

Participation in Outdoor Sports Activity
Research Digest no.85

*A research digest for **sportscotland***

by

Sports Recreational Services

Published by:

© **sportscotland**
Caledonia House
South Gyle
Edinburgh
EH12 9DQ
Tel: 0131 317 7200

ISBN 1 85060 403 4
Price £4
August 2001

Acknowledgements

The research was undertaken by Andy Anderson of Sports Recreational Services. The report was written by Kirsty Noble, Research Manager, **sportscotland**.

Introduction

- 1 In September 1999 **sportscotland** commissioned Sports Recreational Services to carry out a short study of several aspects of outdoor activity participation and the role of the school experience.
- 2 This summary report provides key findings.

Background

- 3 There has been concern for some time that there has been a reduction in the availability of opportunities for young people to gain experience in a range of outdoor activities. The concern stems from the closure of many outdoor centres operated by Scotland's local authorities, the loss of specialist staff and the increasing pressures on the school curriculum and budgets. It has been suggested that these factors may have resulted in reduced opportunities, particularly for children from less well-off families. Reduced opportunities may also result in an overall decline in participation in future years.

Methods

- 4 The study was undertaken as part of a larger study involving face-to-face interviews with active outdoor participants. This sample was augmented by postal questionnaires and a questionnaire posted on the Glenmore Lodge website. The final sample was 1109 respondents with 765 of these postal or website and 344 face-to-face. The return rate for the postal questionnaire was 30%, the response rate for the face-to-face interviews was 95%.
- 5 The questionnaire is included as an appendix.

The Sample

- 6 The gender mix of the sample was 79% male and 21% female. All age groups over 16 were reasonably well represented. Most of the respondents were resident in Scotland, with the remainder from England and Wales. Where appropriate the results are reported using the reduced Scottish sample. The sample included participants from a wide range of sports including low level walking, hill walking, rock scrambling, rock climbing, canoeing, mountain biking, sailing/boating, orienteering, winter mountaineering, skiing/other snow sports, and hill running. The length of time they had been involved with outdoor activity ranged from beginners to those with over 25 years experience.

Main Findings

Method of first introduction

- 7 It is clear from Table 1 that although 25% of respondents had been first introduced to outdoor activity through school, the most common means of introduction was through parents or family friends.

Table1: Method of first introduction

Method	Percentage of respondents
Parental influence or family friend	32
Organised school activity	25
Youth organisation	14
Through university or FE	12
Own initiative	10
By joining a club	7

Base: all respondents

- 8 The older age groups were more likely than other age groups to have become involved initially through 'their own initiative' and the 25-34 age group had the highest proportions in the 'parents or family friend' category and the 'youth organisation' category. In the younger age group the two most important factors were 'parents or family friends' and 'organised school activity'. There is no significant difference between age groups in the proportion who were introduced to outdoor activity as an organised school activity.

Table 2: Method of first introduction by age

Method	15-24	25-34	35-44	45+
Percentage of respondents				
Parental influence or family friend	26	36	35	30
Organised school activity	26	23	25	25
Youth organisation	14	20	13	11
Through university or FE	18	9	10	10
Own initiative	5	8	11	17
By joining a club	8	6	6	7

Base: all respondents

Main factors influencing continuing participation

- 9 Respondents were asked what they considered to be the most important influence in terms of their continuing involvement. They ranked factors on a scale from 1 to 5. These have been grouped to highlight the most important (ranked 1 or 2) and least important factors (ranked 4 or 5)

Table 3: Factors in continuing participation

Factor	Most important	Least important
	Percentage of respondents	
Organised school activity	10	12
Parental influence or family friend	27	7
University or FE	10	10
Youth organisation	13	9
Joining a club	13	10
Own initiative	36	7

Base: all respondents

Note: percentages do not sum to 100 as respondents could give the same ranking to more than one option or could give no ranking to a particular option if they wished.

- 10 This table shows that the factors identified by the respondents to be most important in relation to current participation tend to be the influence of parents and family friends and their own initiative.
- 11 It is interesting to look at differences in these figures with age. Table 4 shows the proportion in each age group that gave each factor a score of 1 or 2 (i.e. most important).

Table 4: Factors in continuing participation by age

	15-24	25-34	35-44	45+
	Percentage of respondents			
An organised school activity	9	13	14	10
Parental influence or family friend	20	35	37	30
Through university or FE	13	16	15	10
Youth organisation	19	16	17	12
Joining a club	13	15	20	22
Own initiative	21	41	43	46

Base: all respondents

- 12 The older age groups report that their own initiative was relatively important in their current involvement with outdoor activities. Joining a club tends to be of greater importance to older than younger age groups. Parents and family friends are important to all groups but particularly to the middle age groups (25-44). Organised school activity does not rate particularly highly but is of more importance to the middle age groups. Youth organisations may be of slightly more importance to younger respondents. It should be noted that respondents' answers will be affected by the passage of time. It is quite possible that if the younger respondents were asked the same question again in 20 years their 'own initiative' and 'clubs' might rate more highly.

The role of schools

- 13 The respondents were asked whether they had ever experienced outdoor activities at their school, and if so, whether it was at a residential centre. Fifty one per cent of respondents had had an outdoor activity experience at school. Twenty one per cent of the respondents had experienced outdoor activities through a residential centre.

Table 5: School outdoor activity experience by age (Scottish sample)

Age Group	Any	Residential
	Percentage of respondents	
15-24	62	26
25-34	47	20
35-44	54	21
45+	32	13
Total	51	21

Base: 678

Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme

- 14 Twenty three per cent of the sample had taken part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

Parental involvement

- 15 Twenty seven percent of respondents had parents involved in outdoor sports.

Other sports

- 16 The ten most common sports participated in by respondents were swimming (12%), keep fit (5%), athletics (5%), badminton (4%), cycling (3%), squash (3%), football (3%), weight training (3%), golf (2%), and tennis (2%). This is similar to participation in the general population but those involved in outdoor activities are more likely to play squash, tennis or be involved in athletics than in the population as a whole. The main sports which those involved in

outdoor activity had been involved in previously but have now given up include badminton (10%), squash (8%), rugby(8%) and football (7%).

Results from additional survey

- 17 The survey described above focused on those already involved in outdoor sports/activities. It was considered desirable to find out the situation in the Scottish population as a whole. A question was inserted in a Scottish omnibus survey to find out whether the respondents had taken part in outdoor activities, organised through school, that involved staying away from home overnight. This question is wider than the original as it does not refer to a 'residential centre' and may reasonably be expected to provide higher figures than the original. The results are shown in Table 6

Table 6: Percentage of respondents who have ever taken part in outdoor activities, organised through school that involved staying away from home overnight	
Sex (16+)	Percentage of respondents
Male	35
Female	28
Age	
12-15	40
16-24	52
25-34	39
35-54	37
55+	13
Social class (16+)	
AB	47
C1	32
C2	31
DE	22
Total (16+)	32

Base: 972

Results from System Three Omnibus Survey

- 18 Table 6 shows that those most likely to have had a residential outdoor activity experience through school are those in the younger age groups (12-15 and 16-24), males, and those in higher social classes (there is a steady and significant decline from ABs to DEs).
- 19 The experience of the younger age groups suggests that there is no real evidence of an overall reduction in opportunity over time but this overall picture may be misleading. There is no information available on the length or quality of the experience, the extent to which places are subsidised and change over time.

Possible future research

- 20 Further work might explore what is happening in schools now – opportunities, take up, issues of cost and quality, identification of areas of concern, local authority policies and practice, and the extent of outdoor education/activity opportunities available to the less well-off.

Summary

- 21 This study was undertaken as an initial investigation to provide an insight into participation and influencing factors.
- 22 School outdoor activity experience declines with social class. Those in the DE group are very much less likely to have had an overnight outdoor activity experience through school than the other social groupings.
- 23 Parents and family friends are very important in introducing people to outdoor activities (32%) followed by an organised school activity (25%).
- 24 The oldest age group (45+) is unlikely to have had a school outdoor activity experience (13%), but among the younger age groups the figure for 16-24 year olds is 52%, with the middle age groups (25-44) around 38%.
- 25 There is no significant difference between age groups in the proportion who were **first** introduced to outdoor activity as an organised school activity.
- 26 The school experience is only one of several factors influencing involvement. The importance of parents and family friends suggests that increasing participation is most likely to be effective amongst those who already have some early experience and knowledge of outdoor activities and will be more difficult among those who have not.