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Countryside Recreation Network

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- gives easy access to information on countryside and related recreation matters
- reaches organisations and individuals in the public, private and voluntary sectors networks thousands of interested people

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### **Liaison:**

to promote information exchange relating to countryside recreation, and to foster general debate about relevant trends and issues.

### **Good Practice:**

to spread information to develop best practice through training and professional development in provision for and management of countryside recreation.

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Countryside Recreation is free and is published three times a year. We welcome articles and letters from all readers.

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# *Editorial*

# *“A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise” - Executive Summary*

*Jules Pretty, Murray Griffin, Jo Peacock, Rachel Hine, Martin Sellens and Nigel South, University of Essex*



## **Introduction**

How does nature make us feel? Much, of course, depends on what else is important in our lives. Is it a good or a bad day? Irrespective of where we come from, it seems that the presence of living things makes us feel good. They help us when we feel stressed, and if there is green vegetation, blue sky and water in the scene, then we like it even more. This idea that the quality of nature affects our mental health is not a new one, but it has not greatly affected the planning of our urban and rural environments, nor the setting of public health priorities.

In the UK, more than 80% of people live in urban areas (Defra, 2004), though the greater growth is now in rural areas. Urban settings by definition have less nature than rural ones. And less green nature means reduced mental well-being, or at least less opportunity to recover from mental stress. As natural green environments have increasingly come under pressure from economic development, so it seems our own

wellbeing has suffered as a consequence.

Today, stress and mental ill-health are becoming more common, and the associated public health costs are growing. The World Health Organisation estimates that depression and depression-related illness will become the greatest source of ill-health by 2020. This is partly because some other behaviours, such as smoking, over-eating and high alcohol consumption, are likely to be coping mechanisms for mental ill-health and stress, and have their own serious consequences. In addition, many urgent physical health challenges, including obesity and coronary heart disease, are also connected to sedentary lifestyles. Yet it is known that physically active people have a lower risk of dying from coronary heart disease, type II diabetes, hypertension and colon cancer. In the UK, there is evidence for a dramatic fall in physical activity over the past 50 years.

## Purpose of Research

There is substantial evidence that links the natural environment with good physical health and psychological well-being. The 'Biophilia Hypothesis' states that the desire for contact with nature is partly innate. As both physical activity and nature can positively affect well-being, we have undertaken research to explore the synergy in adopting physical activities whilst being directly exposed to nature. We have called this 'green exercise'.

## Evidence

The evidence indicates that nature can make positive contributions to our health, help us recover from pre-existing stresses or problems, have an 'immunising' effect by protecting us from future stresses, and help us to concentrate and think more clearly. We have discerned three levels of engagement with nature:

- i. viewing nature – as through a window, or in a painting;
- ii. being in the presence of nearby nature – which may be incidental to some other activity, such as walking or cycling to work, reading on a garden seat or talking to friends in a park; and
- iii. active participation and involvement with nature – such as gardening, farming, trekking, camping, cross-country running or horse-riding.

Most evidence, though, comes from the USA, Scandinavia and Japan. There there have been few UK studies on the effect of nature on health, and very little research has investigated the separate effects of social capital on well-being.

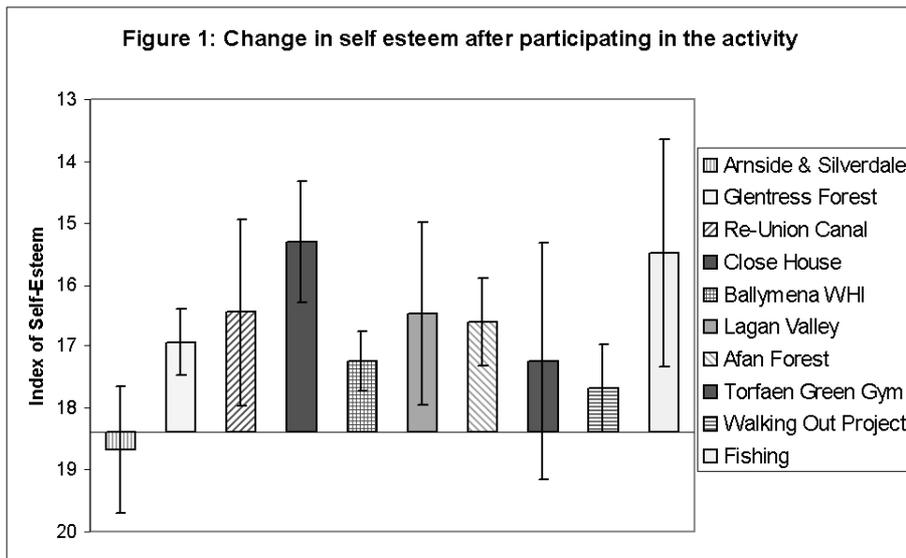
## Methodology

In this report, we have reviewed on existing green exercise studies in the UK on the effects of the view from the window (University of Essex), on Walking for Health Initiatives, and Green Gyms (conservation activities for health).

We have also undertaken research on the effects of active participation in the countryside. To do this, we conducted a quantitative analysis of the effects of ten countryside activities in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales on the health of 263 people. The range of projects incorporated both group activities (such as the health walks) and activities in which people undertook part on their own. This enabled us to examine whether the health benefits of green exercise were affected by a variation in social capital context. The projects are shown in the box.

- 1 Arnsdale & Silverdale AONB, Lancashire, England – conservation work
- 2 Glentworth Forest Recreation, Borders, Scotland – mountain biking and walking;
- 3 Re-Union Canal Boats, Edinburgh, Scotland – canal boating;
- 4 Close House Initiative, Herefordshire, England – woodland activities;
- 5 Walking the Way to Health Initiative (WHI), Ballymena, County Antrim, Northern Ireland - walking;
- 6 Horse riding club, Lagan Valley, County Antrim, Northern Ireland – horse riding;
- 7 Afan Forest Centre, Port Talbot, West Glamorgan, Wales – mountain biking and walking;
- 8 Torfaen Green Gym, Pontypool, Gwent, Wales – conservation work;
- 9 Walking Out Project, Lincoln, England - walking;
- 10 Layer Pit fishing club, Essex, England - fishing

The data from people taking part in the ten green exercise case studies was obtained in the field by means of a composite questionnaire, which was administered both before and after the activity. The questionnaire was designed to fit all scenarios including different levels of activity and engagement and contained questions relating to basic data, physical health, mental health and physical activity. It also included an opportunity to gather qualitative narratives. Components of the questionnaire consisted of standardised and widely used formats (Euroqol EQ-5D, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Profile of Mood States test), together with additional questions particular to this research.



**Results of the Research**

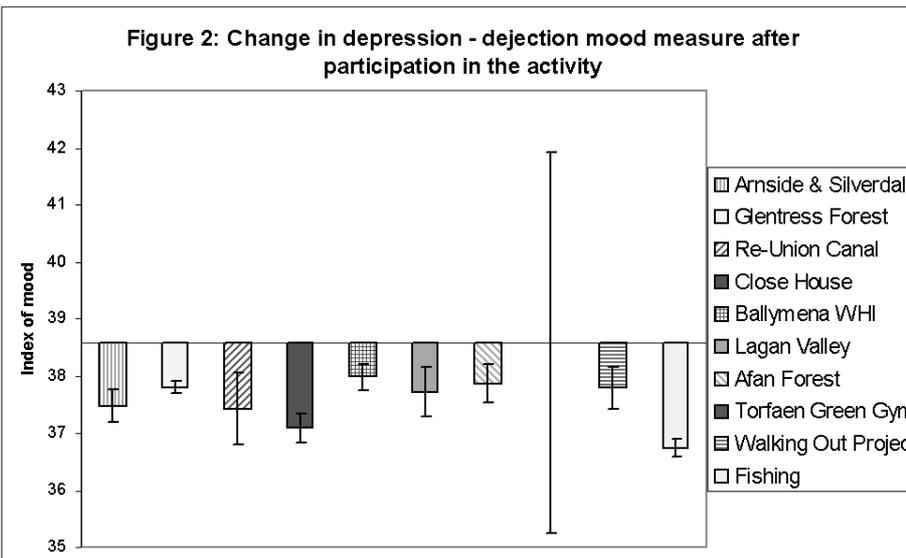
The ten case studies represented a variety of activities that took place in diverse contexts with varying durations and intensities. The amount of activity varied from 100-650 calories per hour and from 330 to 3500 calories per visit.

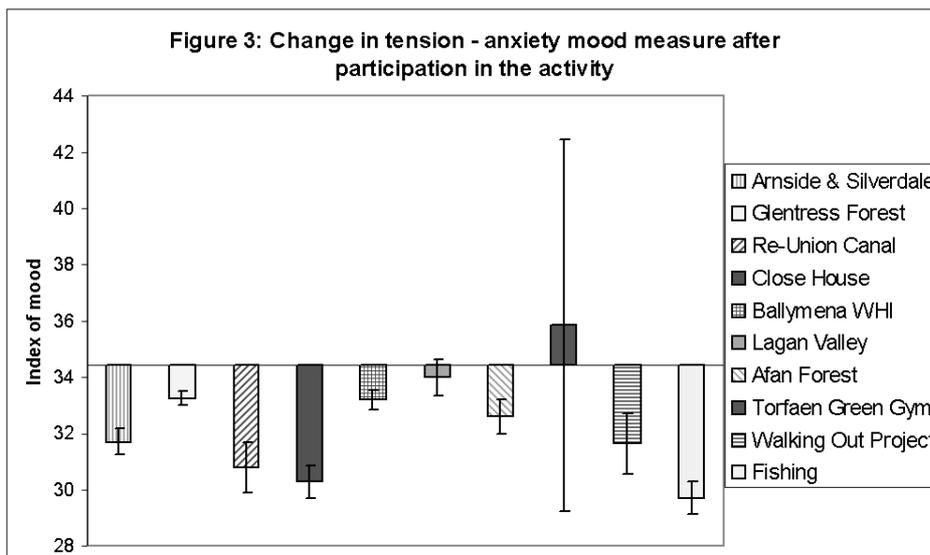
As a result of green exercise, there was a significant improvement in self-esteem in 9 out of the 10 case studies, excluding Arnside and Silverdale (where participants had an arduous and long day) (Figure 1). The largest change was detected amongst the Close House participants, followed closely by the fishing group. The smallest increases in self esteem were found in both the walking project groups and the

Green Gym. [Note a decrease in score equals an increase in self-esteem].

We found that self-esteem was significantly correlated with an individual's body weight. The heavier the body weight reported, the poorer the self esteem score. We also found that self-esteem was not affected by the intensity of the green exercise activities, though it did appear to rise over very long visits. This is an encouraging finding as it implies that all intensities and durations of activity generate significant mental health benefits.

We also gathered data on the six mood measures assessed using the POMS method. Mood is measured according to six characteristic themes:





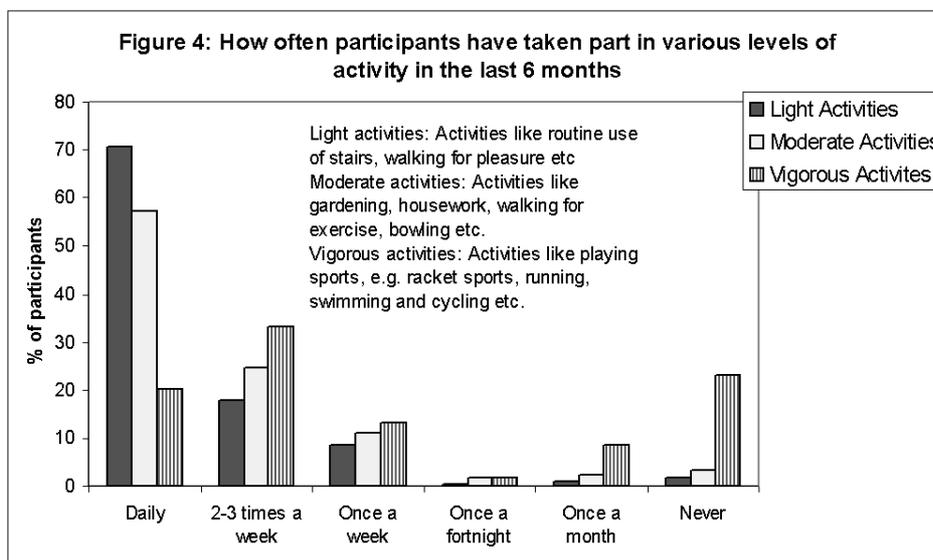
anger-hostility, confusion-bewilderment, depression-dejection, fatigue-inertia, tension-anxiety, and vigour-activity. The majority of these showed significant positive changes in most of the projects (see Figures 2 and 3).

An estimation of participants' physical fitness level was calculated. Some 70% of individuals reported participating in light activities daily, with the overall majority (97%) participating at least once a week. Only 20% engaged in vigorous activities daily. The average weekly duration for moderate activities was 404 minutes, which is equivalent to 58 minutes per day.

This data shows that the participants studied were a very healthy, active group, who currently meet the

Chief Medical Officer's physical activity recommendations of 30 minutes of moderate activity, 5 times a week. It re-emphasises the difficulty in accessing those people who do not currently engage in regular activity. If this active group of individuals can derive numerous health benefits from participating in varying types and intensities of activity, the possible gains for a more inactive group may be substantial.

The full report presents detailed findings on each of the ten case studies, but from the range of initiatives examined for this research it can be noted that the synergistic effects of green exercise generate many positive physical and mental health benefits regardless of the level of intensity, duration or type of green activity.



## Research Implications

We conclude therefore that green exercise has important implications for public and environmental health. A fitter and emotionally more content population would clearly cost the economy less, as well as reducing individual human suffering. Thus increasing support for and access to a wide range of green exercise activities for all sectors of society should produce substantial economic and public health benefits.

If green exercise can have such a positive effect on health, why then do not more people regularly take exercise and visit green space? First, it is clear from participation rates that many people in the UK already do engage in forms of green exercise. 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. The Walking the Way to Health Initiative has already encouraged 900,000 people to walk more. Thus, there is already a health dividend being experienced.

On the other hand, health data indicates that a substantial proportion of the population is obese and too sedentary. It is clear that barriers to participation (e.g lack of time, feeling too tired from work, no motivation to take exercise) are affecting different groups of people in different ways. Many of these, however, have been overcome in the best projects, and factors that make up best practice in green-exercise land-based and group-based projects – which include attention to good partnerships, opportunities for feedback., clearly-marked routes, good information, facilities, successful market research, good staff, a programme of events with clear dates and locations, personality of group leaders, and advertising to local people.

## Recommendations

We conclude with sectoral policy recommendations, addressing:

- i) Access and recreation providers (including local authorities), who need to address maintenance of paths, sustainable transport, promotion of facilities and provision of information.
- ii) Agricultural managers and policy makers, who need to increase countryside access and encourage the farming industry to promote the opportunity to indicate that land management can involve opportunities for public health provision.
- iii) Schools should ensure that all primary age school children experience visits to a range of types of countryside, and where possible establish their own on-site gardens; they should also emphasise the public health value of physical activity for all children.
- iv) Health sector – which needs to consider the contribution that green exercise makes to public well-being and saving money for the NHS. The forthcoming Physical Activity Plan should emphasise the value of nature and green space for formal and informal use, and also stress the therapeutic value of the outdoors (both rural and urban) for delivering mental well-being.
- v) Planners and developers – who should take account of the vital role that local green space (or nearby nature) plays for all people, and regard outdoor recreational activities as part of economic regeneration strategies in both rural and urban economically-depressed areas.
- vi) Social services – who should acknowledge that green exercise has clear mental health benefits for those people who engage collectively with existing groups or new groups, and so countryside and local authority agencies should ensure their provision of services at recreation and leisure locations is focused on encouraging families and other groups. Crime/social services agencies should also consider the therapeutic value of green exercise.

- vii) Environmental managers – local and national Biodiversity Action Plans should be rewritten to include a component on biodiversity activities that contribute to public health;
- viii) Sports and leisure industry – gyms and fitness centres should improve the green aspects of their facilities, and the formal sports sector should emphasise the health value of participation, as some sports (e.g. football, cricket) draw from a wider range of social groups than most countryside recreation;
- ix) Partnerships - green exercise has implications for many sectors, suggesting the need for cross-disciplinary and sectoral strategies and action, and so countryside agencies should market the countryside as a health resource, and the private sector, particularly the food manufacture and retail industry, should be engaged in partnerships for provision of both healthy food and healthy places where the food is raised and grown.

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The published report will be available in April 2005, priced £20, from the Countryside Recreation Network.

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# *The Chopwell Wood Health Pilot Project*

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There is established empirical evidence to support the theory that involvement in regular bouts of moderate intensity physical activity, can be beneficial to health and well being, physiologically, emotionally and socially (Hillsdon et al 2002, Waldholz 2004). Exercise is an important tool in the government's strategy to improve the health of the nation, the Chief Medical Officer Sir Liam Donaldson recommends that adults participate in at least 30 minutes of moderate level physical activity at least 5 days per week. Further to this the government recommends children and young people engage in at least one hour of moderate level physical activity daily (Department of Health 2004).

Exercise or General Practitioner (GP) referral schemes were first established in the United Kingdom in 1991 with the Oasis project in Hailsham Sussex (Snowdon 2004). There are currently around 220 exercise referral schemes running throughout the United Kingdom, the majority of which follow the most common model, the client is referred to a facility such as leisure centre or gym for supervised/instructed exercise programmes (NHS 2001). There is however some criticism of this model Hillsdon et al (1999) states *"Interventions that encourage walking and do not require attendance at a facility are more likely to lead to sustainable increases in overall physical activity."* The Observer (2003) offers support to this

statement by reporting that despite building £1.6 billion worth of sports centres with lottery money over the past nine years, participation in sport has only risen by 0.3 per cent. Interventions for Preventing Obesity in Children (2002) recommended that being outdoors is the most powerful correlate of physical activity in pre-school children and that a safe natural environment allows children to engage in physical activity by jumping streams or puddles, rolling in grass or climbing trees or rocks. One exercise referral scheme that is responding to such research is the Chopwell Wood Health Project (CWHP).

## **Why Chopwell?**

The CWHP is situated in the West of Gateshead. The 15 month project, launched on the 17th of June 2004, is a partnership initiative between the Forestry Commission, Gateshead Primary Care Trust (PCT), Derwentside PCT and the Friends of Chopwell Wood. The project is an initial pilot to identify the potential for woodlands to contribute to the government's health agenda. Forestry Commission England and the partners require a well evaluated and monitored pilot project to help develop the evidence base to support 2005 and future Treasury spending review bids. Chopwell Wood has been selected as the pilot site because it is in a Health Action Zone with well documented needs for health improvement and has a highly accessible "walk in wood."

Deaths from coronary heart disease in Gateshead from 1996 were 26% above the national average for men and 36% above for women. Deaths from strokes are 20% above the national average. 38% of men and 26% of women were calculated as being overweight, a further 12% of men and 13% of women were classified as obese. Excess weight peaks between the ages 55-64 years; men 63% and women 55%, government figures state that 16% of 2-15 year olds

are classified as obese. Empirical evidence suggests that within Gateshead 23% of men and 27% of women indicate the presence of possible mental ill health. Further to this women aged between 16 and 74 years are more likely than men of the same age to have possible mental ill health (Gateshead Primary Care Trust 1999).

Derwentside Director of Public Health Annual Report (2003) states that there is currently a gap in life expectancy of about 2 years for men and just under 2 years for women between Derwentside and the national average. The major causes of death are heart disease, all cancers, stroke and lung cancer. Death rates from these diseases are significantly higher in Derwentside than the national average. The gaps between Derwentside and the national average for these diseases have however been narrowing since 1997. The Derwentside Health Improvement Programme (2003-2006) notes that:

- Overall, the health of local people is less good than that experienced by people in more affluent parts of the country
- Within Derwentside communities, there is considerable variation in health, most conspicuous in ex-coalfield areas - in which Derwentside is included
- All parts of County Durham, including the more affluent areas suffer inequality and have groups that experience poorer health
- Some remote rural areas suffer hidden deprivation in the form of low income, poor psychological and social aspects of health and access to services
- While ethnic minorities comprise only a small part of our population, there is evidence to suggest that these communities suffer poorer health - this group includes travellers

The DETR Index (Deprivation of Environment Transport and the Regions) of multiple deprivation

(2000) ranks Derwentside as one of the most deprived areas in the country with 22 out of 23 wards ranked as above average in terms of severity of deprivation. Seven wards are among the worst 10% in the country and a further 12 wards fall into the worst 30% in the country.

### **The Project**

The CWHP is cross generational and aims to improve the health of the local population by providing a range of physical and stress relieving activities within a woodland setting. The project seeks to achieve this by implementing two different "recruitment" strategies.

Firstly the project works closely with Gateshead PCT and Gateshead Council. Gateshead PCT in collaboration with Gateshead Council run a common model exercise referral scheme, Gateshead's Opportunities for Active Lifestyles (GOAL) where the client visits the medical setting and, after examination and consultation is referred to the physical activity specialist by the health professional. The client is offered a range of physical activities (during a further consultation with the physical activity specialist) the majority of which are conducted within a local authority (Gateshead Council) facility. The referral period lasts for thirteen weeks within which the client can attend the prescribed activities at a reduced price (standard rate of £1.35), on conclusion of the thirteen week period however the client must then pay a full public participatory fee (£3.25 for use of the gym).

The CWHP works in collaboration with the GOAL referral scheme and shares many commonalities but also has significant differences. The CWHP follows the same referral process, however the CWHP accepts "self referrals," (members of the public not suffering from any health ailment or conditions and thus not referred by a health professional) that find out about the project from local media coverage, word of mouth, promotional literature etc. All self referred participants complete a pre exercise medical check to highlight any contra-indications for exercise, any self referrals that highlight an exercise contra-indication

are asked to visit a health professional for a complete medical consultation prior to undertaking physical activity within the CWHP.

A further difference between the two schemes is the venue within which the activities are held. The use of local authority facilities to stage physical activities automatically generate financial outlay that has to be redeemed through the scheme and thus the participants/clients. The CWHP's utilisation of the wood reduces financial outlay. Further financial savings are generated through the activities (all activities provided were devised via consultation with local exercise groups) that are offered, walking, conservatory activities, cycling and Tai Chi and the utilisation of volunteer activity leaders.

Walking is a voluntary led activity. All walk leaders undergo the Gateshead Council Walk leader training. Completion of the training along with a valid first aid certificate qualifies the volunteer in leading walks with members of the public and covers the volunteer walk leader with public liability insurance. Conservatory activities are run in conjunction with annual appropriate work undertaken by the Forestry Commission Ranger, the Friends of Chopwell Wood and the British Trust for Conservatory Volunteers (BTCV). Utilisation of existing forestry work (Forestry Commission and Friends of Chopwell Wood) and partnership working with BTCV allows the conservatory activities to be undertaken free of charge. Cycling and Tai Chi however due to the nature of the sessions (appropriately qualified personnel, together with supplying suitable safe equipment) do incur a financial charge.

The CWHP does not however discriminate between referred clientele and self-referrals. A nominal charge is administered across the board (£1.35) any outstanding balance is paid for out of the project's budget. The ability to apply one set participatory fee is advantageous for both the user and supplier. The reduced fee alleviates the financial barrier to participation, health inequalities are strongly correlated to levels of poverty, thus the reduction of an entry fee (abolishment in certain activities) allows the

people in most need of health promotional initiatives the ability to participate and can aid in prolonged participation as the user does not experience a sudden increase in price. Further to this the supply of reduced fee or free activities by statutory organisations can increase the sustainability of the project. The utilisation of free facilities along with volunteer leaders, particularly volunteer leaders that emerge from the target population gives the participants a sense of ownership over the activities and a level of self determination regarding the timing and venues of the physical activities.



The second recruitment strategy employed by the CWHP is via organised visits from five Derwentside Primary Schools. Key stage 3 and 4 pupils from each school have been offered 4 visits within the 2004-2005 academic year. Prior to the commencement of the CWHP, Chopwell Wood had an established timetable of forest visit activities that address key stage learning outcomes. The practical nature of the forest visit lessons can aid schools in two ways. Firstly school visits can become "multi curricular" in their nature, a number of key stage subjects can be addressed in one visit. History, Geography or Science lessons can be combined and, further to this, involve an element of physical activity due to the practical element involved within the lesson (walking and running through the wood). This type of school lesson can aid schools in achieving the government's target of providing children and young people with one hour of physical

activity per day without reducing the time a school commits to academic study.

Secondly, County Durham and Darlington Healthy School Partnership co-ordinate the County Durham and Darlington Healthy School Standard (CDDHSS). The National Healthy School Standard is jointly funded by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health and is hosted by the Health Development Agency. The overall aim is to help schools become healthy and effective, providing an environment that is conducive to learning and that encourages pupil to achieve. It is part of the government's desire to reduce health inequalities, promote social inclusion and raise educational standards through school improvement. All schools selected for the woodland visits have either achieved CDDHSS or are working towards it. Their participation within the CWHP shows a positive commitment to promoting and developing a healthy learning environment and thus aids the schools in the maintenance or achievement of the award.

The 4 visits experienced by each school are divided into three different sessions each delivered by different providers. Firstly the Forestry Commission forest ranger delivers two visits chosen by the school from the existing timetable of activities. Secondly the integration of the CWHP into the school visits has led to the establishment of specific health related lessons- that emphasise the relationship between the natural environment and healthy living. These "Why 5?" lessons are delivered by members of Derwentside PCT 's health promotion team and address the health benefits of consuming at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day and have been coupled with environmental lessons, this combination allows the lessons to be taken outside into the woodland and incorporates a practical and physical element into the lesson which justifies the schools visit to the woodland environment. Finally each school experiences an alternative therapy lesson within the woodland (these visits have been timetabled for the end of the 2004-2005 academic year and are the final school visits). These lessons are delivered by therapists from the Derwentside Healthy Living Centre (a project funded

by New Opportunities Fund, National Lottery money) and emphasis the holistic approach to health living. The alternative therapy lessons highlight the potential of woodlands as a place to relax and provide a contrast to the high physically active nature of previous visits. Although the lessons are predominately delivered by the therapists the structure of the lessons allows the school teachers' to take elements of the visit back to the school setting and transfer them into the everyday school environment.

### **Milestones Achieved so far**

The CWHP is a fifteen month pilot project that aims to evaluate the effectiveness of woodlands as a medium to promote healthy living. The project is due to conclude in August of 2005 and has eight months of life span remaining thus it would unwise to draw conclusion regarding its effectiveness prior to the analysis of the collected data. The project however has achieved a number of its objectives.

- The project has recruited a number of volunteer walk leaders and a timetable of woodland walks has been established.
- A twice weekly cycling timetable has been in operation since (27-10-2005) .
- Tai Chi activities have been established (first session to take place 25-01-2005)
- Three schools have participated within at least two of their four visits, all visits are timetabled and will conclude within the arranged time scale.
- Commencement of qualitative and quantitative data collection.
- Conduction of first school group feed back session.

A full report analysing the effectiveness of the CWHP will be compiled and is due to published in August of 2005.

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Photographs taken by Alan Witherington (Friends of Chopwell Wood).

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## *Nature's Prozac - the long term view*

*Fiona Duncan, Greenspace Scotland*

It is rare for a day to pass without some mention of the shocking state of our national health in the media; whether it be obesity, the increase in mental health problems, or the state of the NHS, reports uniformly condemn the lack of funding, political nannying or the lazy attitudes of the population in taking care of themselves. What is distinctly lacking in the majority of these diatribes is a willingness to look at the wider causes of our nation's poor health, to understand why we don't exercise as much or teach our children the importance of eating healthily, or smoke too heavily. Without taking a more holistic view of the problem we rush to create costly short term solutions which treat the symptoms rather than the cause.

Instead, why not turn the problem on its head and imagine how one would describe a healthy nation. For me it would be one where people spent time outdoors in the fresh air, cycling, walking, playing football or Frisbee, taking the children to play or the dog for a walk. Because once you spend time outdoors and get gradually fitter it provides its own incentive to exercise more, smoke less (or give up entirely), and to eat more healthily.

There are also other indisputable facts: blood pressure tends to decrease when people are in more natural surroundings; physical activity releases endorphins which in turn help fight depression; people in hospital with views of greenspace have been shown to recover more quickly and with fewer drugs than those with no such views.

And then there is the mental health aspect: 1 in 4 of us will have a mental health problem at some point in our lives and in any one year, at least 3 out of every 10 employees will be off work with a mental health problem. The economic impact of this, let alone the human cost is enormous and yet this is an issue that we are only just beginning to recognise whilst

simultaneously the number of people prescribed anti-depressants reaches staggering proportions.

Studies show that our surrounding environment can have a huge impact on the way we feel about ourselves, which in turn can impact on every facet of our lives from relationships and family, to our ability to seek work. Compare the difference between walking out of your front door every morning and being surrounded by concrete high rises and motorways to walking to work through a leafy park.



Greenspace has a calming and restorative effect and evidence shows that exposure to a more natural environment improves both mood and concentration. Nature is its own Prozac; simply viewing an outdoor greenspace can produce significant recovery from stress in just 3 to 5 minutes. For the many people who are lonely or depressed it provides a way to come into contact with others in a non threatening environment. For some, simply being able to say hello to another human being is enough to relieve that feeling of despair and loneliness.

However, the health benefits of being outdoors can't occur unless there are attractive places on the doorstep where people can go. Open countryside and country parks are valuable in themselves but for those people who aren't already motivated or who don't have transport they might as well not exist. What is needed is accessible, appealing places which suit people's needs, close to home.

A study on the longevity of senior citizens undertaken in 2002 showed that *“the probability of five year survival increased in accordance with the space for taking a stroll near the residence, parks and tree lined streets near the residence, and their preference to continue to live in their own community.”* And Australian research into the health benefits of greenspace confirmed that those closest to people's homes are used much more than those at a distance.

Yet in a recent survey commissioned by Greenspace Scotland the disparity between people's expectations of what their local greenspace should be and the reality on the ground was alarming.

Of over 1000 people interviewed:

- **81%** agreed that greenspaces should be good places for children to play but only **47%** agreed this was true of their local greenspace.
- **80%** agreed that greenspaces should be safe places for physical activity but only **46%** agreed this was true of their local greenspace.
- **75%** agreed that greenspaces should be attractive places but only **48%** agreed this was true of their local greenspace.
- **79%** agreed that greenspaces should be places where you can relax and unwind but only **53%** agreed this was true of their local greenspace.

In all cases, the gap for those living in the 15% most deprived areas was even wider.

With results like these, where less than half the population felt their local greenspace was a good place to go, it is unsurprising that mental and physical health in Scotland is poor, but would the results have been so different if the survey was UK wide?

Quality greenspaces can serve as our free outdoor gym. Indeed it has been proven that people are more likely to continue with exercise programmes that are in outdoor greenspaces than those in gyms and leisure



centres. They are accessible to all and provide opportunities for a wide range of physical activity, from active play and sports, to healthy walks and physical tasks such as bulb planting and path creation.

The presence of local, attractive greenspace actively encourages participation in these type of activities and the appeal of being in the outdoors, with the ability to move around and the opportunity to devise informal activities which are not necessarily bound by the limitations of a defined space, allows greenspaces to offer something unique.

Yet the connections between healthy greenspace and a healthy nation are only just beginning to dawn. The provision of quality, accessible and fit for purpose greenspace is not a quick solution, and it is one which needs to be managed and promoted. For instance one report examined the physical activity of different socio-economic groups and found that lower income families tend to have more provision close by but levels of use were low, reflecting perceived and actual problems of low environmental quality. The report concluded that physical provision must be accompanied by promotion and other actions to ensure that the potential benefits are realised.

Simply providing space is not the answer. To make greenspace have a real impact on health, certain key criteria need to be met:

- They must be attractive
- They must be fit for purpose
- They must be sufficiently nearby to be accessible
- Their impact will be increased if promotional activity is undertaken.
- All of the above can only come about by working in partnership with the local community.

There are many projects across the UK which are demonstrating the benefits of this approach. At Grangemouth and Bo'ness in Scotland, a GP Referral Scheme has embraced 'Paths to Health' in a bid to encourage patients to adopt physical exercise as part of a holistic approach to recovery.

Walking has been identified as an accessible, sustainable and beneficial activity which can be recommended in the treatment of certain patients and the scheme works by GPs advising patients to enrol on a free 12 week programme at a gym nearby. Here staff assess their needs and design a fitness programme for them which includes opportunities for participating in led walks.

On the basis that exercise is one of the best cures for depression, local GPs see the Paths to Health link as a logical one, allowing people to make new friends and build confidence, as well as benefit from increased physical activity. As Dr Jenny Lim, a participating GP says *"Exercise is the best anti-depressant. This is the Road to Damascus – It's about getting people to start improving themselves rather than social services taking out equipment to the house."*

Elsewhere, people are grouping together to save their local allotments, seeing them as a way of not only providing productive physical exercise but also a means of growing their own food. As one allotment holder puts it *"I enjoy digging – it's very therapeutic. A couple of years ago I had a heart bypass and there's no question that working on my allotment helped me recover."*

In other parks, local nature reserves and greenspaces, local communities are involved in physical activities such as rubbish clearance, woodland management, pond clearance, and activity days which in themselves add to a sense of community spirit and cohesion. And other projects, identifying the natural remedies and benefits to well-being provided by greenspace, are working with people with mental health difficulties to create gardens, flower beds and vegetable patches. One

volunteer working at Redhall Walled Garden in Edinburgh said *"I felt institutionalised after spending many months in hospital. I was at rock bottom – then I started working at Redhall Walled Garden. It gave me purpose, I no longer dreaded waking up and the sheer physical activity felt good. I've learned to laugh again... and I have hope. Redhall is a very special place. At Redhall I am part of something not defined in mental health terms... I am a gardener."*

So the provision of quality and well-managed greenspace does have real, tangible benefits for our mental and physical health. The fact that these benefits may be harder to quantify when pitched against NHS spend on drugs and bed spaces does not mean they should be ignored. We need to take a longer and more holistic view to discover that investment in greenspaces will reap long term benefits for people everywhere.

To finish with a quote from van den Berg *"Ignoring public preferences for natural over built environments may have serious public health consequences. Eventually the ongoing expansion of cities at the cost of natural areas may not only upset the environment's delicate ecological balance, but may also take away vital restorative opportunities for the human species itself."* (van den Berg 2003)

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# Natural Fit

Ian Dickie, RSPB

***“The countryside can be seen as a great outpatient department whose therapeutic value is yet to be fully realised.”***

This is the conclusion of Dr William Bird, author of the RSPB report *‘Natural Fit – can biodiversity and green space increase levels of physical activity?’*.

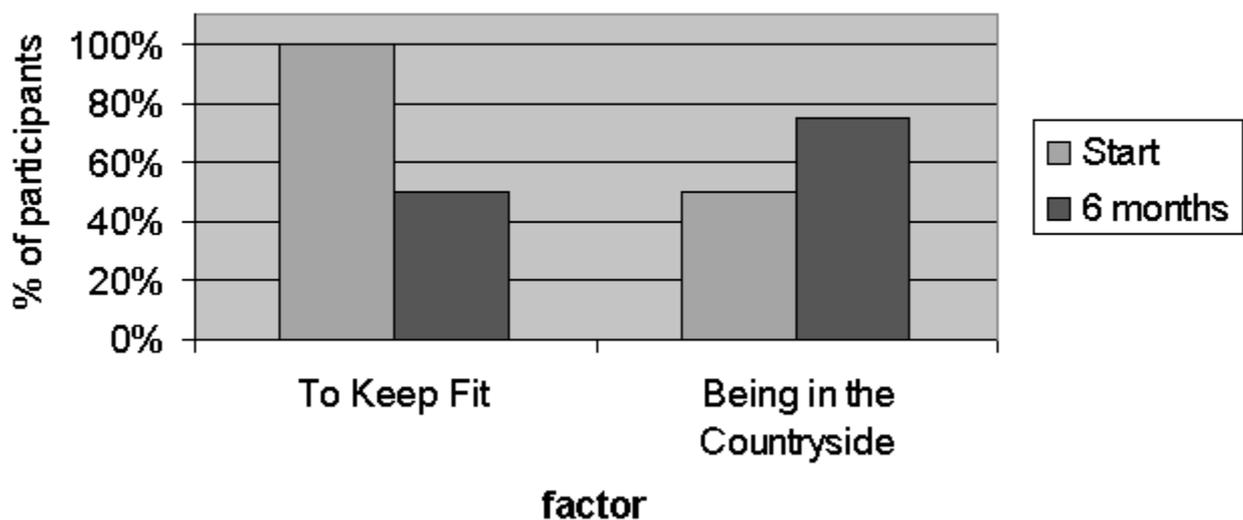
Dr Bird’s research outlines the benefits for the NHS and society of physical activity. Regular moderate physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease, diabetes, strokes, cancers, disability, osteoporosis, depression, anxiety and sleep problems. It is also a vital component in preventing and reducing obesity. However, physical inactivity is a major health risk in the UK, affecting about 60% of the population. This inactivity costs us £8.2 billion per year, but today’s policy culture requires strong evidence to justify interventions in peoples lives.

## The Evidence

The link between our natural environment and public health have long been recognised, and was a factor in the establishment of both urban parks and National Parks. Natural Fit analyses the research evidence on two national schemes promoting physical activity through the natural environment. It shows people are more likely to continue physical activity if it includes close contact with nature.

Green Gyms use conservation work to increase both physical and mental health. A survey of one scheme revealed that most people joined because of the need to become fit. However, as figure 1 shows, after 6 months being in the countryside became a more important motivating factor to encourage people to continue with the Green Gym. Organisers of the Green Gym schemes throughout the UK have noted

**Figure 1. Factors that were very important in continuing participation in the green gym**



this trend of people entering conservation with a 'health ticket', but continuing through a developing relationship with nature (Reynolds, 2002).

A study of health walk participants found that being in the countryside and the seasons were important factors that stimulated and maintained physical activity. All forms of countryside recreation can help increase physical activity and improve public health. However, sociable walking is likely to be the most popular and effective way for people to be active: it achieves the benefits of physical activity without needing increased fitness levels and with low risk of injury; it is increasing in popularity; appeals to the broadest group of people; and is cheap. In contrast, structured exercise puts most ordinary people off physical activity and is a particular disincentive for some high health-risk groups. For these reasons, Natural Fit identifies walking as the best solution to the public health problems of inactivity.

### Providing Green Space



*Health Walkers at Sandwell Valley RSPB Reserve*

The RSPB believes that public health can be improved cheaply and sustainably through the provision of accessible natural green space. As the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Fiona Adshead has said, in welcoming Natural Fit, "...It highlights the importance

*of tackling obesity with a joined up strategy, that includes investment in making safe green space available to everyone, enabling them to make healthy lifestyle choices."*

The RSPB, and the nature conservation sector as a whole, is a major provider of natural green space and opportunities for people to connect with nature close to where they live. RSPB reserves receive over 1 million visitors per year, and our reserve centre at Sandwell Valley in Birmingham is the meeting point for a health walk.

Green space in an urban environment has been shown to improve life expectancy and decrease health complaints. Much of this is thought to be due to a favourable environment for people to exercise. However, health policy still fails to recognise the huge potential benefits that access to natural green space can offer. In areas without good provision of natural green space, ambitious projects are needed to bring nature closer to communities. RSPB reserves at Old Moor in Yorkshire's Dearne Valley and Rainham Marshes in the Thames Gateway are creating new wildlife-rich green spaces close to urban communities.

A lack of access to natural green space is not just an urban problem. For example, following major habitat creation work at Frieston Shore RSPB reserve near Boston in Lincolnshire, visitor numbers increased from 11,000 per year to over 56,000 people. This surge in visitor numbers is attributed to the variety of habitats that can be seen at Frieston Shore, and the scarcity of comparable wildlife viewing opportunities along the Boston coastline.

These sites create wildlife habitats needed to achieve the Government's own wildlife targets, and provide local people with access to high-quality green space. Therefore they can play a role in biodiversity and public health policies. Dr Adshead went on to say "*Given the evidence of the connection between our health and our physical environment, it is clear that public health professionals together with their local partners should give consideration to green space and the quality of the environment in which we live.*"

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*This article is a summary of the RSPB report Natural Fit by Dr. William Bird. Copies can be downloaded at [www.rspb.org.uk/policy/health](http://www.rspb.org.uk/policy/health)*

*Photograph by Lee Coplestone, RSPB*

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## *Healthy Trees - Do woodlands really make us healthier?*

*Paul Nolan, Mersey Forest*

Over the past 15 years England's 12 Community Forests have been delivering a wide range of projects and programmes with a focus on community involvement in creating new community woodlands. In that time over 10,000 ha of new woodland has been created, at all scales from large 100 ha plus sites right down to very small copses in schools and in local parks.

The 12 Forests are based on strong local partnerships, that have signed up to delivering long term Forest Plans – plans that not only have targets and strategies for increasing woodland cover but also highlight the importance of having a mosaic of habitats and which are built in the premise that by transforming environment we can have positive economic and social impacts for people who live and work in the Community Forest areas.

The Forests are within the reach of 50% of the population of England, Due to the focus of the Forests on degraded landscapes it is true that the Forests cover some of the most deprived areas of the country and by association some of the areas with the poorest health statistics.

If we are creating community woodlands how can we maximise their community benefit for both physical and mental health?

Filling your lungs with fresh woodland air as you stroll through the lush greenery of your nearby woodland certainly seems like a healthy thing to do. But is it really any better for our health than taking a walk around the block or staying in and watching TV for that matter?

When it comes to health and the environment, there is a great deal of talk and assumptions about the potential benefits – finding out the facts is more

demanding. We took a fresh look at the evidence and current thinking to discover whether creating community woodlands is really going to make anyone any healthier.

In particular we looked at the situation in the north west of England, in The Mersey Forest.

Clearly we do have a health problem in the UK and one that is particularly acute in the Northwest of England. Life expectancy is lower than the national average in many areas of the Northwest. Obesity is also on the rise, with over 20% of the region's population classified as obese and 20% suffering from a long-term limiting illness - a higher proportion than any other region. In our car dependent, TV dinner culture, lack of physical exercise is also damaging our health. Six out of ten men and seven out of ten women are not active enough to gain health benefits and almost a third of the population is inactive – taking little or no exercise.

Looking at the health statistics for the northwest region there is a clear health gap between those who live in the Mersey belt, the area from Liverpool to Manchester. In this belt incidence of CHD, respiratory illnesses are highest and life expectancy is lowest. Yet these are the very areas on which the prosperity of the region is being built. The Manchester and Liverpool City Regions are seen as the economic drivers for the region.

There is also an environmental quality gap between the Mersey belt and the rest of the region. Lower woodland cover, larger areas of derelict land and poorer air quality occur in the approximately the same areas as the poorest health. We cannot presume cause and effect, but we do know that involving people in creating sustained improvements to their local environment can improve health and wellbeing – as

the recent research by Jules Petty has shown so well.

The task is to try to bring these agendas together, using environmental improvements through community forestry as one tool in tackling the “wicked issue” of our apparent worsening health and widening health inequality as our national economic wellbeing increases.

Thinking about the future, it is estimated that meeting current targets for prescribing preventive medication to heart patients would result in approximately 20,000 fewer deaths each year. However, a modest reduction in national smoking rates, together with small changes in average cholesterol levels and blood pressure (which could result from tackling obesity and physical inactivity) would halve heart disease mortality in England and Wales. The impact of these changes would be seen within 12-24 months. Tackling risk factors in the general population is up to three times more effective in preventing deaths than concentrating on people with established heart disease.

The potential to reduce CHD is huge as the statistics above show, but the challenge to get people, especially those most at risk from CHD involved in local environment programmes is also a great one. The task is complex and one that cannot simply be passed over to NGO's because “they do that sort of thing”

Below is an extract from “*Indications of Public Health -Lifestyle and its impact on health*” a publication aimed at helping those implementing the Government Health White Paper - Choosing Health, which sets the scene for how community woodlands can pay a part in this huge social issue.

### **Physical activity**

*People who are physically active have half the risk of heart disease of those with a sedentary lifestyle, and 33–50% lower risks of type 2 diabetes and obesity which are independent risk factors for heart disease. Regular aerobic exercise is the most effective. People*

*at high risk of heart disease may benefit even more from physical activity compared with people at lower risk. Physical activity also significantly reduces the risk of stroke and provides effective treatment of peripheral vascular disease. It can improve several risk factors for heart disease, including raised blood pressure, adverse blood lipid profiles, and insulin resistance. Observational studies suggest that physically active people have lower risks of:*

- *colon cancer – by up to 40–50% (with moderate activity – e.g. 3–4 hours walking per week)*
- *breast cancer – by up to 30% (e.g. 30 mins walking a day reduces risk by 20%)*

*Physical activity may also decrease (by around 30%) the risks of prostate, uterine and lung cancers. The mechanisms involved include a link to body mass and obesity, but also changes in insulin resistance, metabolism and other inflammatory, immune and hormonal factors, and possibly lung function. There are also benefits for mental and musculoskeletal health – eg for older people, improved mobility and fewer falls (up to 25%) and fractures.*

### **What can be done?**

*Health Development Agency Evidence Briefing: The effectiveness of public health interventions for increasing physical activity among adults, Feb 2004, summarises evidence of effectiveness of interventions in:*

- *health care settings (including GP advice and exercise prescriptions)*
- *the community (e.g. interventions which promote moderate activity such as walking, including the involvement of exercise specialists and behavioural programmes)*
- *older adults (e.g. specifically tailored interventions including group-based and home activities)*

*The White Paper Choosing health includes plans for*

*promoting active travel and sport in schools and communities, and for rolling out evidence-based physical activity interventions.*

- *Moderate physical activity halves the risk of heart disease and reduces the risk of some cancers by around a third*
- *Target level is 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week*
- *Around 50% of young men, but only 20–30% of young women, reach this level*

So, can woodlands make a difference? According to the World Health Organisation, *“health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”* Under this universal definition of health, woodlands have an important role to play and the evidence is mounting.

The link between mental wellbeing and woodlands has been explored by, amongst others, Professor Roger Ulrich of A & M University in Texas. Ulrich showed that in as little as three minutes, people placed in green surroundings would relax the anxiety muscles in their foreheads and their pulse rate would be lower than in an urban setting. Ulrich also demonstrated through an analysis of 12 studies of both patient and non-patient groups that being in the presence of greenery and trees, or even being shown pictures of these environments, can have a positive impact in terms of reducing stress and anxiety. Pictures of nature used in intensive care units were shown to shorten the stay of patients and reduce the need for strong analgesics.

Forests also provide a public space for recreation and exercise. For walkers, runners, cyclists, horse riders and climbers, woodlands provide an environment to explore and to improve health. Even a moderate level of exercise can have dramatic health benefits. Walking two miles a day for five days a week is enough to increase fitness levels and reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes by 50% and colon and breast cancer by an estimated 30%. Forests are providing the ideal setting for exercise, encouraging more visitors each year to use their feet, rather than their car, for a day out. Forests are popular leisure

destinations, with 350 million day visits made to woodlands each year and, in the case of The Mersey Forest, 4 million people live within 20km of the forest area.

Trees also have wider health impacts. The leaf surface area of a mature tree covers between 2 and 12 times the area the tree occupies and this surface area makes trees efficient at removing gaseous air pollutants and dust from the atmosphere. Trees also help maximise sunlight interception – with an individual tree providing UVR protection of between factor six and ten – and have the ability to absorb and store carbon dioxide. In short, trees are good for our atmosphere and therefore the air we breathe, providing a green lung for our urban areas.

Work by the National Urban Forestry Unit has also identified additional health benefits from the ability of trees to filter air pollution. The Unit’s report ‘Trees Matter’ highlighted the ability of woodlands to reduce incidents of asthma, skin cancer and stress related illnesses, as well as providing environments that, in themselves, are calming and therapeutic.

The knowledge that plants and trees are good for our health, however, is nothing new. The tangible benefits of healing trees and plants date back at least to 79AD to Pedanius Dioscorides, a Greek physician who wrote a text known as *“About Medicinal Trees”* which was used as a resource guide for 1,500 years. What is new is the growing evidence base and recognition amongst health professionals that the link between environment and health is not only strong, but represents a sound investment.

A recent ‘Green Space’ conference highlighted how the creation of woodlands and public open space is a cost effective health care option. The preventative treatment required to reduce one individual’s chances of having a heart attack would amount to approximately £15,000 over five years, whilst the equivalent costs in forestry terms could benefit a far high number of people over a lifetime. The unique aspect of forestry is that it provides both ‘front of pipe’ and ‘end of pipe’ health benefits. Woodlands can help

prevent illness by encouraging more healthy and active lifestyles. They can also provide therapeutic environments that can help ill people to recover.

Community forestry then, is not just an investment in our physical landscape but also in our physical and mental health and wellbeing. Trees provide places to visit and explore and environments that can make us feel better and keep us alive longer.

### What can we do

Community Forests are increasingly being seen as areas where there are partnerships in place that can respond to changing demands and act quickly to put in place projects and programmes that deliver activity on the ground quickly. However, whilst there is a large amount of health based activity across the 12 Forests we are nowhere near delivering the potential benefits that could be delivered.

There are issues about our understanding of how the health sector works;

- Health delivery structures, funding allocations, lines of accountability and decision systems are complex and not well understood by the Community Forests. There is a need to:
  - Understand which bits are critical to what Community Forests want to achieve (regional health investment plans etc.)
  - Find the right way in (identifying who actually makes the decisions about the things we are interested in)
  - Talk the right language (particularly in relation to prevailing indicators like intervention cost per patient)
  - Promote community forestry in the same way drugs companies would promote the latest medication (facts, figures, costs)
  - Compare the cost effectiveness of community forestry approaches with conventional treatments (potential savings in intervention costs)

Once we have a better relationship and understanding

with the health sector we can target health interventions along 3 axes:

- Type of health problem (CVD, obesity etc.) – recognising where our potential to add value really lies
- Geographical area (using deprivation indices)
- Social grouping (age, ethnicity, gender etc.)

It is interesting when talking to PCTs that in a surprising way they want to see their work “mainstreamed” into the types of regeneration programmes that the Community Forests are aiming to mainstream into. Economic performance indicators drive most regeneration programmes – particularly GDP per head of population. Unfortunately, there is no link between GDP per head and life satisfaction or wellbeing, whereas health is a key indicator of wellbeing.

Experience suggests most people enjoy healthy physical activity once they actually begin to participate. The critical questions for us are :

- Motivation – how do you get more people, and particularly those most at risk, ‘off their settee and out of the door’ (outreach, leadership, pedometers etc.)
- Information – how do you let people know what is actually out there in ways that make it relevant to their lifestyle (advertising, networks etc.)

There need to be linkages between ‘healthy activity’ activities and other local programmes, including healthy eating, regeneration, education (healthy schools programmes), sustainable communities, local strategic partnerships (community strategies) etc.

### So what do we know ?

We know that there is an emerging trend in Health care towards increased focus on illness prevention and on personal choice and responsibility. We know that we cannot go on forever increasing health spending. We know that there are real concerns for the health and wellbeing of large numbers of our young people.

There is clear evidence on the link between increased physical activity and lower risk of CHD and we also know that environmental improvements such as creating and managing community woodlands not only encourages increased activity by a proportion of the local community but also provide other social, economic and environmental benefits that have a positive impact on wellbeing.

We also know that Community Forests are built on strong local partnerships that deliver activity efficiently and cost effectively and we know and see everyday how local communities value and use their new trees and woodlands.

Our task is to try to stitch all these “Known“ items together to maximise the benefits from our community woodlands and Community Forests

### **Case Study**

The Mersey Forest’s REACT programme is working in five wards in Liverpool to demonstrate that using local green space for physical activity can have significant health benefits. The project is particularly targeting young people, black and minority ethnic communities and disabled people. By encouraging people to discover and use their environment, the project aims to reduce high levels of cardiovascular disease and obesity.

When Dingle Vale Allotments held an Open Day in August, almost two hundred people turned up to have a look around this large site in Liverpool. Around thirty people put their names down for a plot, and so for the first time in years, there is now full occupancy, plus a waiting list.

Gill Weston, event organiser said: *“More and more people are looking for ways to increase their activity levels, and to adopt healthier lifestyles. Having an allotment is a perfect, green way to do this – it keeps you physically active, provides you with fresh fruit and vegetables and is a great place to escape the stresses of city life. You will also be contributing to the improvement of our urban greenspace – so the benefits will be felt by the wider community too.”*

As well as information about gardening and healthy eating, general health advice was also available. Children enjoyed painting flowers, making dragonflies, and picking wild blackberries. Adults enjoyed a tour of the 100 plot site, with chairman Malcolm Dally acting as guide and answering tricky gardening questions. Everybody enjoyed the tasty food cooked up by The Vegetarian Society just minutes after it was harvested – you just couldn’t get fresher!

The event was organised through REACT: a partnership between Central Liverpool Primary Care Trust, The Countryside Agency and The Mersey Forest Project that aims to use Liverpool’s green space to get people fit and active, and appreciate the green spaces on their doorsteps.

In the project area there are no community woodlands (yet) and very few trees. The area was chosen because it has some of the worst health statistics in the country. What the project has shown is that given the resources it is possible to engage people in environmental activities and increase their activity levels and then start to introduce the idea of using trees and woodlands further afield as places to go and introduce the idea of being involved in activities to improve their local environment through tree planting.

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## *Healthy Beginnings- out of the classroom in the real world*

*Heather Mitchell, RSPB*



***“I caught 15 stickleback fish, a couple of beetles, some water snails and many other amazing creatures. I had a lovely day’ KS2, day visit***

Remember what it felt like the first time you dipped your tired hot feet into an ice-cold mountain stream after a long walk? Or rolled your body down a hill, cycled off road juddering over stones and exposed tree roots? Ever got lost in a historic maze? Or tried paddling a canoe? Yes?

Well, thousands of children growing up today have never experienced those things. Their knowledge about nature and our cultural heritage is based on what is taught in a classroom or on a computer.

With fewer youngsters being able to see wildlife and our heritage first-hand or enjoy adventurous trips away from the classroom, we are building a generation that will have an appreciation of the outdoor recreation and our countryside way down its list of priorities. This is where the Real World Learning campaign finds its starting point: to get more children learning out of the classroom and discovering the world around them for themselves.

### **What is real world learning?**

‘How do you build a sandcastle?’ is not a question many people expect to be asked by a 10-year-old visiting a beach. We assume children know milk comes from cows, that tadpoles become frogs and that a robin is a small brown bird with a red breast. But for today’s children, questions like the one above, posed to an RSPB field teacher on a school visit to an RSPB reserve, are commonplace.

Out-of-classroom or ‘real world’ learning is one of the most effective forms of education. Despite all of our modern technology, sophisticated teaching practices and living there is no substitute for a child getting out of the classroom to experience nature and culture first hand for themselves. Their senses and minds can be stimulated by simple joys that boost a thirst for learning that will repay itself, in terms of their educational achievement, personal development and positive participation in society, many times over. It

can link to and help achieve many Government objectives such as children's health, citizenship, future reduction of deprivation, crime and unemployment, achievement of social inclusion and much more.

Real World Learning is a chance to dip for mini-beasts in a pond, to marvel at a life size model of a blue whale, crane your neck to look up to a cathedral ceiling, appreciate the still of a wood or the comforting warmth of a camp fire.

### **Real World Learning campaign partnership**

The Real World Learning Campaign is a partnership between the National Trust, Field Studies Council, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, PGL and RSPB, and was devised in early 2004 as an initiative to get children out of the classroom to discover the world around them.

### **Health benefits to Real World Learning**

Since this issue is focussed around health, let's consider what benefits real world learning can bring to children's health – both physical and mental.

Less active children are more likely to have excess fat and links have been shown between inactivity and obesity. Activity programmes have resulted in clinically significant decreases in body fat and body mass index in obese children. There are more ways of tackling child obesity than playing organised sport.

A major review found that there is a positive relationship between physical activity and cognitive functioning that includes concentration, memory and language. Schoolwork may be improved by physical activity.

As providers of outdoor recreation it is important that we engage children, as hopefully they will be our day visitors of the future. There is strong evidence to show that by the time children leave secondary school their attitude to exercise is highly predictive of whether they will be physically active as adults. The strongest relationship is between the quality of exercise they

have experienced as opposed to the quantity of exercise.



Why are children not taking part in school trips?

Between us the Real World Learning campaign partnership host visits from around one and a half million school children a year at their centres across the UK, yet this number has declined by 10 % in the last five years and many sites are now operating below capacity.

There are lots of reasons why many children are missing out on out-of-classroom visits. With the increasing demands of league tables, literacy and numeracy targets and school inspections and costs, out-of-classroom learning is being squeezed out of the timetable.

One prominent teaching union urges its members not to support school visits amid health and safety fears and the UK's increasing compensation culture. Yes, there are risks associated with taking children out of the classroom, but there are far more accidents on the journey to and from school than on any organised school visits; and furthermore, any risks can be balanced against the benefits. We have to accept in life there is an element of risk in most things we do and it is important children have the opportunity to learn about it in a safe, controlled environment. Do we want to foster a generation of children who in their

adult years are too apprehensive to take even a walk, for the good of their health, in their local urban park or countryside?

### **Real World Learning campaign partnership activity**

Our action to-date has included tabling an Early Day Motion signed by almost 170 MPs, seeking manifesto commitments from each political party, calling for and giving evidence at the Education and Skills Select Committee inquiry into out of classroom learning. Our work has put out-of-classroom learning on the political agenda.

The Partnership's objectives received a significant boost in England on February 10th this year when the Education and Skills Select Committee (ESC) published their recommendations in a report following on from an inquiry into out of classroom learning. Furthermore, on February 15th the Education and Skills Secretary Ruth Kelly MP made a statement saying that the Government wants outdoor learning, including school visits, to be part of every pupil's experience.



### **How are our Real World Learning objectives being met – an English perspective?**

The Real World Learning partnership identified six objectives at the start of our campaign. Progress to date is listed beneath each one:-

#### **1. Government must give clear direction to schools that out-of-classroom experience is**

#### **important and an integral part of every child's education.**

The ESC report said that it has 'become convinced of the value of education outside the classroom'. They recommend the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) publish a Manifesto for Outdoor Learning, giving all children a 'right' to education outside the classroom. The Manifesto should attract a similar level of funding to the Music Manifesto (£30 million) in order to deliver real change.

#### **2. Introduce out-of-classroom learning as a key part of every school inspection.**

We are disappointed that this was not a recommendation of the ESC report. However, we are submitting further evidence on this to the ESC in relation to Ofsted's role. At present there is no data on the quantity or quality of out of classroom learning that schools are providing. Without inspection, schools may not be encouraged to place out-of-classroom learning as a priority.

#### **3. Government to engage in a debate with Teacher Trade Unions to address issues of concern over out-of-classroom education.**

It was the view of the ESC that 'fear [of accidents and the possibility of litigation] is entirely out of proportion to the real risks'. They recommend the DfES should work with teacher unions, including the NASUWT, to research and address their concerns. The DfES should issue clear safety guidance and streamline bureaucracy.

#### **4. The Teacher Training Agency must ensure that the teaching profession, both now and in the future, has both the competence and confidence to deliver out-of-classroom teaching.**

The ESC recommends that the DfES work with the Teacher Training Agency to ensure that Initial Teacher Training courses demonstrate the potential benefits of out-of-classroom learning. They say teachers should have an 'entitlement' to training on how to deliver out-

of-classroom learning.

### **5. Government should support quality providers of out-of-classroom learning in tangible ways.**

The ESC recommends that DfES and others should boost the long-term viability of activity centres by helping them to retain staff, develop expertise and build strong links with schools.

### **6. Government should ensure equality of access for all schools to out-of-classroom learning**

The ESC recommends each Local Education Authority have an Outdoor Education Advisor, each school should have an Educational Visits Co-ordinator, there should be a nationwide network of support, guidance and innovation, the potential of school grounds for learning should be tapped, and schools should receive help with transport costs of school trips.

### **Next steps**

Without change, children will continue to miss out on invaluable learning opportunities that can benefit their future, especially their health. A survey of 500 conservation professionals in 2004 showed more than 80 % could identify an experience of nature or wildlife as a child which changed the course of their lives. So the importance of childhood experiences influencing adult attitudes cannot be overstated.

At time of writing we are awaiting the forthcoming General Election which provides the opportunity for political parties to demonstrate they are serious about out-of-classroom learning and it must be a high priority in the next Government's work. We can all play a part in making sure this message is heard.

### **Photographs**

*Photographs 1 & 2 credited to Andy Hay and rspb-images.com*

*Photograph 3 credited to Carolyn Merret and rspb-images.com*

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# *An Historical Reflection on Health and the Countryside*

*Marcus Sangster, Forestry Commission*

## **An Historical Reflection on Health and the Countryside**

I wonder how many of us are watching the growing interest in health and the outdoors with a sense of *déjà vu*, a feeling that we've been here before. Are we seeing in modern terms a re-casting of a philosophy that has been fundamental to the countryside recreation movement in the UK?

When I was a young boy growing up in Marple on the edge of the Peak District, not far from Hayfield and Edale, the road by our house was filled at weekends and midsummer evenings with groups of walkers and cyclists from Stockport and Manchester. Our local shops and pubs did good trade selling refreshments to day-trippers walking the hills around Mellor or visiting the Roman Lakes and the remarkable flight of locks joining our three canals. With memories of wartime austerity still very recent and money not easy to find these visitors were enjoying themselves in their local countryside. It was a countryside that many of them had not been allowed to enter as children. It had required active campaigning and civil disobedience before, in 1949, they won the right of access when Parliament passed the *'National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act'*.

My first real job was with the Forestry Commission in 1976 when I started my career as a forester in the Forest of Dean. The Forest had been designated a Forest Park in 1938, though the idea for the designation stemmed from the long friendship between our chairman Lord Robinson and Ramsay MacDonald the first Labour Prime Minister. They believed that working people should be able to enjoy fresh air and outdoor leisure, and Lord Robinson was in a position to take action.

This connection between the outdoors and health is

as old as civilisation itself, taken for granted until the enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries when human reason came to be seen as the key to building a better world. Whilst this led to the development of science and technology and to today's industrial society it also built a philosophical divide between the world of nature and the world of reason and intellect.

Although to many of us the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are epitomised as an age of industry and engineering there was also a great re-awakening of interest in the spiritual side of life, and concern that people labouring in factories and towns were living dispirited and soul-less lives. We see this concern expressed in many ways, for example in the model factories and communities developed by the great industrial philanthropists such as the Owens in New Lanark or later by the Cadburys in Bourneville.

And we also see it in the way that nature and landscape were constructed in poetry, literature and painting. Alongside this intellectual construction was the physical construction, often by the same people, of the designed landscapes that are so characteristic of lowland Britain today. In the Lakeland poets, in the broader romantic movement, in the picturesque movement and in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arts and Crafts we see an expression of a philosophy that sought to reconnect people and people's lives with the physical world.

The proponents of these ideas were some of the most influential thinkers of their era and played a large part in shaping our political culture today. For example, John Ruskin's writing was one of the great influences in the development of the early socialist movement in Britain; the ideas of John Stuart Mill and William Morrison resonate still in modern life. Nor were these ideas the territory only of an intellectual elite. They

had a very practical expression and, at a time of empire, were reinforced by the direct observation of how people in undeveloped countries lived their lives. There was a strong popular movement across Europe that saw people as part of, not separate to the natural world and linked health seamlessly with nature and with the spiritual and social development of individuals and wider society.

If this connection between the outdoors and health was so widely understood why are we having to make the case again today, almost as though we are starting from scratch? Part of the answer is that the idea became politicised and discredited.

On April 25th, 1932, *The Manchester Guardian* reported:

*'Four or five hundred ramblers, mostly from Manchester, trespassed in mass on Kinder Scout today. They fought a brief but vigorous hand-to-hand struggle with a number of keepers specially enrolled for the occasion. This they won with ease, and then marched to Ashop Head, where they held a meeting before returning in triumph to Hayfield... As they marched they sang. They sang the "Red Flag" and the "International."*

This was one of the defining moments of the pre-war socialist movement. Had this been the limit to the subversion of health and nature by politics the idea would probably have survived as part of British culture, and countryside recreation today would have much wider participation. However, the real damage was done when the fascists in Germany and Italy adopted the idea as their own. The 'strength through joy' project with the Hitler youth and the appropriation of body-culture by the Nazis linked the countryside to ideas of racism and racial purity, creating such a strong association that in post-war Britain the connection between nature and health was no longer an acceptable intellectual discourse.

But today, for many of you reading this, the Nazi's intellectual appropriation of the countryside will have little relevance. You will not see the countryside as a

racially defined space. We can leave the baggage of an earlier generation behind and move on without it. However, this does mean that we need to make the case anew and in language that is appropriate to today. This can be through rediscovering Ruskin, by reading Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley and the other romantics with new eyes or perhaps by revisiting the art of the late Victorian era. But it can also be by developing our own thoughts and ideas and fitting our actions to suit the needs of contemporary society.

My own hope is that we do not become too distracted by a mechanical search for 'evidence'. Every mother knows how her children respond to a day out in the countryside. Each of us knows first-hand, from our own direct and personal experience, that the natural world holds untold beauty that feeds our spirit. Surely this is enough for us to have confidence in a vision of a countryside that is accessible to all. And to work at bringing it about with purpose and persistence.

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## *A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing Conference Summary*

*Held at the Royal Horticultural Halls in London on Thursday 24th February*

The Countryside Recreation Network invited senior practitioners and policy advisors from the Health and Countryside sectors to attend a conference at the Royal Horticultural Halls in London. The subject for the day was the findings from research recently commissioned by CRN members into the benefits of the countryside on health. Professor Jules Pretty and his team at the University of Essex carried out the study. Professor Pretty's study included:

- primary research into the benefits for individuals,
- a review of literature from across the world,
- field study to identify best practice,
- analysis of the policy implications and
- advice on evaluation and learning from initiatives and projects

The conference was opened by Lord Clarke of Windermere, previously Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, welcoming delegates on behalf of CRN. The chair for the day, Peter Donnelly, Deputy Chief Medical Officer in the Scottish Executive then introduced Rt Hon Alun Michael MP, Minister of State for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality.

The Minister emphasised that health is a concern for all parts of Government, not just the Department for Health. He believed that access to the countryside and to natural places was fundamental to wellbeing and welcomed the contribution from CRN.

Len Almond, Director of the British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health, explained why public health is an increasing concern. He proposed that the evidence linking health and the outdoors is now widely accepted. The focus for future research should be addressing the question of how we encourage people who are inactive to get outdoors.

Professor Jules Pretty then introduced the study and his findings. Copies of the summary of his study are available free of charge from CRN via the website ([www.countrysidecreation.org.uk](http://www.countrysidecreation.org.uk))

After lunch, Rachel Hine, also from Essex University, introduced some of the case studies that had been used in the initial research. The first presentation from the case studies was an insight into the conservation volunteering world from Sabrina Mazzoni of Arnside and Silverdale AONB, followed by a case study from Northern Ireland's Walking for Health Initiative in Ballymena. The final case study presentation was from the Hereford Bods, their project has several aspects but the main focus was on their outdoor adventure education scheme, taking young people out into the Werndee woods (a managed, mixed deciduous woodland area) at St Weonards in Herefordshire.

Following on, Angela Mawle, Chief Executive of the United Kingdom Public Health Authority, discussed the natural environments and public health policy.

All participants and guests were invited to attend a reception hosted by Lord Clark of Windermere for an announcement and signing of a health concordat between English Nature, Countryside Agency, Association of National Park Authorities, Forestry Commission, England and Sport England. The concordat shows the joined up approach that these agencies are going to take towards encouraging and motivating more people, especially children and those socially excluded, to have more contact with and get greater enjoyment from the outdoors.

The Conference and Reception were closed by Fiona Adshead, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England.

*For further information or to order your copy of the full research report (priced £20) from the Countryside Recreation Network, please contact*

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# NEWS

## BRITISH UPLAND FOOTPATH TRUST

### UPLAND PATHS - FACING THE FUTURE

The 3rd British Upland Footpath Trust Conference will be held on Monday 12th -Wednesday 14th September at Bangor University, North Wales.

The conference will be of invaluable interest to policy makers, funders, managers, path workers and path users. As well as visits to view pathwork in Snowdonia the conference will consider a number of topical issues facing the future of upland and coastal path management, with contributions from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Numbers may be limited so book early to avoid disappointment.

Delegate fee is £175.

*For further information please contact Margaret Thomas on 01690 710711 or  
Email: [marg.thomas@care4free.net](mailto:marg.thomas@care4free.net)*

## BRITISH WATERWAYS

### CANAL TUNNEL BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS BEGIN

Two Northamptonshire villages have begun months of celebrations to mark the 200th anniversary of the opening of one of the longest navigable canal tunnels in Britain.

The opening of Blisworth Tunnel on 25 March 1805 was the final link in a chain of communications joining London with the industrial Midlands and northern England.

The Grand Junction Canal (now known as the Grand Union Canal) became one of the main transport

arteries of Georgian England, and was a vital factor in the war against Napoleonic France, carrying the supplies for Nelson's ships and Wellington's army.

In 1793, when construction began, the building of a 1¾-mile (3km) tunnel was a major feat of engineering, being constructed with no mechanical aids beyond pick, shovel, wheelbarrow and gunpowder. By 1796, the canal had reached Blisworth (the north end of the tunnel), and in 1800, London was connected with Stoke Bruerne (the south end of the tunnel). Until the tunnel was completed in 1805, 12 years after construction began, a connecting tramway enabled the canal to open for through traffic.

In 1980, British Waterways began a £4.5 million project to rebuild the central section of the tunnel and it re-opened in 1984. The opening of the tunnel in 1805 was marked on Monday 21st March, with the unveiling of a special plaque at the tunnel mouth in Stoke Bruerne to celebrate the bicentenary. Dr George Greener, chairman of British Waterways, which cares for the nation's 2,000-mile network of canals and rivers, will be joined by representatives from The Inland Waterways Association and The Waterways Trust for the plaque unveiling.

Dr George Greener, chairman of British Waterways, said: *"I'm delighted to celebrate the 200th birthday of this incredible feat of engineering, which was hand cut through solid rock and took 12 years to complete. 200 years ago Britain's canals were the transport arteries of the industrial revolution, vital to industry and the war effort. Today they are havens for wildlife, rich in heritage and valued more than ever by millions of people across the country who enjoy spending their leisure time on our canals and rivers."*

Elizabeth Payne, deputy chairman of The Inland Waterways Association, said: *"I'm delighted to celebrate this wonderful structure, one of thousands*

*created by the canal engineers which are still doing their job today – keeping the canal network up and running and used and enjoyed by millions across the country. It is thanks to the continued efforts of volunteers, charitable bodies, the government and British Waterways that the canals are again thriving in Britain.”*

The plaque unveiling is one of a series of public events and exhibitions from March to June 2005 marking the bicentenary. The festivities began this week with a book signing by David Blagrove, author of *Two Centuries of Service: the Story of the Canal at Stoke Bruerne and Blisworth*, and the opening of a Blisworth Tunnel exhibition at The Canal Museum at Stoke Bruerne.

The celebrations will continue with a bicentenary festival on 18 & 19 June, with highlights including a boat procession and the biggest gathering of boats in the Northamptonshire area since the early 1970s. For more information on this and other waterway events across the country, visit [www.waterscape.com](http://www.waterscape.com).

*For further information, please contact British Waterways, Willow Grange, Church Road, Watford, WD17 4QA. Tel: 01923 201329. Fax: 01923 201300 Email: [pressoffice@britishwaterways.co.uk](mailto:pressoffice@britishwaterways.co.uk) or visit our website: [www.britishwaterways.co.uk](http://www.britishwaterways.co.uk)*

## **COUNCIL FOR FOREST RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**THE IRISH COUNCIL FOR FOREST RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT LOOK AT RECREATION AND OTHER PUBLIC GOODS BENEFITS.**

Coford, the Council for Forest Research and Development in Ireland are looking at forest recreation and other public good benefits as part of their mid term review of forest research. With a changing operating climate – the post 2006 Rural

Development Programme, the fact that forests play a huge part in Irish access to the country side and an ever increasing urban population - Irish foresters are increasingly looking at public goods and re-examining their role in the provision of these services and in particular their role in recreation.

Work began in this area approximately two years ago when Coillte, the state forestry company, reviewed it's role and policy on recreation addressing such issues as the value of the service provided and the role of recreation in delivering a "licence to operate". Coillte and the Irish Sports Council are collaborating on an economic study on the value of trails and forests for recreation. This however highlighted the need for broader research into forest recreation. Coford established a working group to look at all aspects of recreation.

The group draws from several disciplines including landscape architects, social scientists, educationalists, foresters and farmers and represents several interest areas such as farming, third level institutes, tourism, Forest Service and Coillte.

The group is reviewing

- The value of forest recreation – economic, social and health
- Landscape issues and recreation
- Management of recreation
- Forest Recreation and education
- Farmers and forest recreation
- Tourism and forest recreation
- Urban Forests in recreation

The report on the research needs and priorities is due for publication by mid 2005.

*For further information, please contact [john.fennessy@coford.ie](mailto:john.fennessy@coford.ie)*

## COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY

### THE COUNTRYSIDE IN AND AROUND TOWNS

The Countryside Agency and Groundwork have launched 'The Countryside in and Around Towns: A vision for connecting town and country in pursuit of sustainable development'.

The vision highlights a territory that is often overlooked by urban and rural planners and policy makers; and is promotes practical action to unlock the potential of the countryside in and around towns (CIAT) at a regional and sub-regional level.

The vision sets out ten functions for the CIAT: a bridge to the country; a gateway to the town; a health centre; a classroom; a recycling and renewable energy centre; a productive landscape; a cultural legacy; a place for sustainable living; an engine for regeneration; and a nature reserve. These functions should be combined within 'multifunctional landscapes' that deliver benefits across the community, strengthen links between town and country and generally underpin sustainable development.

The document sets out a four step approach to implementing the vision and points out that many of the practical tools and techniques already exist having been developed by bodies like the Countryside Agency, Groundwork, local authorities etc over many years.

*The document can be downloaded from the Countryside Agency or Groundwork websites. Alternatively, it can be obtained from the Countryside Agency.*

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## COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL FOR WALES

### NEW COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS WEBSITE FOR WALES

The new right of access starts on 28 May 2005 in Wales. The Countryside Council for Wales is creating a new, ground-breaking website to help people plan their visits to the countryside. The site will show all land with access rights and some other types of permissive access, mainly from Tir Gofal agri-environment agreements. The site will present this information as switchable layers over OS base maps. It will also show where new CROW access rights are restricted and have a tool for plotting and measuring distances. We will develop links to other websites that the visitor will find useful to plan a visit, such as mountain weather reports and travel information. In due course, the web maps will show facilities, such as promoted routes and nature reserves, with links to other sites for more detail. The website address will be [www.ccw.gov.uk/countrysideaccesswales](http://www.ccw.gov.uk/countrysideaccesswales).

## COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY AND THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE)

### BREAKTHROUGH IN MAPPING TRANQUILLITY

Researchers have created the first detailed, accurate maps showing places which make people feel tranquil. Tranquillity is one of the most sought-after, hard-to-pin-down qualities of life, and many places which provide it are endangered.

To make their pioneering maps, the research team first consulted hundreds of countryside users on their perceptions of tranquillity.

Then, using their responses, the team employed computer-based techniques to show how every location within two large study areas compared in providing the qualities which help people feel tranquil.

The maps created by a team from Newcastle and Northumbria Universities, are being launched today on Wednesday 23 March, when thousands of people across the country plan to get outdoors and find some tranquillity during the Easter holidays.

The research was commissioned by a group of organisations in North East England with the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and the Countryside Agency. It makes significant advances on earlier maps of tranquil areas. The new maps:

- take the views and feelings of countryside users and visitors – as opposed to professionals and experts – fully into account;
- are based on a wide range of factors influencing people's feelings of tranquillity, both positive and negative;
- display subtle graduations in tranquillity rather than labelling each place as being either tranquil or non-tranquil; and
- are highly detailed, revealing small, local pockets of tranquillity which might otherwise be overlooked.

The consultation underpinning the maps found people had a great diversity of views about the things in their surroundings which do – and don't – make them feel tranquil. But most views revolved around three general, mappable themes – the presence of people, landscape qualities and the impact of various noises.

The maps take into account factors which, according to the consultation responses, contribute to feelings of tranquillity (such as sweeping views of open countryside) *and* factors that detracted from those feelings (such as the presence of busy roads in those views).

In addition to CPRE and the Countryside Agency, the project partners are the North East Regional Assembly, Northumberland Strategic Partnership, Northumberland National Park Authority and Durham County Council.

The researchers were Dr Robert MacFarlane, Centre for Environmental and Spatial Analysis, Northumbria

University, Dr Claire Haggett, Landscape Research Group, University of Newcastle, Dr Duncan Fuller, PEANuT (Participatory Evaluation and Appraisal in Newcastle-upon-Tyne), Northumbria University.

The project mapped Northumberland National Park and the West Durham Coalfield, two contrasting areas covering hundreds of square miles. The maps reveal that the National Park offers a vast potential to experience tranquillity. The West Durham Coalfield is far less remote and much more densely populated, but the mapping clearly shows it contains significant, valuable areas where people can enjoy tranquillity.

The project partners hope the new technique will become an important tool in planning and conservation. It could lead to tranquillity maps covering all England.

Project leader Dr Robert MacFarlane of Northumbria University said: 'Many official reports and statements talk about how important tranquillity is. What we've lacked until now is a robust, reliable way of showing where people can find it. Our new maps do just that.'

Tom Oliver, lead countryside campaigner at CPRE, said: 'Places that make us feel tranquil take us away from stresses and strains and lift our spirits – but they face a multitude of threats and are shrinking. This new approach can help us protect and enhance these precious places, which are found not just in the most remote and beautiful landscapes but in the countryside on our doorstep.'

Huw Davies, the Countryside Agency's North East Regional Director, said: 'This kind of mapping based on Participatory Appraisal could become an important tool for planners and for people managing the countryside. For those involved in major new regional development and regeneration schemes, this new methodology might even help to create new tranquil places. Tranquillity matters to people and it needs protecting.'

*For further information, please contact Northumbria University Dr Robert MacFarlane (Project Manager), on 0191 227 3750; or Campaign for the Protection of*

Rural England, Tom Oliver, CPRE on 020 7981 2800; or for The Countryside Agency, please contact Tina Snowball, Admiral PR on 0191 222 0722.

A 56 page report, 'Mapping Tranquility - defining and assessing a valuable resource', is available from CPRE priced £10.00 by calling 0800 163680 .

Publication enquiries can also be sent to [publications@cpre.org.uk](mailto:publications@cpre.org.uk).

## EPILEPSY ACTION

### "OUT IN THE OPEN" WALK APPEAL

Epilepsy Action is appealing for people from all over the UK to organise and take part in walks to help increase awareness of epilepsy, and raise money for the organisation's vital services.

The charity is holding its annual nationwide sponsored walk – "Epilepsy: Out in the Open" on Sunday 15th May 2005 to mark the beginning of National Epilepsy Week.

Epilepsy Action needs to recruit as many walkers and walk organisers as possible if it is to reach this year's fundraising target of £50,000.

TV Vet Emma Milne is supporting the walk and made this appeal:

*"Get your walking boots on and donate a little of your time, energy, and as much money as you can squeeze out of your mates to help those whose lives are affected by epilepsy."*

Epilepsy is the UK's most common serious neurological condition affecting 450,000 people but there are still many myths and misunderstandings surrounding the condition. Last year, Epilepsy Action's Freephone Helpline dealt with around 25,000 enquiries from people with epilepsy and their families. A Helpline user said: *" Ringing the Helpline changed my life for the better. It's a big comfort to know that there is such strong support for this condition."*

It doesn't matter if you trek for miles or take a short stroll, every step will be helping Epilepsy Action to continue its vital work.

Anyone interested in organising or taking part in a walk in their area should contact Ian Turnpenny, fundraising officer, on 0113 210 8800.

## FORESTRY COMMISSION

### TRANS-NATIONAL PROJECT HELPS RECONCILE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

Research into reconciling conservation and recreation in the New Forest and the Forêt de Fontainebleau in France has been underway over the last year. The four-year PROGRESS project is a €3.7 million initiative co-funded by the EU and led by the Forestry Commission.

PROGRESS (PROmotion and Guidance for Recreation on Ecologically Sensitive Sites) is an international project with several overseas partners including the Office National des Forêts and the Comité Départemental du Tourisme in France, the Dutch research institute, Alterra, and the UK's Countryside Agency. The project aims to reduce the impacts arising from the increasing demands of recreation on protected conservation areas in both Forests.

Both the New Forest and Fontainebleau have a lot in common – both are Natura 2000 sites and have a strong cultural heritage and a huge variety of wildlife, including many internationally rare species. But shared problems have resulted in serious ecological damage as both lie within easy reach of huge populations and attract millions of visitors each year. Over the last three decades vulnerable habitats have come under increasing pressure from recreation due to growth in visitor numbers. A sustainable, effective and practical strategy is essential if we are to protect these lovely Forests for the future.

The first year of the project involved conducting huge on-site visitor surveys across all seasons at both sites to check how many people come, what they do, where they go and why they choose the Forests over other attractions.

Alterra is now collating all these data, and will feed it into two computer models which will analyse the interaction of the ecology with recreational use across the Forests. These models will predict where likely disturbance or erosion will occur, and provide detailed maps identifying which locations, sensitive habitats or wildlife are under the greatest threat from recreation pressure.

Pilot schemes can then be devised to ease pressure on sensitive sites and re-direct the public away from vulnerable areas. This could involve, for example, improving gravel tracks for horse-riding, building a mountain bike trail outside the Forest or moving car parks to help channel recreation. In parallel with these physical changes, campaigns will be developed in partnership with local tourism businesses to raise awareness of the ecological importance of the Forests and promote responsible behaviour. This will ensure that the local economy still benefits from visitors, but in a way that is sustainable and sensitive to the needs of the environment.

Another key aspect of the project is the involvement of local stakeholders at both locations. Statutory agencies, forest user groups, businesses and interest groups have been brought together in a project forum to ensure that decision-making has broad support and that any actions taken can be sustained into the future.

An early achievement of the New Forest stakeholder group is the production of new codes of conduct for popular activities such as horse-riding, dog walking and cycling. These codes carry important messages to provide guidance on how forest users can help protect the area they enjoy so much.

The project has many other aims including establishing health walks, forging closer links with

schools and developing websites to raise awareness of conservation issues. This will enable people to enjoy the Forests, find out where appropriate activities can be pursued and, simultaneously, learn to appreciate the special character and values of these two unique sites.

The project ends in September 2007 and all the valuable lessons learned over the four years will be drawn together and published in a useful handbook. These lessons will also be disseminated across NorthWest Europe via scientific articles and the project website so that land managers can apply them at other internationally important sites.

*For further information about the project please contact Keith Campbell, project co-ordinator, on 023 8028 6824, or by emailing: [keith.campbell@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:keith.campbell@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)*

## **FORESTRY COMMISSION, WALES**

### **FOREST VISITOR CENTRES KEY TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

In a bid to promote the value of woodlands to communities and visitors alike, Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) are encouraging the public to make more use of the recreational and educational facilities on offer in the forest visitor centres across Wales.

Woodlands can often provide an effective way of developing community spirit, and allow people to enjoy fresh air and the great outdoors. Forests are full of things to do - from walking, cycling, enjoying a picnic to just relaxing and taking in the beautiful scenery - and the visitor centres are the best place to start. With five such centres in Wales, FCW ensure that you are never far away from a great day out.

Nant Yr Arian, near Aberystwyth, is excellent for red kite spotting as well as great walking and biking trails. Coed Y Brenin, near Dolgellau, has world class

mountain biking facilities. Afan Forest Park, near Port Talbot, also has fantastic trails for mountain bikers and walkers. Garwnant Visitor Centre, in the Brecon Beacons, has a very exciting ropes course which helps to burn off children's excess energy. Cwmcarn Visitor Centre and Forest Drive, near Caerphilly, has a spectacular 7 mile scenic drive, magnificent sculptures and some great single-track mountain bike trails.

Andy Fryers, Visitor Services Manager, FCW, said "Woodlands provide environmental and social benefits to local communities, supporting learning & contributing to local sustainability. Many of the Forest Districts manage and organise a programme of events throughout the year, with details, where appropriate, published in 'What's On' leaflets, or in the local press. These events include walks, family bike rides, open days, visits to see timber harvesting, wildlife watching, and a host of other activities suitable for families, young and old alike."

On the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park in South Wales is Garwnant Visitor Centre, an ideal base for a host of recreational and educational activities to ensure a good value, family day out. The 55 mile long Taff Trail from Cardiff to Brecon passes through the centre, offering cyclists a diversity of fabulous views.

There is an adventure play area with 'Forest Frenzy,' a fantastic ropes course for the adventurous and a new play area for toddlers. Three scenic woodland walking trails and two marked off road cycling trails of varying lengths, cycle hire and puzzle trail begin at the visitor centre, giving everyone the opportunity to enjoy the natural beauty of the area. Fishing permits are also available for the nearby Brecon Beacons Reservoirs.

After the day's activities you can browse in the gift shop or relax in front of the log fire and enjoy a restaurant meal or snack in the café with locally sourced refreshments. Schools and community groups can explore the forests around Garwnant with the Ranger led education service, and there are activities organised during term holidays.

There are many seasonal events held at Garwnant Centre, such as the Halloween Spooky Walk on Friday 29 October 2004, followed by a disco, fire breather and fancy dress competition. Booking essential, as tickets are only available in advance, priced £3 (01685 723060 or 01685 384060). Garwnant is situated conveniently just off the A470 5 miles north of Merthyr Tydfil in a beautiful forest setting.

*For further details of events in Wales's woodlands and what's on at your nearest forest visitor centre, visit our website: [www.forestry.gov.uk/wales](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/wales)*

*For further information, please call Katherine Gwynne, FBA PR, on 01970 636413 OR email [katherine@fbagroup.co.uk](mailto:katherine@fbagroup.co.uk)*

*More information on the woodlands of Wales can also be found on the Forestry Commission's website: [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)*

## FOREST RESEARCH

### ACCESSIBILITY OF WOODLANDS AND NATURAL SPACES: ADDRESSING CRIME AND SAFETY ISSUES

A seminar was held on the above subject in 2004 organised by Forest Research with backing from CABI Space, Lancashire Constabulary and English Nature. A publication which brings together the presentations and workshop discussions from the event has just been produced. The issues discussed at the seminar included access and risk perception, access and liability, access and exclusionary behaviour, crime reduction and the rehabilitation of offenders and location and design of accessible woodland. Those who attended the seminar included police officers, local authorities and environmental organisation representatives. In the forward to the publication Inspector Steve Haworth of Lancashire Constabulary outlined his hope that new understandings would be forged between organisations and pathways found towards crime

reduction in both rural and urban environments.

To obtain a copy of this publication which costs £7 please contact Liz O'Brien, Social Research Group, Forest Research ([liz.o'brien@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:liz.o'brien@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)) or visit the Social Research Group website for a pdf copy at: <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/peopleandtrees>.

## MOORS FOR THE FUTURE PROJECT

### WE NEED MOOR CARE

During the last two years the Moors for the Future project has been utilising Heritage Lottery Funding to undertake restoration of the Peak District moors. Without raising awareness of why and how this work is needed further deterioration could occur. That is why the project has started a campaign called the 'Moor Care Initiative'.

Peat forms at approximately 1mm a year under ideal conditions, however, over 6km<sup>2</sup> of the Peak District moors are devoid of vegetation and erosion is occurring at a rate ten times faster than this. Accidental summer fires are the single biggest factor contributing to this rapid loss, as these fires tend to burn deep into the peat, destroying the seed bank and effectively sterilising the soil. With no vegetation to bind the bare peat together, it is at the mercy of wind, rain and frost. The main causes of accidental fires are arson, discarded cigarettes, campfires and camping stoves.

This April, Moors for the Future have organised a fire awareness week (16-24) where we will be launching our new 'Fire Kills' leaflet and handing out re-usable ashtray pouches. Representatives and fire fighting equipment from all six fire services who operate in the area, plus the Peak Park Rangers, National Trust, United Utilities and Severn Trent Water will be on hand to highlight the dangers of moorland fires at eleven roadshows.

For further details visit

[www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk](http://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk)

or contact: Dan Boys, Moor Care Ranger, Moors for the Future Project by email on:

[daniel.boys@peakdistrict.gov.uk](mailto:daniel.boys@peakdistrict.gov.uk)

Please also note that the proceedings for the '**Moors for All conference**' held on 28th January 2005 in Hathersage, which focused on enabling equal participation and access to moorland heritage in the peak district, are now available on the Moors for the Future website. [www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk](http://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk)

**COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION NETWORK EVENTS*****'Delivering a Countryside for Health and Wellbeing'*****Tuesday, 10th May 2005  
The Priory Rooms, Birmingham**

The seminar is aimed at countryside managers, NHS and local authority staff with an interest in promoting and using the natural environment as a resource for health and wellbeing.

The potential of the countryside to contribute to health and wellbeing is increasingly recognised. As well as being a place where exercise can be taken, helping with fitness and addressing current anxieties about inactivity and obesity, recent research by CRN members suggests that outdoor spaces can contribute to social and mental wellbeing. The Health Development Agency suggests that the outdoors can help in four areas: physical fitness through exercise; mental health and wellbeing, including reduced stress; social interaction and friendship through shared activities and interests and understanding of the natural world and the development of environmentally friendly lifestyles. Professor Jules Pretty and his team at the Centre for Environment and Society, University of Essex, looked in depth at the research evidence that links use of the countryside with human wellbeing. Drawing on real-life examples his team developed advice on how the countryside can be a resource for health and wellbeing, and developed guidelines on how success can be measured.

**To receive further information and a booking form, please email: [k.j.powell@shu.ac.uk](mailto:k.j.powell@shu.ac.uk)**

***A Question of Respect:  
Conservation and Countryside Recreation*****28 June 2005  
Cardiff**

This seminar is aimed at managers of conservation, access and recreation; as well as those involved with, or having an affiliation to, outdoor pursuits.

Finding a balance between conservation and recreation has always been one of the key issues in countryside management. As users and managers of the countryside it is essential that we have an informed understanding of our effect on the environment. It is equally important that we can share this knowledge with other countryside users in a concise and effective way. There are presently numerous incentives, directives and partnerships aspiring to promote harmony between these seemingly uneasy bedfellows. This one-day event will explore the various approaches that are used or are being created to inform, educate and sometimes direct visitor actions in the countryside

**To receive further information and a booking form, please email: [k.j.powell@shu.ac.uk](mailto:k.j.powell@shu.ac.uk)**

**The Summer journal will be based on the theme of  
*'Motorised Recreation'***

If you would like to submit an article or a news item for consideration by the Editorial Board, please email the document in word format to the Network Manager  
[m.bull@shu.ac.uk](mailto:m.bull@shu.ac.uk).

Please note the following submission deadline dates:

Articles to be submitted by 27 May 05.

News Items to be submitted by 10 June 05.

# Countryside Recreation and Training Events

## APRIL 2004

**18-21 April 2005**  
**Interpretation - Be the Best at Visitor Communication**  
 (Losehill Hall)  
 Cost: £529-£608

**25-29 April 2005**  
**Foundation Ranger Training**  
 (Losehill Hall)  
 Cost: £545-£627

## MAY 2005

**4-5 May 2005**  
**Rights of Way Law and Practice I-Public Path and Definite Map Orders**  
 (IPROW)  
 Venue: Knuston Hall, Northants  
 Cost: £330/£370 + VAT

**5-6 May 2005**  
**Participative Training Techniques**  
 (Plas Tan y Bwlch)  
 Venue: Snowdonia National Park Authority

**9 May 2005**  
**Introducing Environmental Games and Activities**  
 Venue: Leeds  
 (Environmental Trainers Network)  
 Cost: £105/£155 + VAT

**23-26 May 2005**  
**Getting More from your Greenspace**  
 (Losehill Hall)  
 Cost: £479-£551

**26 May 2005**  
**Preparing Effective Funding Applications**  
 (Environmental Trainers Network)  
 Venue: London  
 Cost: £105/£155 + VAT

## JUNE 2005

**2-3 June 2005**  
**Rights of Way Improvements Plans Seminar**  
 (Losehill Hall)  
 Cost: £363-£418

**6-7 June 2005**  
**Rights of Way Law and Practice II-Maintenance and Enforcement**  
 (IPROW)  
 Venue: Glenfall House, Gloucestershire  
 Cost: £330/£370 + VAT

**13-17 June 2005**  
**Grassland Management for Nature Conservation**  
 (Losehill Hall)  
 Cost: £522-£600

## JULY 2005

**25-29 July 2005**  
**Wetland Management for Nature Conservation**  
 (Losehill Hall)  
 Cost: £512-£589

## Contact details for training/events organisers

### Environmental Trainers Network

Tel: 0121 358 2155  
[www.btcv.org/etn/](http://www.btcv.org/etn/)

### Field Studies Council

Tel: 01743 852100  
[www.field-studies-council.org](http://www.field-studies-council.org)

### Institute of Public Rights of Way (IPROW)

Tel: 01439 788093  
[www.iprow.co.uk](http://www.iprow.co.uk)

### Losehill Hall

Tel: 01433 620 373  
[www.losehill-training.org.uk](http://www.losehill-training.org.uk)

### Plas Tan y Bwlch

Tel: 0871 8714004  
[www.eryri-npa.co.uk/ptyb\\_base/e\\_800.html](http://www.eryri-npa.co.uk/ptyb_base/e_800.html)

### Institute of Ecology and Environment Management

Tel: 01962 868626  
[www.ieem.org.uk/Workshops.htm](http://www.ieem.org.uk/Workshops.htm)

### BTCV Training

Tel: 01491 821600  
[www.btcv.org](http://www.btcv.org)

# Countryside Recreation Network Publications List

	Price (incl.postage)	Tick
<b>REPORTS</b>		
A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise	£10	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Exclusion in Countryside Leisure in the United Kingdom - the role of the countryside in addressing social exclusion (2001)	£10	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS</b>		
Removing Barriers; Creating Opportunities: Social Inclusion in the Countryside (2001)	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managing the Challenge of Access (2000)	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the Honeypot Overflowing? (1998)	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making Access for All a Reality (1997)	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>
Today's Thinking for Tomorrow's Countryside (1995)	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communities in their Countryside (1994)	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS</b>		
Visitor Safety in the Countryside (2005)	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
'And Your Evidence Is?' Evaluation Frameworks (2004)	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visitor Information and Wayfinding Needs (2004)	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Demonstrating the Economic Value of Countryside Recreation (2004)	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessible Greenspace (2003)	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Country Parks II (2003)(Country Parks I & II can be purchased together for £20)	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Country Parks I(2003)	£12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Rights of Way Improvement Plans (2002)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Funding for Social Projects (2002)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opening Up Access In and Around Towns (2002)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visitor Payback Schemes (2002)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Access Forums (2001)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fundraising and the Lottery (2001)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are We Getting There? Delivering Sustainable Transport in the Countryside (2000)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Breaking New Ground in Sustainable Tourism (2000)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using Local Distinctiveness as an Economic Development Tool (1999)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Just Walking the Dog (1999)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sponsorship (1998)	£8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making Ends Meet (1997)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
GIS & Countryside Management - Theory and Application (1997)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to Water - Sharing Access on Reservoirs and Rivers (1997)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do Visitor Surveys Count? - Making use of Surveys of Countryside Recreation (1996)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consensus in the Countryside II (1996)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consensus in the Countryside I - Reaching Shared agreement in policy, planning and management (1996)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
A Brush with the Land - Art in the Countryside II (1996)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
A Brush with the Land - Art in the Countryside I (1995)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing Safe? Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside (1995)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
GIS & Access to the Countryside (1995)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sport in the Countryside (1995)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
A Drive in the Country? - Examining the Problems of Recreational Travel (1994)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental Economics, Sustainable Management and the Countryside (1994)	£6	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>CRN RESEARCH DIRECTORY</b> An annual directory of the research work carried out by the CRN agencies during the year		
Research Directory 1998	£5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research Directory 1997	£5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research Directory 1996	£2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research Directory 1995	£2	<input type="checkbox"/>
UK Day Visits Survey 1994 (1996)	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>
UK Day Visits Survey 1993 (1995)	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>

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