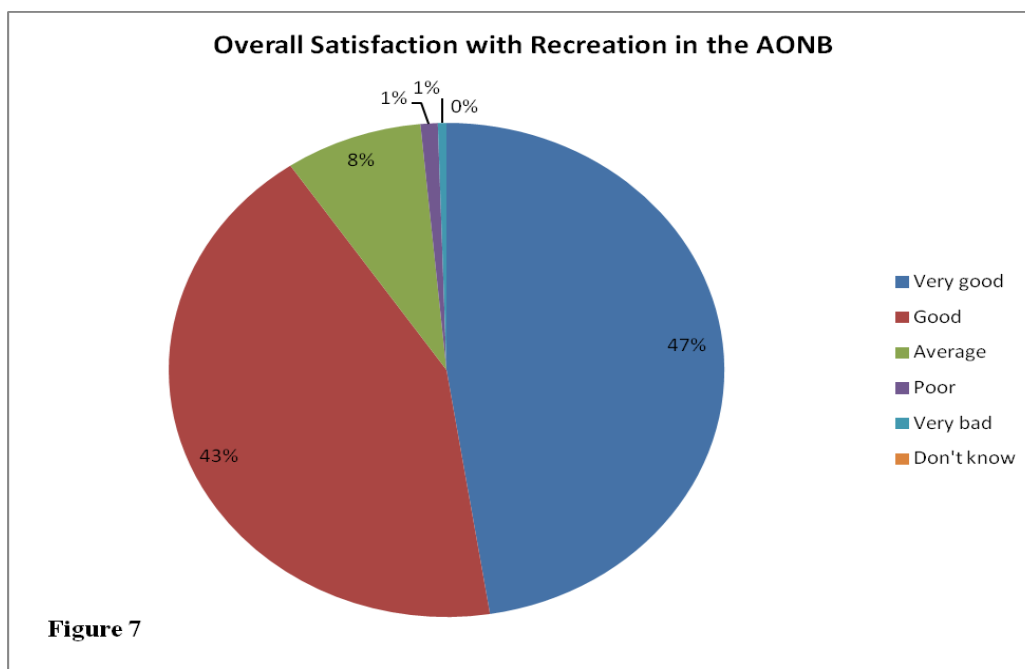
outdoor recreation, further facilities may be needed. With 16% of responses stating walking as their mode of transport this is probably due to locals using areas close-by for recreation, while only 6% stated using a bus for transport raises the issue of public transport and how this could be enhanced to incorporate outdoor recreation.



In the questionnaire, respondents were asked where they obtain information regarding recreation in the area as this is important for further promotion and improvement of current activities. It is important to note here that the results in Figure 6 highlight that it is local knowledge that is the main source of information for recreation in the area with 77 out of the 200 (38%) responses stating this as their main source of information. This suggests that it is mostly locals using the area for recreation but with 51 people (26%) stating that they used the internet for information on recreation, reinforces what was stated in the literature by Pigram & Jenkins (2006) that there is increasing information available on the internet. Figure 6 portrays these results.



The final two questions in the questionnaire focused on establishing the people's views on how the area as a whole could be improved for recreation and overall satisfaction with outdoor recreation. Overall satisfaction with the AONB was a resounding 'very good' or 'good' from these recreation users that completed the questionnaire (Figure 7). However, when asked about any improvements that they would consider for the area, a number of suggestions received large responses (Figure 8). The two most common responses was for 'improved access' and 'partnerships with landowners,' as mentioned in the literature this is an overarching issue for recreation users in Northern Ireland. 'Public transport' also received a large number of responses indicating that some users see this issue as something that could help with recreation in the area. The development of 'more facilities' received 30 responses which suggest that it is not the lack of facilities but the organisation and development of current facilities that need improved. 'Organised events' also is seen as an area that could help promote outdoor recreation in the area but as a whole, it can be seen from Figure 7, recreation users are satisfied with the AONB.



Results: Interview Analysis & Photographic Survey

From the results of the survey it can be seen that there are clear areas that need to be addressed in relation to outdoor recreation in the AONB. Being informed by the results of the survey, several interviews were carried out to gain a better understanding of the main issues that surfaced from the results. As mentioned, priority recreation activities were identified as being walking, mountain biking and mountaineering so interviews also centred on these. Although walking is the most popular activity, it is still seen by many as an area that needs improvement while both mountaineering and mountain biking both have huge potential in the area.

As mentioned previously, to gain a better understanding of the most popular activities in the AONB, it was necessary to acknowledge the views of those involved with recreation in the area. In this case interviews with two countryside officers from both Larne Council and Ballymena Council were conducted. For the purpose of this investigation, the identity of the interviewees was kept anonymous with the ethical issues being explained and agreed and with both interviews being conducted separately. Ultimately, as it has been established that walking is the most popular activity in the AONB, it was important to gain an understanding of the activity based on the information from both Countryside Officers and their council areas. (Appendix 2&3).

The results of the survey were seen by both Countryside Officers as something they would have expected. For Larne Council and the AONB as a whole it is seen that, *“The most popular activities are the normal activities that a great number of people pursue; walking/rambling, fishing etc.”* Furthermore it emerged from the interviews that an important part of the walking infrastructure in the AONB is the Antrim Hills Way and it is something that needs constant management. (Figures 9&10). This walking trail has been developed and improved over the last decade as it is seen by recreation users as being one of the best areas for walking but it is still lacking compared to the more popular Mourne Mountains. Regarding the Antrim Hills Way and walking in the AONB, Larne Council stated, *“In terms of managing the Antrim Hills Way, this has improved a lot over the last ten years or so. Beforehand, the signage and guidance on the route itself was very poor and also the maintenance*

and access were an issue. So because of this, it could not be marketed effectively in order to promote it. Thankfully this has improved with appropriate signage and access has improved with 10 waymarked ways.” Furthermore, the importance of walking as an important recreation activity in the AONB was highlighted by Ballymena Countryside Officer as they stated, *“For the areas of the AONB that are in our council area, walking and rambling is the most popular, there are a more walking/rambling locations in the area than other activities. There are actually no ‘extreme’ recreation activities in our area.”* Ultimately, these responses help validate the survey results in positioning walking as the most popular activity, but it is still an activity that needs management.



Figures 9&10: *Images showing the appropriate signage on the Antrim Hills Way and better access points on the waymarked ways.*

An important issue that emerged in the interviews with both Countryside Officers and which was covered in the literature review was that of access to areas of recreation. In relation to the Antrim Hills Way, *“Landowners cooperate to allow access on to their land, most of them do not want to sign any contract in relation to the NIE landowner agreement but having their approval to allowing access is*

enough for the Antrim Hills Way.”(Larne Council- Countryside Officer). However, for Ballymena Council access to areas for walking proves to be difficult at times. When asked about the issue of access for walking in the Ballymena AONB area, it was stated that, “A large proportion of the land is privately owned by landowners, especially around Slemish and these factors of ownership determines recreation. Yes this is the case in the Glens areas as well but the Ballymena is made up of small field patterns and access through land is difficult, so it is not as popular as the Glens.”(Ballymena Council- Countryside Officer). It is clear from both the results of the survey and the interviews that the issue of access is important in terms of establishing outdoor recreation in an area.

As the survey results highlighted, there is potential in both the areas of mountain biking and mountaineering in the AONB. This issue was put towards both Countryside Officers to determine the likelihood of such activities being developed further in the area. Larne Council Countryside Officer highlighted that, *“Mountain biking is growing more popular but in the Larne Council area itself there are no facilities. Glenariff Forest Park, although not in the Larne Borough, has great potential for mountain biking. It takes place there but illegally, its not insured or managed so if this could be done properly it would be good for the AONB as a whole. Mountaineering/rock climbing takes place in the council area but unfortunately it is also illegal. At Ballygally Head it takes place but it is just too close to the main road so safety to drivers is an issue. The area is actually perfect for climbing and is used regularly but safety and liability is too important.”*

Figures 11-12 show evidence of mountain biking taking place at Glenariff Forest Park and also show the potential the area has for the activity. Ultimately, this has determined that these areas of recreation have good potential in the area but is issues of liability and safety that hinder their progress. But with both the survey results and the interview showing that there is a market for these ‘extreme’ outdoor recreation activities, as well the literature highlighting that these ‘extreme’ sports create the sense of ‘adventure and risk,’ further development would surely benefit the area.



Figures 11&12: *Unofficial mountain bike trails at Glenariff Forest Park- the activity takes place but it is not an official venue despite its potential.*

This is highlighted by both the president of Queen’s University Mountaineering Club (Appendix 7) and the TrailBadger representative (Appendix 4). In terms of mountaineering in the AONB, QUB Mountaineering Club was asked where this activity usually takes place in the area and it was highlighted that the area mentioned by Larne Countryside Officer, Ballygally Head, is currently used. *“At present we use Fairhead on a regular basis for day trips, usually at the weekend. Fairhead is most widely used because of the rock conditions are really suited and relatively safe compared to some other areas. Ballygally head is also used regularly, however, it is more difficult to access and take large groups here. There is also some strong opposition to the activity being carried out here, especially by people within the nearby golf club.”* Therefore, once again the issue of access is important for this activity, especially as it is such an extreme sport. In terms of further promotion of the activity though, at Ballygally it is the legality of the activity that is the important issue. *“At Ballygally, because climbing is not allowed, the main concern is to legalise it. The rock conditions are very good; however, realistically large groups could not attend because of the area being small. If more people expressed interest maybe a small car park could be incorporated and support from local people to*

advertise the area.” Furthermore, better advertisement for the area as a climbing location was seen as an important factor for improving the activity in the area.

However, as mentioned, there is opposition to this activity taking place at Ballygally Head because of its proximity to Cairndhu Golf Club. By interviewing the Manager of the golf club (Appendix 6) it was clear that the club is against any climbing taking place because ultimately, *“Cairndhu Golf Club are occupiers of the surrounding land where the rock climbing is taking place and we have refused permission...it stems from any liability the club may have if climbers on our land cause an accident to road users.”* Therefore, in relation to the recreation of activity in this area, there are conflicting views regarding the use of the land which links back to the idea of commonage land and it is ultimately the landowner’s decision if activities such as this should be permitted (Flegg 2004). The potential of the area for mountaineering can be seen in the following images (Figures 13-14) as well as its proximity to the main road. Furthermore, the conflicting views regarding the site can also be seen in Figures 15-16, images taken as part of the photographic survey.



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figures 13-16: *Ballygally Head- Potential for successful climbing but with conflicting views on the activity taking place at this location.*

As the results of the survey highlighted, mountain biking in the area proved to be a popular outdoor recreation activity and this was ultimately further highlighted in the interview with the representative from TrailBadger. Regarding the current position of mountain biking in the area it was highlighted that, *“There is casual use, racing, the hardcore jump builders and then the general trail-rider who likes the ups and downs. There is a lot of activity to try and grow the sport, and indeed many of the councils and the biggest relevant landowner (Forest Service) are actively interested, partly because of the public clamour for facilities (which are lacking compared to other areas like Scotland, Wales and England) but also because of the economic benefits.”* Ultimately, from this it can be said that the activity has a market in the area but it is the logistics of it that makes it difficult to promote. This was highlighted in the views of the representative from TrailBadger regarding the issue of access for the activity as it is seen as a complicated issue, *“The unsanctioned trail building and forest access goes on, as it’s the only way to get out mountain biking. E.g. If I started today and decided I wanted to go through the official channels to go out riding my bike, I might never get permission. If I wanted to get proper trails built, I need to be an expert in funding, a political genius, and be prepared to wait*

and do at least 5 years lobbying.” It is clear from both the survey results and the interview that mountain biking is a popular activity in the area and one that could be developed further. Questioned on how the activity could be promoted in the area, TrailBadger stated that “the whole Glens region should and could be covered with well-managed environmentally sensitive trail networks, like what happens in England, Scotland, Wales, Spain, France and the U.S. There is a massive gap between what people want and what public bodies understand mountain biking to be.”

The popularity and potential of mountain biking in the area was further emphasised when an interview with Recreation NI was conducted (Appendix 5). The interview highlighted the potential the area has and outlined the project taking place in the Mourne Mountains developing a £1.9 million propose-built mountain bike facility with 45kms of cross-country and downhill trails. Asked how the land is being allowed for mountain biking use, Recreation NI stated that, *“The Northern Ireland Forest Service is leasing the land to the respective councils who will then take on the liability, management and ongoing maintenance of the trails.”* With this in mind, if the same project could be developed in an area like Glenariff Forest, it would ultimately be beneficial to the local area. This was highlighted by Recreation NI in the interview as they emphasised how there is *“23,000 mountain biking visitors expected by the end of year 1, bringing £1.1million annual boost to the local economy as well as attracting major events such as the 2013 European Speed Championships.”* Figures 17-18 show the development in the Mourne Mountains and how the trails are being developed into suitable mountain bike trails. Ultimately, the information gathered from this interview and these images highlight how mountain biking as a recreation activity could and should have the potential in an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens, as it has been proven in the Mournes area. The next section of the investigation will explore further the findings of both the survey and the interviews and how both ultimately can provide meaningful conclusions and recommendations regarding recreation in the AONB.



Figures 17-18: *Mourne Mountains-Castlewellan Forest Park and Kilbroney Forest Park purpose built mountain bike trails. Similar site to Glenariff Forest Park highlighting the potential Glenariff has for the activity if it could be made official.*

Chapter 6- Discussion

AONB Questionnaire

From the results it is clear that there is a need to provide quality outdoor recreation opportunities, infrastructure and services for encouraging participation in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB especially in the three priority activities identified: walking, mountain biking and mountaineering. As well as this, the results of the survey identified issues which were addressed in the literature such access to recreation areas, travel to recreation and the main motivating factors that ultimately determined whether people participated in recreation or not. In this section, these issues will be discussed and their significance highlighted as it is ultimately an important issue for recreation in the AONB. Particular attention must be paid to understanding latent- as well as expressed (in the survey results) - demand and complexity of recreation issues in the area and Northern Ireland as a whole. Motivating factors for recreation will be addressed first with the priority activities being discussed after and how they are important for the area.

From Figure 4 it can be seen that the main reason why people participate in recreation in the AONB is for their health and well-being as was stated in the literature (Bischoff, 2007). It is clear that in the Antrim Coast and Glens, there is a growing awareness of the possible benefits of outdoor activity to physical and mental health, and its increasing emphasis by governments and national health, may have caused an increasing proportion of the population to participate in some form outdoor recreation. Ultimately, the motivation to improve health and well-being has the potential to broaden the range of outdoor recreation activities in the AONB, for example the priority activities. An important issue seen in Figure 4 that the option ‘adventure’ received the second highest response indicating that this is an important motivator for recreation in the area, again highlighted in the literature (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003). For many outdoor recreation activities, ‘adventure and risk’ is a key selling point and motivator for participation along with being ‘close to nature’ and ‘relaxation’ are significant influences on recreation. This is significant for this investigation as the three priority activities identified clearly

fall under these motivators; walking for relaxation while mountaineering and mountain biking for adventure and risk.

In relation to Figure 5, Pigram & Jenkins (2006) stated that having access to a car is an important factor in determining participation in outdoor recreation. This is clearly seen in Figure 5 as it highlights how important the car has become for recreation, especially in a rural area like the Antrim Coast and Glens. This is significant as it clearly highlights how the area is not perceived as a holiday destination where people drive to and stay a long period of time. Quite the opposite in fact, as people drive to their recreation destination (e.g. Glenariff Forest Park), park their car, and then drive home again which can be linked to the literature as it was stated that many people find the journey to the recreation venue to be part of the experience (Pigram & Jenkins, 2006). However, this issue may change in the future as recreation scenarios change with more people wanting activities closer to the work place so transport options like walking and cycling may increase. Furthermore, a significant issue in this part of the survey was the low response for public transport as this shows that this is lacking in the area, especially for the likes of recreation users. However, once again, this may change in the future in the AONB if mobility becomes more difficult for recreation users and people try to minimise travel costs by using more public transport.

The next issue in relation to the survey results was how people got information regarding recreation in the AONB. As it is seen as the least popular area for recreation compared to the Causeway Coast and Binevenagh, it was expected that the greatest response for this part of the questionnaire would be 'local knowledge' as more locals would tend to use the area. However, it can be seen in Figure 6 that the 'internet' was the second highest response indicating that this is an important issue of recreation in the area as information online and in the media ultimately allow more leisure activities to be considered as stated by the Henley Centre, (2005); Pigram & Jenkins (2006). A further increase in information available on the internet could ultimately help towards a greater understanding of recreation in the AONB as well as an increase in participation, especially in the priority activities. Furthermore, the option of 'organised events' received a low proportion of responses in the survey

even though this is seen by many as an influential element in turning non-participants into participants. Therefore, this is significant for the investigation as an increase in local and large scale recreation events in the area could provide an increase in activities as highlighted by Tivers (2008) in the literature.

It was encouraging that the results showed overall satisfaction with the Antrim Coast and Glens to be very high (Figure 7). However, from Figure 8, it is clear there are issues that could be improved in order to enhance recreation in the area. The significance of these results is that both ‘improved access’ and ‘partnerships with landowners’ received the greatest response, highlighting the issues are clearly important in the Antrim Coast and Glens. This was emphasised in the literature as being a major issue as it creates tension between those participating in recreation and those who own the land. Pearman *et al*, (2003) indicated that outdoor recreation is seen by many as an economically negative issue as it creates conflicts with farmers and dwellers. Therefore, as highlighted by both the literature and the results of the survey, access to recreation is still a major concern in the area and in Northern Ireland, especially for the priority activities of walking, mountain biking and mountaineering.

Interview Analysis & Photographic Survey

Using the three priority activities identified in the survey results (Figure 2), both the interviews and photographic survey were based upon these types of outdoor recreation. As mentioned, walking was expected to be the most popular activity as it covers a range of recreational activities which at one end is casual, irregular and short distances, through to long distance challenge walking on a regular basis. From the two interviews with the Countryside Officers from Larne and Ballymena Council, it was recognised that like the survey results, walking was clearly the most popular activity. In establishing walking as a priority activity, the interviews highlight once again the issue of access that determines whether the activity can be successful or not. Both Council members mention the issues of “*private land*” and “*landowners*,” therefore, like the survey results and the literature, public access is a problem for many locals and policy makers involved in rural development (Flegg, 2004). However, Figures 9&10 show how the Antrim Hills Way has become a

popular part of the walking infrastructure in the AONB, with improved access and signage this has become important for the area especially as walking is constantly used for the health benefits, as highlighted in the literature and survey.

“With mountain biking trail projects progressing, Northern Ireland is set to become an attractive venue for mountain bikers” (Outdoor Recreation NI, 2012: p.3). This statement, along with the survey results and interviews reinforces the position of mountain biking as a priority activity in the AONB. The interviews and photographic survey highlighted Glenariff Forest Park as being an area with huge potential for the activity if the product could be achieved in the same way as it has been in the Mourne. As mentioned in the interview with the Countryside Officer from Larne, the activity takes place “*illegally*” and is “*not insured*” therefore if these issues could be addressed it could be successful. The interview with the representative from TrailBadger highlighted how difficult it is to have official mountain biking trails as it would take “*at least 5 years of lobbying, campaigning and effort.*” However, in relation to the survey and the literature regarding the issue of motivation, mountain biking is an activity that is seen as providing the feelings of adventure, risk and excitement which are significant drivers for participation in many recreation activities (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003). This desire for ‘adventure and risk,’ ‘being close to nature’ and ‘health and well-being’ were established in this interview, “*There is a great rush with flying down a tight trail and having to concentrate...and many people do it for fitness and the views as much as the ride down.*” With this in mind, the construction of the mountain bike trail in the Mourne (Figures 17&18), highlights that this priority activity can be successful in the Antrim Coast and Glens if it can be managed in the right way.

Using mountaineering as the final priority recreation activity, it can be seen from the results that this activity has potential in the area. At Ballygally Head (Figures 13&14) it is evident that this is an area that can be used for the activity and is being used but once again there are issues regarding the legality of it taking place, as highlighted in the interview with Cairndhu Golf Club. Being the landowners, the golf club “*try and make sure it doesn’t happen and we have the appropriate signage to try and stop this...although there are still climbers using the site.*” This is

significant as the issue of ‘commonage’ mentioned in the literature is linked to the activity of mountaineering at Ballygally Head as those using the area see it as a public good (Flegg, 2004). Furthermore the signs displayed at the site prohibiting climbing, highlight what Rafferty (2005) stated in relation to landowners displaying signs to discourage access to areas like this. President of Queen’s University Mountaineering Club recognised these issues in the interview but also highlighted how the activity is seen as something that instils “*excitement*” in the participant as well as better “*fitness*.” Again this highlights the issues mentioned in the literature and also emphasises the results of the survey. Ultimately, the research results discussed here have addressed the key aims and objectives stated previously in determining priority recreation activities, what motivations people have for participating and issues affecting outdoor recreation.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions & Recommendations

“Life is best enjoyed when time periods are evenly divided between labour, sleep, and recreation...all people should spend one-third of their time in which is rebuilding, voluntary activity, never idleness” (Brigham Young 1801-1877). The importance of outdoor recreation is highlighted in this statement and ultimately reinforces the importance it has in terms of an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens. This thesis has set out to establish the recreation activities that have the greatest potential for growth in the area so it can develop into a successful recreation destination. In this final section, the overarching aim and objectives will be addressed demonstrating how they have been achieved and how they ultimately can be interpreted for recommendations. The major research outputs from the investigation will be addressed for the concluding section showing how this thesis has contributed towards outdoor recreation in the AONB.

Revisiting the aims and objectives of this thesis and how these were achieved throughout the research will allow for substantial recommendations and conclusions to be made. As stated previously, the overarching aim was to deepen the understanding of recreation in the area by finding priority activities that should be developed in order to increase the potential of the AONB. Furthermore, to recognise important factors that relate to participation in outdoor recreation and how they ultimately affect the priority activities; factors motivating people to participate and barriers to participation like access to sites. Determining motivating factors for recreation participation was achieved by reviewing the broad range of literature and establishing those issues that were important for activities taking place in the AONB. In doing so, this allowed for a section in the survey to be informed by these issues so the results would indicate the main motivations for recreation in the area being investigated. Determining what recreation activities were the most popular in the AONB was achieved by using the survey questionnaire and highlighting the three activities that were the most popular but also that have potential. This in turn allowed the interviews with the key stakeholders to be influenced by the survey results so that a greater understanding of the activities and factors affecting them could be explored.

Recommendations

The popularity and range of walking as an activity suggests that an appropriate range of walks and areas of open access should be available in the AONB. This has improved greatly over the years with the success of the Antrim Hills Way but it should be further developed to encourage greater participation especially in this area. It is recommended that there should be relatively short walking trails around centres of population that make the most of the attractive landscapes; as well as continued growth in the longer walking routes and way marked ways within easy travelling distance. The large potential market which does not have ready access to a car needs to be catered for in terms of direct walking links and public transport. To further enhance the activity in the area, the most important issue remains the achievement of agreement with landowners, predominantly farmers, for improved access. If access can be improved for the walking infrastructure, this could lead to better waymarked ways and an enhanced product for the activity. Furthermore, an increase in organised events and information available (online) promoting the activity, like the Walk the Glens Festival, is recommended as it would inevitably motivate participants for reasons of health as previously mentioned.

Mountain biking is an activity that has a number of sub-disciplines and is an activity that has proven to be popular in the area and so it is recommended for further promotion. In particular, as the interview with TrailBadger and photographic survey highlighted, Glenariff Forest Park has huge potential to develop the activity in the area. If this site could be developed in the same way as the new project in the Mourne, the activity would definitely prosper. As it is a recreation activity linked with the motivations of adventure and risk as well as health and well-being, having an official mountain biking trail in the AONB is highly recommended. Furthermore, economically it would be beneficial to the local area as will be seen with the completion of the trail in the Mourne. It is recommended that considerable attention is paid to this activity as it has potential in the area as there are large areas of land not being used for recreation in the area, e.g. Glenariff Forest Park. Furthermore, from the results it is obvious that the activity is taking place already, the basis of tracks exist so to develop it officially would be recommended.

Ultimately, during the current economic climate this recommendation may not be practical but in the future the creation of mountain bike routes in the area will add to the overall activity product. Until more sites are provided there is little point in trying to restrict access to current unofficial sites such as Glenariff as this runs the risk of stymieing an activity like mountain biking. If new facilities can be required for mountain biking then it can be formalised and provide a recreation product that can attract day visitors in search of ‘adventure and risk.’

Mountaineering in the AONB is pursued but it can be established from the interviews that the overarching issue of access will determine whether or not the activity is successful. The survey results indicated that there is a population participating in the activity for those motivating factors of adventure and risk previously mentioned. It has to be recognised that there is also an important issue relating to safety in this activity especially at Ballygally Head, therefore recommendations for the promotion of the activity have to take this into account. Figures 13&14 show the site’s proximity to the main road so any recommendations would have to consider the safety involved and whether proper management could be put in place to deal with this proximity by maybe installing car parking facilities so recreation users are not crossing the road. Furthermore, the interview with Cairndhu Golf Club indicated their stance regarding the activity, so it is recommended that agreements between the landowners and recreation users are improved the activity can improve. It has to be recognised that although the central focus for this investigation centred on the top three recreational activities in the AONB, local authorities and organisations must ensure that other activities are not forgotten and are promoted as opportunities arise.

Conclusions

To conclude, there is great scope for positive development of the above outlined recreational activities and organisations like CCGHT should proactively push the top three recreation activities established from this investigation: walking, mountain biking and mountaineering. This investigation has established both the most popular outdoor recreation activities in the area as well as the reasons why people participate in recreation. Ultimately the reasons why people participate in recreation established

in both the survey results and the literature allows for a greater perspective of what recreation demands there will be in the future. Furthermore, by establishing priority activities, reasons for participation and barriers to participation provides a deeper understanding of how such factors work to influence patterns of leisure and recreation in the area.

With the Antrim Coast and Glens being considered the least popular for recreation, there is a need to establish it as a recreation destination that can attract visitors not just from local areas but from further a field. By highlighting the major issues in relation to motivation to participate in outdoor recreation, this thesis has established what activities and situations will prevail in the coming years. Activities like walking that provide the feelings of relaxation as well as health and specialised activities like mountain biking and mountaineering that provide the feelings of adventure and achievement. An important factor in this investigation is the issue of access for recreation activities, something that is vitally important. This investigation highlighted this as one of the main barriers to recreation both from the literature and from the survey results as those participating indicated this was a concern for the improvement of the area. With this in mind, this investigation has contributed to the fact that there should be an emphasis placed on joint working which is strategic and coordinated. This is the case in terms of the possible access links to recreation sites especially for the priority activities mentioned.

It should be acknowledged that there are limitations to this investigation and addressing these in the future will ultimately lead to further research on the issues presented here. As mentioned previously, the surveys were conducted in areas where walking was naturally the most popular activity. If this was to be addressed in the future, surveys could be done in areas of specialised recreation activities but it is difficult to determine when these activities take place so this has to be taking into account. Furthermore, as mentioned previously as the Antrim Coast and Glens area is the largest out of the three AONB's, time constraints on the investigation have to be recognised. With this in mind, further development of the investigation in the future should take this into consideration so a larger proportion of the area can be represented. The analysis involved in this investigation highlighted the main issues

relevant to the aims and objectives but again this was limited in terms of the number of participants in the survey, so if there was a larger population involved this would enhance the investigation.

Ultimately, this investigation has highlighted the need to understand latent demand, as well as existing activity in the area and the complexity involved in participating in recreation. With better understanding, more should be done to encourage new recreation users in the area based on those motivating factors highlighted and based upon the three priority recreation activities identified. At a local level, developing a self-image of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB -domestically and internationally- as a location that is in touch with the outdoors, feels a sense of ‘belonging’ of it, and is at ease recreating in it, would be desirable for encouraging a generally more positive attitude towards outdoor recreation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Antrim Coast and Glens (AONB) Outdoor Recreation Survey Questionnaire

Date:

Day of week:

Area of AONB where interview took place:

Hello, my name is Joseph Timlin and I am an Environmental Management Student from Queen's University Belfast. I am investigating outdoor recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens for my MSc Thesis. May I ask you a few questions? (It will take about 5 mins)

a. I just need to check first- Are you aged 18+? Yes No
(Please circle)

(If No- Thank and close interview)

1. What recreation activity do you usually participate in within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB? (Please tick one)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Walking | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Cycling | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mountain Biking | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mountaineering | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Horse Riding | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Orienteering | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Off-road motor sports | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Canoeing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Angling | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sub aqua | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2. What mode of transport do you normally use to travel to the recreation activity?(Please tick one)

- Walk ☐
- Car ☐
- Bus ☐
- Taxi ☐
- Other ☐

3. Overall how many times a week do you take part in recreation activities in the AONB? (Please tick one)

- Once a week ☐
- Twice a week ☐
- Three times a week ☐
- Four times a week ☐
- Five times a week ☐
- > Five times a week ☐

4. What is your reason for taking part in outdoor recreation in the AONB? (Please tick one).

- Motivational- Relaxation ☐
- Achievement ☐
- Adventure ☐
- Health ☐
- Close to nature ☐
- Place attachment ☐

5. Where did you get information about outdoor recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens? (Please tick one)

Live locally/local knowledge ☐

Word of mouth ☐

Brochure/Tourist centre ☐

Internet ☐

Advert in paper/magazine ☐

Other events ☐

Other (please specify)

6. How could recreation activities be improved in the AONB? (Please tick one)

Signage ☐

More facilities ☐

Availability of public transport ☐

Information boards ☐

Better partnerships with landowners ☐

Safety ☐

Improved Access ☐

Organised events ☐

Any other comments please specify in space below:

7. Overall how satisfied are you with recreation in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB?(Please tick one)

Very satisfied ☐

Quite satisfied ☐

Neither satisfied or dissatisfied ☐

Quite dissatisfied ☐

Very dissatisfied ☐

Don't know ☐

That is the end of the questionnaire, thank-you very much for your assistance and for completing the questionnaire.

Appendix 2

Interview Transcript- Larne Borough Council

Interviewer: Joseph Timlin (Queen's University Belfast)

Interviewee: Countryside Officer- Larne Borough Council

Interview Setting: Interview conducted in Larne Leisure Centre on Monday 25th June 2012 at 10:30am.

(Start of interview)

In the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and your own council area of Larne, what are the most popular recreation activities?

The most popular activities are the normal activities that most that a great number of people pursue; walking/rambling, road cycling, fishing and so on but there are other recreation activities that are growing in the area.

In relation to walking and rambling, we know there are forest parks in the area and also the Antrim Hills Way but being the most popular activity how can it be improved/what has been done to improve it?

Compared to other areas in Northern Ireland like the Mourne AONB and areas in England and Wales like the Lake District, there is a small population of walkers in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, approximately 1% of avid walkers. For the Antrim Hills Way, as I said there is not a lot of people using this area compared to the Mourne but nonetheless it is still popular for walkers. In terms of managing the Antrim Hills Way, this has improved a lot over the last ten years or so. Beforehand, the signage and guidance on the route itself was very poor and also the maintenance and access were an issue. So because of this, it could not be marketed effectively in order to promote it. Thankfully this has improved with appropriate signage and access has improved with 10 waymarked ways. People counters were installed at access points on the route but they proved inaccurate but did allow for some guidance on how many people are using the area. Landowners cooperate to allow access on to their land, most of them do not want to sign any contract in relation to

the NIE landowner agreement but having their approval to allowing access is enough for the Antrim Hills Way.

How is this management maintained on the Antrim Hills Way? For example the problem of litter or damage to crossing points etc?

We have an excellent resource in place now for the last few years. There are now rangers to look after the walk way, both WalkNI and CycleNI use this recourse to manage routes and it has definitely helped the Antrim Hills Way. The rangers are just volunteers from the local area and there are two for the Antrim Hills Way area and there are approximately 50 for the whole of Northern Ireland.

Walking is obviously the most popular recreation activity in the AONB but in your opinion is there any potential to promote any other activities in the area? Or what activities are also popular in the area other than walking, cycling etc?

Mountain biking is growing more popular but in the Larne Council area itself there are no facilities. Glenariff Forest Park, although not in the Larne Borough, has great potential for mountain biking. It takes place there but illegally, its not insured or managed so if this could be done properly it would be good for the AONB as a whole. Other activities like motorbike scrambling and off-road quad driving take place but it has proven to be a huge problem because of the noise and damage to land. Mountaineering/rock climbing takes place in the council area but unfortunately it is also illegal. At Ballygally head it takes place but it is just too close to the main road so safety to drivers is an issue. The area is actually perfect for climbing and is used regularly but safety and liability is too important.

Appendix 3

Interview Transcript- Ballymena Borough Council

Interviewer: Joseph Timlin (Queen's University Belfast)

Interviewee: Countryside Officer Ballymena Council

Interview Setting: Interview conducted at Ballymena Showgrounds Complex, Warden Street Ballymena on 3rd July 2012.

(Start of interview)

In the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB and your own council area of Ballymena, what are the most popular recreation activities?

For the areas of the AONB that are in our council area, walking and rambling are the most popular, there are a lot more walking/rambling locations in the area than other activities. The trail from Slemish to Glenarm, part of the Ulster Way is promoted within the council area and proves to be a popular route. There are actually no 'extreme' recreation activities in our area.

In relation to recreation in the area, especially walking, what issues arise regarding access to walking areas?

A large proportion of the land is privately owned by landowners, especially around Slemish and these factors of ownership determine recreation. Yes this is the case in the Glens areas as well but the Ballymena is made up of small field patterns and access through land is difficult, so it is not as popular as the Glens. As well as this there are concerns regarding that many of the local trails are on-road instead of being off-road. If better access could be agreed for off-road trails it would be better.

How could this type of recreation be improved in the council area?

The area itself is not as popular as the Glens area but it still provides a great resource for walking in the AONB as a whole. As mentioned, obviously if there was better access to walking trails in the area this would benefit the activity. There is also a few areas of forest that are underused for walking so if these could be improved it

would again help. Overall the area is lacking in recreation and to market recreation in this part takes a lot of resources but with better management and promotion the area might be able to be more popular.

Appendix 4

Interview Transcript- TrailBadger

Interviewer: Joseph Timlin (Queen's University Belfast)

Interviewee: Representative from TrailBadger.com

Interview Setting: Phone Interview- Conducted on 21st August 2012

(Start of Interview)

After completing a survey in the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, Mountain Biking was seen to be one of the most popular activities. Walking was the most popular but is interesting that mountain biking received a large proportion of responses. With this in mind, what is the current position regarding mountain biking in the area?

It's easy why walking would receive the largest response but mountain biking definitely is growing in the area. There is the casual use, racing, the hardcore jumpers and the general trail rider who like the ups and downs. There is a lot of activity to try and grow the sport and indeed many of the councils and the biggest relevant landowner (Forest Service) are actively interested in all of this, partly because of the public clamour for facilities (which really are terribly lacking compared to other areas, such as Southern Scotland, Wales and England), but also because of the economic and community spin-off benefits there have been in regions that have taken it seriously and got their product right.

The activity is taking place in places like Glenariff Forest Park in the AONB but this is not official. Is this a major issue in growing the activity?

The unsanctioned trail building and forest access goes on, as it's the only way to get out mountain-biking. E.g. If I started today and decided I wanted to go through the official channels to go out riding my bike, I might never get permission, unless I pay a hefty fee and sign a form, and certainly would not get permission quickly. And if I wanted to get proper trails built, I need to be an expert in funding, a political genius, and be prepared to wait and do at least 5 years of lobbying, campaigning and effort. I'm not having a pop at anyone here, but that's just the way things sit, and we're very keen to participate in anything that helps get sanctioned trails and access for Northern Ireland.

Is finance and access to certain area an issue for mountain biking in the AONB?

Finance for public bodied to be free up to develop the facilities, yes. Because of the ground here and how wet it is, and the number of different types of recreation and user types ion areas like this, trails need to be separate, armoured with stone, and interfaces need to be carefully managed so that people don't crash into each other (walkers, bikers, runners, cars). Liability is the big one and that leads to sticklers around access and permission. Who is responsible if someone careers off? That is an important issue and a source of great fear for the public bodies, so there has been this impasse for many years.

As mentioned, walking is the most popular activity but mountain biking also received favourable responses. How could mountain biking be further developed in the AONB?

The whole Binevenagh/Glens region should and could be covered with well-managed environmentally sensitive trail networks. Like what happens in Scotland, Wales, England, Spain, France, USA, Canada, etc. etc. Groups like us are keen to see trails developed and indeed to get involved in making it happen and maintaining the trails using volunteer support as part of a wider community effort. There is a massive gap between what people want and what the public bodies understand mountain biking to be.

It is seen as a specialised activity because it is quite dangerous. As well as the danger, what motivates people to participate in the activity?

Very little of it is dangerous. Only the extreme jumping and downhill stuff is dangerous, which is why those people are all padded up with full face helmets and goggles etc. that is the minority extreme. Most people want to blast around a forest or along a trail and they have absolutely no desire to put themselves or others in danger. There is a great rush with flying down a tight trail and having to concentrate, but most people do it for fitness, so they enjoy the climbs and the views as much as the ride down.

Are there many organised events in the area or in N.I as a whole where it could be promoted by people going to observe?

There is loads of stuff on all the time. Most mountain biking activity is informal and not through organised groups. It is just groups of friends who meet up and go biking, typically for a few hours at a time. There is of course a buoyant race scene too which is administered by Cycling Ulster, with MTB races going on all the time. Mountain biking is also growing through the growth of sports like adventure racing, which includes navigating, running, and biking.

Appendix 5

Interview Transcript- Recreation NI

Interviewer: Joseph Timlin (Queen's University Belfast)

Interviewee: Product Development Manager for Recreation NI

Interview Setting: Interview conducted at Outdoor Recreation NI, The Stableyard, Barnett's Demesne, Malone Road, Belfast, on 6th July 2012.

(Start of Interview)

From survey results regarding recreation in the AONB, mountain biking was seen as being an activity which is popular. Does Recreation NI see this activity as having potential in the area?

There is great potential for mountain biking in the Antrim Coast and Glens as there are many forest areas where the activity can be developed. Areas like these have to take into consideration who would manage the activity, for example trails etc. and is usually down to us to establish agreements with landowners for such activities.

How could an area like the Antrim Coast and Glens develop an activity like mountain biking?

There is a new project being constructed in the Mourne Mountains in Castlewellan Forest Park and Kilbroney Forest Park which is going to be very successful. It is expected that 23,000 mountain biking visitors are expected by the end of year one bringing an estimated £1.1 million into the local economy as well as attracting major events such as the 2013 European Speed Championships. If an area like this could be developed in the Antrim Coast and Glens it would certainly have positive benefits.

How is the land being allowed to be used for the construction of mountain bike facilities? Is access not an issue?

Funding for the project has been secured by Outdoor Recreation NI from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Down District Council, Newry & Mourne Council.

The Northern Ireland Forest Service is leasing the land on which the trails are being built to the respective councils who will then take on the liability, management and ongoing maintenance of the trails. There is obviously a lack of major mountain biking facilities in Northern Ireland compared to other areas in the U.K but with this development, there should be growth in the area. There are other bike trails progressing and if it can be successful Northern Ireland is set to become an attractive venue for mountain bikers.

Appendix 6

Interview Transcript- Cairndhu Golf Club

Interviewer: Joseph Timlin (Queen's University Belfast)

Interviewee: Manager of Cairndhu Golf Club,

Interview Setting: Interview conducted at Cairndhu Golf Club on Tuesday 25th June 2012

(Start of Interview)

There is an issue of rock climbing at Ballygally head, what is the golf club's stance or opinion on this activity?

Cairndhu Golf Club is occupier of the surrounding land where the rock climbing is taking place and we have refused permission for climbing to take place here. It stems from any liability the club may have if climbers on our land cause an accident to road users because it is so close to the main road.

Climbing is still taking place, is there any way to make it legal or to have an agreement with climbers?

At the minute, no. The site is just too close to the road and although it still does take place, we are thankful no accidents have occurred. But no, we do not want climbing to take place at Ballygally head. Although it is seen by many as a perfect location

because of the quality of rock etc, it is far too dangerous with its proximity to the main coastal road.

How can the site be managed to make sure it doesn't take place?

We understand that it is difficult to manage the area because rock climbing is obviously a popular activity. We just try and make sure it doesn't happen and we have the appropriate signage in place to try and stop it from taking place. Again though, there are still climbers using the site and I think we will just have to discourage it the best we can so that no accidents take place. Maybe in the future, the activity may be safe in this location if better planning or management is implemented.

Appendix 7

Interview Transcript- Queen's University Mountaineering Club

Interviewer: Joseph Timlin (Queen's University Belfast)

Interviewee: President of Queen's University Mountaineering Club

Interview Setting: Interview conducted in Physical Education Centre (P.E.C) Queens University Belfast on 29th July 2012

(Start of interview)

In the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB are there any locations which you use for rock climbing?

At present we use Fairhead on a regular basis for day trips, usually at the weekend. Fairhead is most widely used because of the rock conditions are really suited and relatively safe compared to some other areas. Ballygally head is also used regularly, however, it is more difficult to access and take large groups here. There is also some strong opposition to the activity being carried out here, especially by the nearby golf club.

Currently, how would you describe the facilities at each of these two sites?

Fairhead is used the most by climbers, however, it is often difficult to get the right conditions to climb because the area is often left for months and can be overtaken by vegetation, which makes climbing conditions all the more difficult. When the vegetation is cut back, however, it is a great area for climbing. The only possible improvement is for bunkhouses to be built, these were proposed before but nothing has been done as of yet. These would help attract more people to the area. Also the routes here would be more travelled and stop the vegetation from overgrowing.

At Ballygally, because of climbing in the area being illegal, the main concern is to legalise it. The rock conditions are very good; however, realistically large groups could not attend because of the area being small. If more people expressed interest maybe a small car park could be incorporated and support from local people to advertise the area.

How could rock climbing in the area be improved?

The main point would have to be advertisement of rock climbing. As you drive toward Ballygally there is little or no advertisement of rock climbing. Advertising boards would benefit people visiting the area as it shows them that rock climbing happens in the area and this may be of interest to them. Also, those who take part in mountaineering do so as they feel the adrenaline rush and excitement and although it is risky, the safety involved makes it a Better management would allow the area to be more attractive and to allow the activity to be carried out on a larger scale and in a much safer manner- which is of huge importance for the activity. Also, a better agreement with the landowners, in this case the golf club would benefit the activity. If both the climbing groups and the nearby golf club could work together for an agreement about the activity, conflicting views on the issue would be addressed.