

Do Visitor Surveys Count?

Making use of Surveys for Countryside Recreation

**Proceedings from a workshop held at
The Royal York Hotel, York
on 16 October 1996**

Countryside Recreation Network

A UK-wide Network, CRN gives easy access to information and people concerned with countryside and related recreation matters. The Network helps the work of agencies and individuals by:

1. identifying and helping to meet the needs of CRN members for advice, information and research;
2. promoting co-operation between member agencies in formulating and executing research on countryside and related recreation issues;
3. encouraging and assisting the dissemination of the results of countryside research and best practice on the ground.

CRN is committed to exchanging and spreading information to develop best policy and practice in countryside recreation.

For further information on CRN workshops, or to receive our free newsletter, please contact:
 CRN Manager
 Countryside Recreation Network
 Department of City and Regional Planning
 University of Wales College of Cardiff
 PO Box 906
 Cardiff CF1 3YN



COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION



Department of the Environment



ENGLISH NATURE



Scottish TOURIST BOARD



BWRDD CROESO CYMRU WALES TOURIST BOARD

Published by CRN Countryside Recreation Network
© 1997 CRN Countryside Recreation Network
ISBN 0 948502 38 X

Recycled paper

Copies cost £8 and
are available from:

Countryside Recreation Network
Dept. of City & Regional Planning
UWCC
PO Box 906
Cardiff
CF1 3YN
Tel./Fax 01222 874970
e mail cplan-crn-l@cf.ac.uk

April 1997

Contents

Market Research for Countryside Recreation – an introduction	1
Steve Green <i>Consultant</i>	
Do you Need a Survey?	3
Ian Fullerton <i>East Lothian District Council</i>	
Designing your Survey	12
Lesley McLagan <i>Survey Research Associates</i>	
Running your Survey	19
Tom Costley <i>System Three Scotland</i>	
Analysing the Data	23
Bill Breakell <i>North York Moors National Park</i>	
Drawing the Survey together	28
Steve Green <i>Consultant</i>	
Programme	30
List of participants	31

MARKET RESEARCH FOR COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION

- AN INTRODUCTION

By Steve Green,
Consultant

What is Market Research?

Market research is about finding out who your customers are, what they want and what they think. Market research should not be confused with monitoring or evaluation, but it will help managers to monitor and evaluate and to guide operational and marketing decisions.

Market research is not just asking your visitors some questions; there is a logical process involving six stages:

1. Defining the problem or problems you wish to investigate
2. Developing a research plan which will allow for the collection of representative information according to the resources available
3. Collecting the information
4. Analysing the information
5. Presenting the findings
6. Using the findings

Good market research is a very useful management tool. However, bad research, can occur as a result of slip-ups at all stages of the process, for example because of un-representative samples, leading or ambiguous questions, inaccurate data analysis and mis-interpretation of the results. It is therefore important to get each stage of the process right.

Market research is usually used to collect information on visitors and/or non-visitors. Types of information commonly collected include:

- The number of people visiting a site, what they do and their distribution in time and space;
- Their profile – for example by age, sex, party composition, distance travelled, socio-economic group, lifestyle;
- Visitor attitudes – for example towards quality, price, service, changes, and;
- Response to marketing and promotion.

Types of Research

Sometimes it is possible to use secondary research to aid management; that is research which has been done on the same or similar subjects by other people. A number of sources will give you information on general trends, for example:

- The United Kingdom Day Visits Survey
- The United Kingdom Tourism Survey
- National Parks Surveys
- National Trails Surveys
- The General Household Survey
- Local Authority visitor surveys

However, for detailed information there is no substitute for the real thing – primary research. There are many techniques and it is important to choose the right one for the problem in hand; these include:

- Counting visitors
- Observing visitor behaviour (behavioural mapping)
- Self-completion questionnaire surveys
- Face to face interviews
- Telephone interviews
- Focus discussion groups
- Structured and un-structured interviews

Good Practice

Doing it yourself is often cheaper on the face of it, but don't be afraid to call in the professionals, it can be more cost effective than you think. If you do choose to carry out market research yourself, be sure to read the good practice manuals available from national agencies first:

- 'Visitor Surveys Manual' - Countryside Commission
- 'Monitoring Training Manual' - Scottish Natural Heritage
- 'National Trails Survey Manual' - Countryside Commission

DO YOU NEED A SURVEY?

By Jan Fullerton,
East Lothian District Council

Do you need a survey?

The decisions leading up to initiating a survey, in my experience in Local Government, invariably relate to or originate from the forward planning process/system. This will generally be either in the form of a strategy or a management plan. In my Authority both have generated surveys and therefore funding has not been a problem because the plans have been approved by committee and have by then received 'political' support.

Surveys are valuable because they help to:

- fulfil service and/or management objectives;
- provide qualitative information on site users / customers;
- measure the effectiveness of the management plan process;
- put 'flesh' on quantitative data which may already be available;
- validate your own previous work;
- provide a piece of 'independent' work that councillors will trust;
- monitor trends.

Who will use surveys?

A diverse array of individuals in a variety of different organisations use surveys to assist management and planning. Typically these might include: council officials, officials of national agencies, site managers, planners, marketing officers (particularly within the tourism sector) and others interested in establishing customer profiles.

How will the results be used ?

The results of surveys can be very useful in the planning process, although there can be tensions on how findings are interpreted. More usually they are aimed at day to day management within a structured management plan environment. Survey results can also be used to make a case for targeted use of resources within your own body and as a means of justifying financial support, for example from European funds or the National Lottery.

Whilst some findings are soon obsolete there will be others which have greater longevity. These can be used as a valuable reference source.

Types of survey undertaken in East Lothian

How you go about the surveying depends on the sample required. Depending on the nature of the survey it may be possible to use in-house staff. On other occasions it may be more appropriate to commission a specialist consultant. Should you decide to use a consultant you will need to be clear on exactly what is required from the survey and how much you can reasonably afford. It is likely that the commission will be undertaken on a competitive fee basis and, to ensure comparative analysis of bids, a clear client brief should be prepared.

The following few paragraphs highlight a number of visitor surveys which have been undertaken in the East Lothian region; some 'in house' by our own staff, and others by independent specialist agencies or consultancies:

- John Muir Country Park surveys 1977, 1978, 1979 & 1980 & résumé
- Observations on visitor dispersal at Linkfield Car Park (1992)
- Aberlady 1972, 1974 & 1991 (see Visitor Monitoring Training Manual SNH April 1993)
- Road side survey 1982 -- the aim of this survey was to provide a broad overview of outdoor recreation across the whole region and to compare the findings with those of an earlier survey undertaken in 1970.
- Longniddry, Gullane (1983) and Yellowcraig (1984) – these surveys provided detailed information about use-levels at each of the sites, and the characteristics of visitors and their visits. The aim was to use this information to: improve understanding of the role of Country Parks in providing for outdoor recreation in the Lothian Region; to aid planning and management of the sites on a day to day basis; and to give Local Authority staff the opportunity to gain additional experience in carrying out recreation surveys, and to help them understand the value of the collected data in guiding policy-making, planning and management.
- Tourism Survey 1993 – this was undertaken to provide more detailed and up-to-date information about the scale and nature of tourism in the District. Specifically, this piece of work was used firstly to devise a method for monitoring the volume and value of tourism in East Lothian over time, and secondly to initiate a programme of market

research to obtain base-line information about holiday and day trip visitors to the District during the summer of 1993.

- Longniddry Bents & Yellowcraig 1993 – these surveys were undertaken at the same time as the Tourism Survey with a number of aims in mind: to find out about the personal characteristics of visitors to the two sites; to collect information about the nature of visits, including the activities undertaken; and to find out what people liked and disliked about the sites they visited and about East Lothian as a day trip and holiday destination. Where appropriate, these findings were used for a comparison with those of the 1983 survey.
- Haddington to Longniddry 1994 – there have been a number of studies in recent years exploring the ease of access from people’s homes at a macro scale, but little information and/or research has been conducted at a local level. Therefore the aims of this piece of work were: to initiate a programme of research in East Lothian into local countryside access, beginning with linear routes, and to develop and test methods for surveying users of a local linear route linking two ‘small’ communities.
- Local Access Routes 1995 – to complete a programme of research in East Lothian into the use of local countryside recreation facilities and to test surveying methods.
- Aberlady Bay LNR 1995 – the aims of this research were: to estimate the level of use at the Reserve; to identify the proportion of visits at each entry point; to identify the dispersal pattern of visitors; to provide information about the characteristics of users, to assess visitors’ opinions of the Reserve in general, and with regard to specific aspects; and to verify the validity of previous ‘in house’ surveys.

An important consideration when planning visitor surveys of any kind is cost. Figure 1 below outlines some of the costs associated with the visitor surveys just described.

Figure 1			
1993			
Tourism Survey (included Longniddry & Yellowcraig)	£38,000	£5,000 from SNH £5,000 from ELTB	£16,000 from LEEL £12,000 from ELDC
1994			
Access survey Haddington/Longniddry	£13,153	£6,576 from SNH	£6,576 from ELDC
1995			
Access survey Musselburgh,	£12,560	£6,280 from SNH	£6,280 from ELDC
Aberlady Bay LNR	£4,700	£2,350 from SNH	£2,350 from ELDC

In these figures, no account is taken of in-house staff time spent supervising the contract or providing background data (e.g. vehicle/people counting statistics or car park ticket sales).

APPENDIX 1:

Brief for Surveys of Users of Local Access Routes and Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve in East Lothian

1. Introduction

East Lothian District Council seeks to ensure adequate local provision of safe, preferably off-road, cycling/walking/horseriding routes within the District. To help achieve this goal, the Council's Department of Leisure and Tourism has initiated research into the use of local routes. The work began in 1994 with a survey of users of the Haddington to Longniddry Walkway; this was undertaken by the Centre for Leisure Research. In 1995, the intention is to extend the research and commission a survey of people using paths leading out from the urban edge of Musselburgh and Wallyford (see map 1).

In addition, the Commission will cover a survey of users to the Local Nature Reserve at Aberlady Bay (map 2) as part of the Council's monitoring programme of sites along the East Lothian coast.

The clients for the work will be East Lothian District Council and Scottish Natural Heritage and an SNH representative will sit on the Steering Group.

This brief sets out the requirements of the surveys and invites costed proposals for carrying out the work.

The results of the previous surveys at Aberlady will be made available.

2. Aims and Scope of the Surveys

The surveys should be designed to:

- estimate levels of use of the different routes/site;
- provide information about the nature and levels of use;
- provide information about the characteristics of users;

- canvass the views of users about the routes/site and set the use of these facilities in the context of use made of other similar facilities in the District and Lothian Region; and
- At Aberlady, identify the proportion of visitors at arriving at four entry points.

The routes around Musselburgh and Wallyford are multi-purpose (used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders) and the survey should be designed to obtain information about each of these groups. Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve is visited by people with an interest in natural history and by people who come primarily to walk and/or enjoy the beach/sea – the survey should obtain information about each of these groups.

3. Approach to the Project and Survey Design

In tendering for the project, prospective consultants should set out their proposals for:

- (a) The timescale for the project and the survey period(s) – it is intended that the overall project will begin by the beginning of May and should be completed by the end of 1995.
- (b) The survey methods – proposals should describe in detail the methods and techniques which will be used to meet the aims of the surveys. The full range of information to be collected by the surveys should be set out. The content and format of questionnaires/survey forms should be agreed with client before the survey begins.
- (c) The fieldwork schedule – the number and type of days on which fieldwork will be carried out and the timing of the survey days should be set out. The 1994 survey conducted fieldwork on weekdays, weekend days and bank/local holidays and it is anticipated that the 1995 surveys will follow a similar pattern. Details also should be given of the locations where the fieldwork will be carried out and how many staff will be deployed at each location on each occasion.
- (d) Sample selection and size.

- (e) Estimating levels of use at the two locations -- the methods which will be used to calculate the number of users along the linear routes and at Aberlady Bay should be outlined. At Aberlady the geographic dispersal into the site is also to be investigated.

For information, a people counter is installed on the bridge at Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve and hourly counts will be made available to the successful consultant.

- (f) Processing and analysing the data, including details of quality control for the data processing.
- (g) The content and format of reports -- full reports on the findings of both surveys and their implications for the District Council are required; technical details of the surveys should be appended.

The client also will require to undertake a presentation of the findings to client staff.

- (h) Staffing -- the proposal should nominate a project manager and give details of other staff who will be assigned to the project. Proposals for briefing survey staff and the way in which work on site will be supervised should also be described.

If it is intended to sub-contract any element(s) of the work, then details of proposed sub-consultants should be provided.

- (i) Progress reports -- the number and timing of progress reports to the Steering Group should be set out.
- (j) The costs for carrying out the work should be presented under the following heads:
 - i) project management and administration;
 - ii) survey design and set-up;
 - iii) fieldwork, including on site supervision;
 - iv) data processing and analysis;
 - v) reporting and presentation of the findings; and

vi) project expenses, including the costs of survey materials.

The costs for (ii) to (vi) above should be itemised separately for the two surveys.

(j) Relevant experience – brief details should be given of previous survey work carried out in outdoor settings.

4. COPYRIGHT

The Copyright in all material produced during the project, including the data from the survey, shall become the property of East Lothian District Council and Scottish Natural Heritage. At the end of the project, consultants should transfer a documented copy of the data, along with any weighting factors, to the Council in a format that can input into the Council's Framework software package.

5. TENDERING PROCEDURE

Written proposals for the project (3 copies) should be submitted to:

Mr Ian D Fullerton
Head of Tourism and Landscape
East Lothian District Council
31 Court Street
HADDINGTON
EH41 3AE

Proposals should arrive no later than 7 April 1995.

One copy proposal to Scottish Natural Heritage:

Mr Alan Leitch
Scottish Natural Heritage
South East Region
Laundry House
Dalkeith Country Park
DALKEITH
EH22 2NA

Prospective consultants may be required to attend an interview and should reserve the following date:

Tuesday 18 April 1995

Further information about this brief and the tendering procedure can be obtained from Mr Fullerton on 01620 827431.

East Lothian District Council

March 1995

Appendix II

A Chronology of Research of a Countryside Recreation Nature which has been Undertaken in East Lothian Sponsored by East Lothian Councils.

Leisure + Countryside = (TRRU)	1970
Car Park Ticket sales Gullane [from 1952] and Yellowcraig [1988] (ELDC)	
Traffic around Edinburgh (ASH)	1982
Site Survey Longniddry Bents & Gullane Bents (ASH)	1983
Site Survey of Users Yellowcraig (ASH)	1984
East Lothian Site Monitoring (commenced) Continuous ongoing (ELDC)	1991
East Lothian Tourism Survey (CLR)	1993

Survey of Visitors to Longniddry Bents & Yellowcraig (CLR)	1993
Survey of users of the Haddington/Longniddry Railway Walk (Local Access Routes #1) (CLR)	1994
Survey of users Musselburgh/Wallyford. (Local Access Routes #2) (System 3)	1995
Survey of visitors to Aberlady Bay LNR (System 3)	1995

DESIGNING YOUR SURVEY

By Lesley McLagan,
Survey Research Associates

This paper covers three key issues with respect to designing a visitor survey, namely:

Survey methods,
Sampling issues, and
Questionnaire design.

Each of these topics is vast in its own right, and indeed there are many publications dealing with each subject. This paper is designed to give an idea of the main issues that should be considered in designing a visitor survey.

Survey Methods

The approach to be adopted will depend on three main factors:

- the objectives of the survey;
- the timing of the survey; and
- the budget available.

These may well appear to be obvious comments, but a common problem with visitor surveys can be to lose sight of the original objectives, while the survey becomes an attempt to answer all the questions that everyone involved with the site or facility ever wanted to know. It is vital that one keeps the purpose of the survey clearly in view as it is planned.

The timing of the survey will have an important bearing on the approach that is adopted. Unfortunately the need for market research is all too often overlooked, and not discussed until the last moment. Everyone involved in the process would benefit considerably if good quality market research was introduced as early as possible.

Budget too is an important consideration, and indeed, often a constraint in that funds may not be readily available to carry out as extensive an enquiry as one might wish. Lack of funds also has a bearing on the choice of sample sites, and even the length of questionnaires.

Techniques

A great deal of visitor research involves an interviewer talking directly to respondents in one of the following locations:

a) In-home

This method is most often used when the main aim of research is to determine behaviour, attitudes, anticipated use of new facilities, or when the length of the questionnaire or the amount of show material is such that other methods are not practical.

b) Hall tests

This method demands use of a central location, either on a national or local basis, and use of a team of interviewers to recruit passers-by (Invitations can also be used). Halls can be used for varying lengths of questionnaires, and are particularly useful for showing display materials, e.g. maps, models of proposed new facilities, or video presentations.

c) In -street interviewing

This can again be national or local, but as the approach is generally only suitable for shorter interviews, it tends to be much cheaper than in-home interviewing. Samples are usually controlled by quotas, and applications could cover such areas as planned or actual usage of a facility in the location.

d) Telephone research

The main advantage of telephone interviewing is the fast turnaround via CATI facilities, and the ability to obtain dispersed samples.

e) Omnibus surveys

Omnibus surveys are widely used in the context of visitor research to give an insight into basic behaviour patterns, e.g. how many people took walks in the countryside or used a leisure centre during the last month. These surveys are syndicated, with confidential sections, resulting in a relatively cheap way of collecting essential basic data.

f) Site surveys

As the name implies, this technique involves on-site interviewing. Care needs to be taken to identify the most appropriate spot (s) at which to interview, and bearing in mind that such questionnaires are usually administered in the open, they need to be kept short and to the point. This approach can usefully be combined with other sources of information, for example information generated by people/traffic counters.

g) Self-completion

This approach cuts down on the manpower needed to conduct a survey, and makes it possible to collect a large quantity of information. However, care needs to be taken about the self-selecting nature of the sample, and the length and layout of the questionnaire.

h) Counts

Counts of various types are often used in visitor research to determine very basic information, such as the total number of individuals visiting a site. More complex techniques can be used, such as electronic counting of vehicles entering or exiting an area, and aerial photography. However, these techniques may be very expensive.

Qualitative Research

All the techniques outlined above are basically categorised as quantitative research requiring reasonable sample sizes. Qualitative research, on the other hand, does not demand such large sample sizes, but rather, tends to involve a more detailed examination of smaller samples. Examples of qualitative methods include: group discussions, paired interviews, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews.

Methods for the Future

Techniques for data collection are developing all the time, and methods for consideration in the future will certainly include PC conducted questionnaires at the site of interest. Other recent developments include Interactive Voice Recognition and Computer Assisted Self Completion interviews on hand-held terminals.

Sampling Issues

It is vitally important to get the sample size right. A good starting premise is to remember that all samples provide estimates of the true population response, and that as a result

every estimate has a degree of error associated with it. The larger the sample size, the smaller the error will be, but obviously the greater the cost of the investigation. Therefore, in selecting a sample size, one is inevitably compromising between statistical reliability and cost. A recommended starting point is to consider the sub-groups needed for analysis; 50 respondents is a bare minimum; 100+ more realistic. Within this overall design there is of course the possibility of boosting certain sub-cells of interest so that resources are not wasted on interviewing too many people within the more easily found categories. Good sampling practice is to produce an estimate as close as possible to the true population mean, to minimise the sampling error (the amount by which an estimate varies from the population value due to sampling) and to minimise bias.

One needs to have confidence in the outcome of any research, and researchers often talk about findings at the 95% level of confidence. This means that for any survey outcome, researchers can state that they are 95% confident that the true finding of the research is between A% and B%. The table below gives some examples based on sample sizes of both 500 and 1000.

	10%/90%	25%/75%	50%
500	±2.7%	±3.9%	±4.5%
1,000	±1.9%	±2.8%	±3.2%

Equally important to consider alongside sample sizes is the actual sample frame. In the following few sections three main approaches are considered: next-passer-by; random probability sampling, and quota sampling.

Next passer-by

This approach involves contacting everyone passing by an interviewing point until someone agrees to an interview. The actual contact is usually the person who has the next birthday. The main benefit of this approach is its simplicity, and the fact that bias due to interviewer selection is minimised.

When using this technique it is also advisable to collect basic information about other passers-by who are not interviewed so that the incidence data can be collated and the survey data weighted to reflect the natural incidence of different types of phenomenon, e.g. walking, horse riding and cycling.

Ideally, two or more interviewers are needed at each site, depending on the volume of traffic, so that someone is available to count and someone to interview. This helps with interviewer safety in remote countryside locations, but obviously incurs additional costs. Alternatively, 5 or 10 minutes in every hour can be set aside for counting/categorising, and the remaining time used for interviewing. Determining user profiles in this way, one must also take into account the time of day, day of week and the time of year when the survey is conducted.

Random Probability Sampling

Often described as the 'purist approach', random sampling is based on the premise that every individual has an equal chance of selection, whoever they are and wherever they live. Two main information sources are used for this type of sampling, namely the Electoral Register and the Postal Address File. In theory, the Electoral Register is a listing of all individuals aged 17+. However, it cannot be readily obtained for some areas; it excludes people not registered to vote; it does not include 16 year-olds who are usually included within an all adult sample; and it is usually in paper form. The Postal Address File is held in computer format and lists all households, however, it also contains a considerable degree of 'deadwood' (possibly as much as 12%).

The reliability of either random approach depends upon the response rate, which needs to be as high as possible. Response rates can be improved by allowing a high number of call-backs, extending the interviewing period, and by varying calls to different times of the day and days of the week. Of course, multiple calls increase the cost of the survey, and it should also be borne in mind that there may be biases in the sample because some people, for example the young and affluent, are likely to be away from their homes more frequently than the elderly and less-affluent. This sort of non-response bias needs to be taken into consideration.

Random probability sampling is generally considered the best approach when one needs to know the true incidence of particular behaviours.

Quota Sampling

Quota sampling involves pre-defining the sample in terms of key parameters, typically age, sex and social class. Interviewers are usually given a control sheet identifying the type of respondent to interview. There are no set rules about the number of call-backs at any address, and the interviewer has considerable freedom in the selection process -- therein lie some of the problems of quota interviewing. This approach, however, is considerably cheaper than random sampling.

Questionnaire design

Having discussed the problem, outlined the objectives, and agreed the sample, the next step is to develop the questionnaire. In essence this may seem straightforward but the following guide should help the reader avoid a number of common problems.

At the outset, thought must be given to a number of main design aspects, for example: relating question topics clearly to overall research objectives; ensuring a common sense structure; ensuring an appropriate length (to avoid boring and frustrating potential respondents); analysis requirements and budgetary constraints. For robust analysis, no sub-cell in the analysis should contain less than 50 individuals, and ideally no less than 75.

Care must be taken to ensure that all questions are valid, reliable, comprehensible, recordable and analysable. It is essential that respondents understand the question, and indeed that their understanding of the question topic is the same as the designers.

It is good practice to keep the questionnaire language straightforward – your sample will contain individuals of differing intellectual ability. Don't use jargon; don't have any double negatives in the questions (this could confuse people); cut back long sentences which contain lots of clauses, and use shorter simpler sentences; don't combine two questions in one, and try to steer clear of conditional questions.

Don't make your recall periods too long, or your answers will become increasingly unreliable. Don't probe in areas where respondents are clearly unable to answer; the respondent will think such questioning is futile, and you may well alienate them. Avoid irrelevant topics, and extended questions or boring or irrelevant topics. A difficult question may prejudice the rest of your questionnaire.

Try to avoid open-ended questions where possible; they are expensive and time-consuming within a limited interview schedule. They can sometimes be difficult to code and analyse consistently, however, they can be exceedingly useful for providing 'top of mind' reactions.

Care needs to be taken with the order of the questionnaire, for example considering behaviour first might cause people to conceal their real attitudes. One should also take care not to bias the outcome to key questions by the having leading questions, and likewise, any individual questions that have the possibility of a positive/negative response should include these in the actual question.

A number of other points to consider:

- When there are lots of statements within a question, rotate the order of asking to obviate bias.
- Similarly, if one needs to ask about visiting behaviour to a number of different sites, but the questions are largely the same, again rotate the order in which questions are asked.
- Probe fully at open-ended questions; don't just settle for the first answer given because this often hides the real response.

Above all, questionnaires should be interesting for respondents so that they will co-operate with your survey to the best of their ability and, equally important, so that they will help next time an interviewer approaches them.

Suggested Reading

By far the best book that I have ever found on Site Surveys is:

Tourism & Recreation Research Unit, 'Recreation Site Survey Manual' (ISBN 0419 12680 5)

Most general market research reference books will contain sections on questionnaire design and sampling. Good examples are:

Handbook of Market Research by Bob Worcester

The Industrial Market Research Handbook by Paul Hague

Marketing Research (Fourth Edition) by Peter M. Chisnall

RUNNING YOUR SURVEY

By Tom Costley,

System Three

Introduction

As my contribution to the seminar, and to complement the advice and guidance offered by the other speakers, I intend to examine three particular aspects of the survey process which may not be accorded the same degree of priority as other more obvious elements. However, for the external researcher each of these elements is of critical importance. I would like to deal in turn with the following topics:

- The survey brief
- The role of the interviewer in the survey
- The management of the survey

The Survey Brief

First of all, is there any need for a survey brief setting out the reasons for conducting the survey and the anticipated outputs from the exercise? How many times have you undertaken a survey without preparing a written brief? I would contend that a written brief is a critical phase of the survey, even if the intention is to conduct the survey using internal resources. A one page note which sets the context for the survey, its objectives, the time table and the outputs anticipated will ensure that there is no confusion and uncertainty about the survey.

Having agreed that a survey brief is a necessity rather than an optional extra, what is its primary purpose? Normally, it will define the parameters of the survey, but it will often have a secondary role as the means by which researchers are selected to undertake the survey. The extent to which the latter purpose for the brief is applicable will often determine the level of detail which is required within the brief. To enable researchers to prepare a good response to your brief, it is important that you provide them with as much information as possible. Ideally, this should be contained within the survey brief but I have never written or received a brief which was so comprehensive that there was no need for further information or clarification. The need to discuss the content of the brief with potential researchers often yields valuable information about their level of experience and knowledge which can be a significant help when it comes to the selection process.

The one issue which produces the most 'friction' between a client and the contractors bidding for a survey is providing an indication of the budget within the survey brief. While I have sympathise with the argument that detailing a precise budget will lead to a 'rash' of proposals within a few pounds of this figure, this is not sufficient argument for excluding some indication of the available budget. The majority of contractors would be delighted to receive details of a budgetary range in order that they can obtain some impression of the scale of the survey. On the other hand, a tight specification of the size of the survey in terms of the number of interviews required will circumvent the need for the budget information. The willing provision of such information is another expression of the need for clients to provide as much information as possible to potential contractors to achieve optimum results from the survey.

The Role of the Interviewer

It is generally regarded as axiomatic that any visitor survey will only be as good as the quality of the data collected. Consequently, it is vital that considerable attention is paid to the issue of who conducts the survey interviews and the general role of the interviewer. For the vast majority of surveys where interviewers are required (albeit there are circumstances where self-completion questionnaires will be the preferred or only option) there are three options:

- internal staff
- students or temporary staff
- market research interviewers.

As might be expected, each of these options has both strengths and weaknesses. The choice depends on a variety of factors including: perceived costs; availability of internal resources; experience of staff, and the complexity of the survey. For example, conducting a survey using internal staff has a number of advantages:

- it obviates the need to pay out money to interviewers;
- staff will be aware of the survey subject(s);
- value added can be forthcoming from staff talking to visitors in a structured format.

On the other hand, it will be more difficult for staff to avoid introducing some bias to the interview because of their attitudes and perceptions towards a subject. Secondly, they are not trained as interviewers and thus their questioning technique may not be as productive as experienced interviewers. Thirdly, a judgement has to be made with regard to the 'real' cost of staff not conducting other duties whilst they are spending time interviewing.

Hiring temporary staff or employing students to conduct surveys is a convenient way of addressing the problem of staff time. On the other hand, students and temporary staff may require more training in the survey process and demand more direct management. Consequently, any staff time gained from not conducting the interviews will be lost, to a significant extent, by the need for more staff involvement in the training and management of the interviewers. In addition, there will also be some outlay in terms of interviewer payments and/or expenses.

The third option is that of employing fully-trained market research interviewers who are experienced in the use of a variety of questioning techniques and in the management of research projects. The use of an external resource of this nature removes most of the responsibility from internal staff for this aspect of the survey process. Probably the only disadvantage will be the perceived cost of such an exercise because of the need to pay the appropriate fees to an external organisation. I must emphasise the word 'perceived' because in comparison to some of the hidden costs of staff time etc., the real cost of commissioning the interviewing from an external supplier may not be that much greater.

Whoever undertakes the survey, it is important to recognise the need to implement quality control procedures. System Three and Survey Research Associates are both members of the **Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS)** operated by the market research industry. In addition to the criteria which IQCS sets for the training of interviewers, member companies are required to conduct regular accompaniment of interviewers by supervisors and to 'back-check' around 10% of all interviews conducted. This is often done by means of a telephone call to a sample of respondents to assess how the survey was conducted and to check the answers to certain questions. This quality control procedure is the primary reason for recording the name, address and telephone number of a respondent at the end of the interview. Not all market research companies are members of IQCS, but the principle of a minimum number of 'back-checked' interviews is one which would be a useful addition to any survey process.

Management of the Survey

Once again, as with the issue of who should conduct the interviewing, there are various management options to consider. Obviously, the client has to be the person with ultimate responsibility for the survey but I am referring to the actual process whereby the survey brief is turned into a final report which addresses, hopefully satisfactorily, the initial objectives. There are three main options, namely:

- for one organisation to manage the whole survey from initial planning to analysis and reporting;

- for the person who is managing the survey to involve an external organisation in the interviewing process;
- for the person who is managing the survey to involve an external organisation in both the interviewing and data processing elements of the survey process.

Only you can decide which of these options is best for your particular organisation, or indeed for any particular survey. Much will depend upon the time available to internal staff to manage the survey over and above their normal workloads and also, with reference to the data processing aspect, the level of expertise available.

The full-service option of contracting the survey in its entirety transfers responsibility to the researchers. Irrespective of who assumes responsibility for the management of the survey, the following represent the main tasks to be 'managed':

- production of the questionnaire and other survey materials;
- scheduling and management of the fieldwork;
- checking, coding and data entry of the information from the questionnaire;
- production of the tabulations and reporting of the survey data.

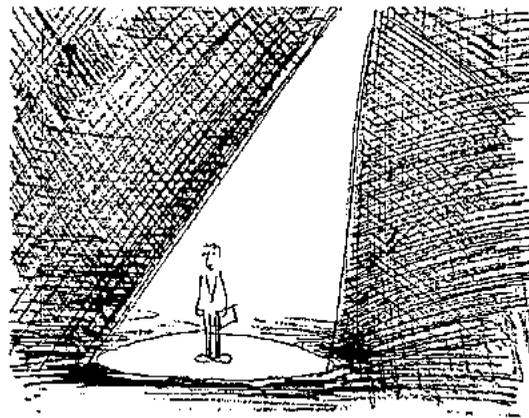
ANALYSING THE DATA

By Bill Breakell,

North York Moors National Park

The moment of truth

The moment of truth comes with the arrival of the first responses. It is only now, possibly after planning for a year or more, that the results of all that preliminary work come together. If you were badly wrong at any stage in the preparation of the survey, you are about to reap the results. On the other hand, those first few completed forms should send the adrenaline racing.



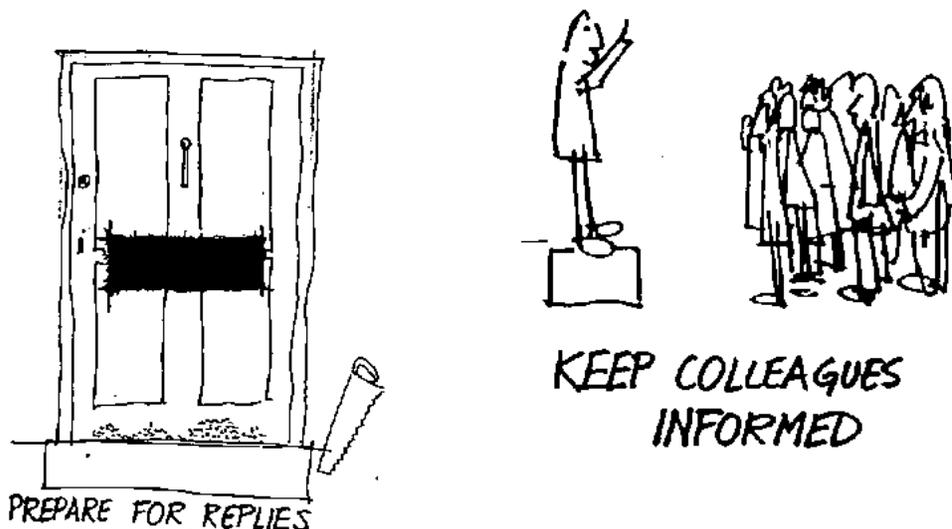
THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Depending on the method of administration, responses may arrive in bulk or in ones and twos. Hopefully the total arrivals will match the required sample size. But even when waiting for the questionnaires to arrive there is work to be done.

A vital early stage is to tell colleagues and administrative staff what to expect. They may have become aware of your progressively fraught mental state, and they shouldn't expect things to suddenly improve. On a more serious note, we hope that colleagues will have been told about the survey. They may have been involved at the early stages, but it would be no bad thing to use whatever tools are available to communicate the current stage of the work. A simple message on the notice board; a paragraph in an internal newsletter; a couple of minutes of a staff meeting; or even a memo could be useful in alerting others to the stage you are at, and may help them realise the importance which the organisation puts on this research. If you feel that the organisation doesn't place enough importance on your research, this is as good a time as any to keep the pressure up!

If any information is to be input which includes personal data which can be associated with an individual you may need to be registered under the Data Protection Act. Check carefully to ensure you meet not only the requirements of the law, but the best practices of professionalism and confidentiality.

At a practical level how will the forms arrive? Will they arrive by post, or will bedraggled and exhausted interviewers bring them in? Will several boxes thud down, brimming over with forms? There may be implications for the mailroom.



It is important to log the arrivals and store them carefully so that they arrive in an easily readable condition: this may be even more important if the data is being read by a machine.

Who will be inputting data and who will be analysing and reporting on the findings? They also should be kept fully abreast with developments.

There may be a need to verify the forms as they arrive. On rare occasions, respondents to self-completion questionnaires may think they can significantly alter the findings of a survey by copying forms and returning them. Is it possible (or necessary) to check the authenticity of returned forms?

Inputting the data

If a pilot has been undertaken, you may feel confident that the input and output of data will be straightforward. On the other hand, it may be of value to input data from a handful of questionnaires and then analyse the output. This will give a clue to problems of interpretation, an indication of time required for inputting data, and will help identify the

types of output possible. If this initial analysis is undertaken it is vital that the 'results' are not disclosed or interpreted: they are a test of the mechanics and could give wildly incorrect information.

Most data is input via keyboard, although some surveys (including ones for the North York Moors National Park) are now scanned directly into a spreadsheet or software such as SPSS by a process called Teleform. Although this technique is accurate, it may not save a great deal of time compared with normal keyboarding. The software will seek confirmation of difficult words or characters, or badly placed ticks or crosses.

Keying in data is time-consuming and requires concentration. It will be important to observe the rules for the use of VDUs, ensuring that adequate breaks are possible. Explaining what the survey is about, and what it aims to achieve can help the inputter understand the need for accuracy and they become part of the team – an essential part of the team at that.

After all the data has been input, and before analysis can begin, it will be necessary to undertake error checking. There may be sampling errors, or non-sampling errors. For instance, what about out-of-range values (e.g. age 103)? Or consistency errors (visited site with friends, group size 1)? What about missing data? Keep a record of problems which arise, and how discrepancies are resolved. This not only helps with consistency, but may answer subsequent questions or criticisms, and may improve the accuracy of subsequent surveys. There may also be simple keying errors.

The dataset

Once the survey forms have been entered and validated, we have a dataset. As an insurance, it is important to copy the data onto another disc and store it safely somewhere. The initial outputs of surveys are usually in tabular form (being derived from spreadsheets). Depending on the software used, the tables may be easily understood or may require more careful interpretation.

From these tables it is often straightforward to create graphs and charts which can clarify trends and comparisons. Data may have been weighted or grossed to adjust the sample, or to correct an imbalance which may have been inherent in the sampling. If weighting is used, it is important to make it clear why it has been introduced. There are cynics who will suggest that weighting has been used to tell you what you wanted, rather than what was actually there.

When analysing data it is important to seek the main findings by interpreting the results, not simply quoting the percentages. Look carefully at the size of subsets; if they are too

small, the results may be flawed. On the other hand, these subsets may hold the clues to a number of important findings. You (and possibly only you) know the survey objectives. Use this knowledge to 'get under the skin' of the data and consider each cross-tabulation as a new piece of the jigsaw puzzle.

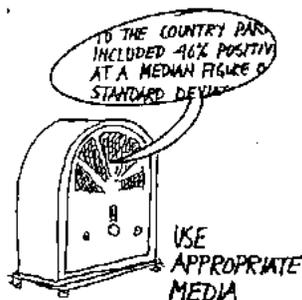
Making comparisons with other information is important. When identifying the need for a survey you probably discovered who else had undertaken similar work. Compare data with other local surveys as well as any national figures. There will be discrepancies and there may be simple reasons why these have occurred. Identify unexplained patterns and try to explain them. Know what to look for, but keep an open mind for findings which may be of use in the future, in other contexts or to other people.

Often the results may simply confirm the general trends you or your colleagues expected. This could, of course, give rise to a criticism that the survey was a waste of resources. You know that this was not the case; make sure that others have confidence in the approach and results.

Once you have the final information you require, you will need to decide what to do with the original survey forms. If they contain confidential data (including addresses) you may wish to destroy them using a shredder. If they are kept it is important that they are identified in such a way that they cannot be misinterpreted or misused.

Communicating results

Making the information known will require a knowledge of the data, the methods by which it was gathered, some general indicators and a knowledge of the intended audiences. Presenting the findings will probably be undertaken by several techniques: written reports (including summaries); information via the media (including radio which doesn't show graphs too well!); and presentations to colleagues or committees.

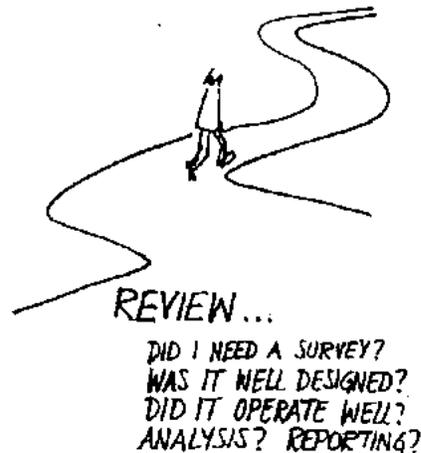


There may also be other local and national organisations and agencies who would welcome the data.

Depending on the nature of your own organisation, there may be specialists to help with this work, or you may be the only one to undertake it. Prepare for the cynics – it is guaranteed that someone will quote 'lies, damned lies, and statistics.' In warning of limited sample sizes or accuracy, ensure that you do not undermine the validity of the whole survey.

Closing the file

Thank all participants if possible – the public through the media or at the site; interviewers by personal letter or even a presentation (you may need them again in the future!); arms'-length sponsors; and of course colleagues who have been involved in any way, however unwillingly!



Review the process – the reasons, the techniques, the outputs, the results. Share your learning with others. Three points to remember: respect confidentiality, thank participants and use the results positively.

Unless you are exceptionally clever (or lucky) there will be the questions you forgot or the phrasing which was wrong. Most of us kick ourselves at the end of a survey, but you will have got results and answers to some of the questions you were seeking. Next time all will be well. Next time?

DRAWING THE SURVEY TOGETHER

By Steve Green,
Consultant

The day included some stimulating presentations from experienced practitioners and interesting discussion revolving around practical exercises. A number of salient points emerged:

- Be sure you know exactly what you want to know – do you need a survey at all or can you get the answer from somewhere else?;
- Allow sufficient time for planning and write a clear project brief;
- Think carefully about your sample – is it representative? Aim to balance sample size against cost; to be confident in your results you need 75-100 responses per sub-group;
- Take care over the questions – are they ambiguous? do they lead? can they be analysed? are they too difficult to answer? do you need to ask them? does the questionnaire flow? is it too long?;
- Pilot your questionnaire to identify any problems before you 'go live', and learn from the experience of others;
- In-depth interviews or focus groups are a good way of identifying the issues and helping to decide what questions to ask;
- Analysing the results by computer allows speedier and more complex analysis;
- Minimise error during information collection, input and analysis _ try to avoid boredom for all concerned;
- Take care in how you interpret the results – how confident are you in the quality of the data? what were the main sources of bias? do you need to weight the data?;
- Only present the information which is relevant to solving your problem;
- Stick to the salient points; translate the information into the readers' language;

- Think hard about whether to do the survey yourself or to contract it out – have you got enough time? how independent are your own staff? Students and volunteers are less expensive yes, but what about their effect on the quality of data collected?;
- Think about how you will use the findings. Do this before you start, and be prepared to have to deal with results you may not like.

And finally, good quality market research needs care at all stages of the work; falling down on just one can invalidate the whole exercise!

'Do Visitor Survey's Count?
Royal York Hotel
16 October 1996

- 0900 Registration and coffee
- 1000 Welcome Fred Coalter
- Market research for countryside recreation -- an introduction Steve Green
A look at alternative approaches to research and existing sources of information
- 1030 Do you need a survey? Ian Fullerton
Setting survey objectives and designing a survey brief
- Practical exercise 1 and coffee
- 1130 Designing your survey Lesley McLagan
How to use different survey methods and design a questionnaire
- Practical exercise 2
- 1245 Buffet lunch and the opportunity to look at PC-based demonstrations and view posters, manuals and national survey reports.
- 1400 Running your survey Tom Costley
Fieldwork and the contractor's perspective
- 1430 Analysing the data Bill Breakell
Interpreting and using the results
- Practical exercise 3
- 1545 Drawing the survey together Steve Green
Discussion of key issues
- 1600 Close and depart

DO VISITOR SURVEYS COUNT?

Delegate List

Andrea Beddows
Coast & Countryside Adviser
National Trust

Peter Cockburn
Reserve Centre Project Officer
Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Amanda Bellringer
Assistant Statistician
Forestry Commission

Andy Cooper
Senior Research Officer
Peak District National Park

Jan Blud
Countryside Interpretative Office
Doncaster MBC Countryside Service

Andy Cope
Research Student
University of Sunderland

Ian Bray
Countryside Ranger
Loch Lomond Park Authority

Ruth Crabtree
Research Student
Newcastle Business School

Claire Brodie
Research Assistant
British Waterways

John Davies
Conservation & Recreation Officer
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd

Martin Brown
Leisure & Tourism Manager
British Waterways

Richard Davison
Senior Recreation Officer
Scottish Natural Heritage

Paul Burgess
Countryside Project Officer
Harrogate Borough Council

Bryn Dowson
Researcher
University of Sunderland

Alasdair Chambers
Director
A. and P. Chambers Ltd.

Nichola Drummond
Planning Assistant (Research)
North York Moors National Park

Colin Cheesman
Park Manager
Parc Bryn Bach

Jim Eccleston
Asst Research Manager
Scottish Tourist Board

Chris Edwards
Quantock Hills Warden
Somerset County Council

Ian Johnson
Access Management Officer
Lancashire County Council

Jackie England
Principal Research Assistant
Middlesborough Borough Council

Ian Keirle
Lecturer
Welsh Institute of Rural Studies

Paul Esrich
Recreation and Access Officer
Scottish Natural Heritage

James Littlewood
Countryside Strategy Assistant
Kent County Council

John Gibson
Head Ranger (Recreation)
Forest Enterprise

Rae Lonsdale
Access & Recreation Officer
Yorkshire Dales National Park

Simon Gillam
Head of Statistics
Forestry Commission

Hayley Lowes
Technical Officer
Environment Agency

Anne Glover
Assistant Co-ordinator
Pennine Way Co-ordination Project

Pat Lumsdon
Researcher
Simon Holt Marketing

Sue Glyptis
Professor of Recreation Management
Loughborough University

Sue Markwell
Development Manager
CELTS

Claire Goold
Senior Research Officer
Wales Tourist Board

Glenn Millar
Research Manager & Vice-chair of CRN
British Waterways

Andrew Graham
Recreation Officer
Environment Agency

Kristie Murray
Sports and Leisure Department
Cardiff County Council

Debbie Greene
Recreation & Access Officer
Scottish Natural Heritage

Andrew Niven
Countryside Manager
Durham County Council

Peter Holden
Senior Ranger
National Trust for Scotland

Kirsty Noble
Research Officer
Scottish Sports Council

Tony Philpin
Coordinator
Pennine Way Co-ordination Project

Julia Scanes
Assistant Countryside Access & Recreation
East Sussex County Council

Gill Smith
Assistant Planning Officer
Denbighshire County Council

Jonathan Stacey
Area Officer Cairngorms
Scottish Natural Heritage

Colin Taylor
Marketing Manager
Rotherham MBC

Kevin Theaker
Senior Ranger
Flintshire County Council

Julie Thompson
Pennine Bridleway Coordinator
Countryside Commission

Carole Thornley
Recreation & Tourism Officer
Countryside Council for Wales

Sarah Tindal
Taff Trail Access Officer
Merthyr & Cynon Groundwork Trust

Jon Young
Recreation & Access Officer
Brecon Beacons National Park