

1995 - 2010 TRENDS IN WALKING, CYCLING & HORSE RIDING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Introduction

In February 2010, Sport Northern Ireland (Sport NI) commissioned the Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN) to undertake a research project to collect data on regular participation in walking, cycling and horse riding and to assess trends in these activities during the past 10 years.

This study is a continuation of the report 'Trends in Outdoor Recreation (1995-2008) – Towards a New Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Northern Ireland' which was also undertaken for Sport NI by CAAN (2009) and which considered a further 23 outdoor activities.

Project Methodology

The project had three stages

1. Data collection and collation
2. Population of data onto a Geographical Information System (GIS)
3. Drafting of formal report.

Data was collected from a wide range of organisations including:

- National Governing Bodies (NGB's)
- Local Councils
- Statutory authorities including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and
- Other stakeholders including the National Trust and Mourne Heritage Trust.

Data was collected using a variety of techniques including phone calls, email correspondence and one-to-one meetings. In addition, a range of templates specifying the data required was issued to the relevant representatives for completion. The information required to be detailed within the templates included venues, facilities, events, participation, trends and factors affecting future development.

The data collection phase of the project highlighted significant difficulties in obtaining accurate statistical data on participation levels. Particularly in walking and cycling where

informal participation makes up the majority of all participation. In general terms, the smaller the participation levels within an activity and more formal the activity, the greater the amount of accurate data available.

A series of maps were produced to illustrate venues where the three activities take place with the use of the programme ArcGIS 10. In order to produce these maps the following GIS data was used:

- Formal and informal sites – a study highlighting publicly owned land used for outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland (Research published by CAAN in 2010)
- Quality walks and cycle trails – GIS data published on the websites WalkNI.com and CycleNI.com

It is important to note that the veracity of the data provided and the conclusions drawn from the data was dependent on the accuracy of the information received from the stakeholders.

Key trends in walking, cycling and horse riding the past 15 years

1. All three activities have shown significant growth in participation levels which has been ascertained either by direct comparison of data or through anecdotal information from users, NGB's and retail outlets (in the case of cycling).
2. The largest increase in participation was informal in nature and this was particularly true for walking and cycling.
3. A number of new organisations, structures and initiatives have been put in place with the goal to facilitate increased participation including new websites (Walk NI, Cycle NI), initiatives such as the walking for health programme, the new quality walks and way marked ways etc.
4. The number of venues used for all of these activities has risen with a significant increase in the use of informal sites due to a lack of managed access.

5. The recreational element within cycling clubs and horse riding organisations is gaining in popularity.
6. The number of events for recreational walking, cycling and horse riding have significantly increased
7. There has been a very significant increase in the number of charity events and challenge walks taking place within the past 5 years.

Factors Affecting Development in walking, cycling and horse riding

1. All three activities experience difficulties when attempting to develop and secure off-road access on both public and private land. The three key issues affecting development are fears over litigation, public liability and the lack of legislative support.
2. The creation and maintenance of access to both private and public land involves substantial financial costs. Securing funding is becoming more difficult not only because of the current economic climate but also due to what are perceived to be unreasonable bureaucratic procedures. Additionally, it is apparent that funding programmes tend to be focussed on capital development and little thought is given to providing further support to maintain projects, once launched.

3. A lack of consistent and reliable statistical data on participation levels was highlighted in all three activities. In particular, it was practically impossible to obtain any information about participation levels of women, disabled individuals, ethnic minorities or those from TSN areas. The absence of such data is problematic when trying to justify the need for future development in these activities.
4. The lack of access to off-road or traffic free routes is a major safety concern especially for cyclists and horse riders. The low awareness level of motorists' is adding to these concerns.

Trends in walking, cycling and horse riding 1995-2010

It should be noted that while there were no statistics on cycling and horse riding participation in 1995 per se – the anecdotal evidence from clubs and other organisations has shown that there is a significant growth.

The figures produced through this study will act as a suitable baseline for future participation surveys.

ACTIVITY	NO. OF VENUES USED (FORMAL & INFORMAL)		NO. OF CLUBS		NO. OF PARTICIPANTS (AFFILIATED & NON AFFILIATED)	
	1995	2010	1995	2010	1995	2008
Walking	N/A	862	19	33	5,090	12,846
Cycling	N/A	133	N/A	46	N/A	2,053
Horse Riding	N/A	48	N/A	44	N/A	7,013*

*N.B. Some members are often affiliated to more than one horse riding organisation

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