

Under-represented Groups: Discussion Paper

Throughout the year, we have attempted to progress with the work on how to encourage under-represented groups to access the countryside more readily. What we have discovered agrees with much of what previous, detailed, studies have determined.

1. Any group (under-represented or not) would appear to be made up of:
 - Those who would wish to visit the countryside more but for some reason are unable to do so.
 - Those who might consider visiting if that activity fell within their cultural norm and was easy to do.
 - Those who might be interested if there was also an 'attraction' of some type, e.g. an event, demonstration, café, pub, show etc.
 - Those who are just not interested.
2. Of these groups, it is most practical to target as a practical proposition those who show some level of interest and to prioritise those who are interested but are unable to visit the countryside for some reason.
3. To encourage people who do not habitually walk in the countryside requires us to address a large list of questions and preconceptions in some way to 'get them off the sofa'. This has led us to discuss the necessity of providing car (and horse box) parking at convenient starting points, providing simple route descriptions either via paper or electronic means at the idea stage, allaying concerns about trespass, farm animals, ground conditions, weather, the possibility of getting lost etc. It has also caused us to consider the value of some means of helping people to gain confidence in their ability to manage and enjoy country walks. Walks4All have this aim and provide a series of graded and well-described routes. We recognized that it is also important to convey a sense of adventure when people are considering a visit. Perhaps the most simple means would be for experienced walkers to provide informal help to the less experienced. This requires some organization and publicity but would probably fit with the aims of, e.g., the Ramblers' Association.
4. Involving children would seem to be a good way to try to get more adults (their parents etc.) involved. The Scouting organizations already do this and there is a possibility to involve schools in visits to the country and walking as part of the curriculum. Apart from it being valuable in its own right, a visit to the countryside has much educational value: history, geography, social history, art etc. We acknowledge that simply going walking is probably not attractive enough for Generation Y and beyond, and that some sort of challenge and reward incentive will be needed to stimulate their desire to go out into the country (possibly things like orienteering, letter-boxing, themed walks could be considered). If we are to reach a younger group of potential walkers, then we should also consider using promotional channels that they use habitually, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Yammer etc. Groups of people organize events spontaneously using these methods and this may enhance the perceived attractiveness of the event.
5. For many in the cities and towns who have no access to a car and wish to visit the countryside, transport is becoming increasingly limiting. Discussions with providers of walkers' transport services show just how difficult is the economics of this and that, even with a large potential audience (e.g. Peak District NP) considerable funding is needed to set up and publicise the service before any accurate demand can be known. In the current situation, speculative attempts to start services probably could not be justified unless independent funding could be raised. However, we consider there could be more emphasis on access via public transport (e.g. Age Concern Cheshire has an admirable programme of walks for older

people, but all start from a car park – even though in some cases public transport is a viable alternative).

6. We found that some means of gaining access to the countryside were very useful as first steps for anyone new to hiking. For example, some of the larger estates (e.g. Lyme Park) provide reasonably adventurous walks within their boundaries and these are well serviced by signage and leaflets etc. They also provide other facilities and, therefore, alternatives should the weather be awful. The same applies to country parks (e.g. Marbury etc). Walks which begin in towns and loop through the country to return (e.g. Nantwich Riverside Loop) provide a similar easy introduction as do canal and riverside walks and linear parks. We began to form a view that any promotional effort would be best aimed at promoting these types of walks.

7. We also determined that to get a statistical baseline by which to measure utilisation is extremely difficult and is more time consuming than members of a CLAF working party could manage. This caused us to consider that any measures we might take should be viewed as 'proofs of concept' as we could take actions and assess the outcome at the time, rather than taking an action and monitoring over an extended period. An example of this would be, say, assessing the number of new walkers to turn up for events at the Bollington Walking Festival. If we were to do that, at least it would give some information on the utility of events of that type in reaching beyond the 'hard core' of walkers.

8. In summary, it is clear that no single initiative will have a breakthrough effect on getting people into the countryside; this is more likely to be achieved by many small steps and a degree of trial and error.

We have raised various proposals as to where we may take this activity next. These include, as noted above

- Improving information to encourage access
- Targeting work with children as a means of reaching adults
- Finding “challenge and reward” incentives to visit the countryside
- Utilising new media to reach younger people
- Emphasising the viability of existing public transport systems as a means of access.
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We would like to discuss these with the CLAF to seek comments, further suggestions and also support to take some of these forward in 2012.