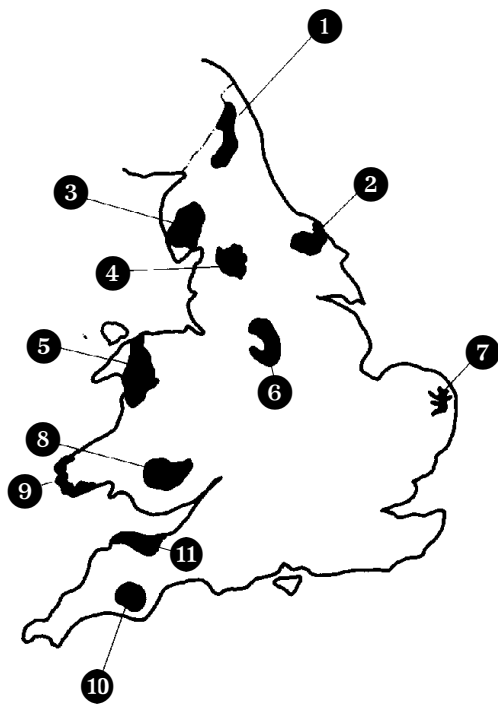




### Brecon Beacons National Park A Visitor Survey Case Study

This Factsheet summarises the findings of a visitor survey carried out in 1994 in the Brecon Beacons National Park. Besides providing evidence to challenge one of the most prevalent assumptions which A level students commonly make about National Parks (the number of car-bound visitors is ruining the environment and people's perception of the Parks!!) the survey provides a useful example of how such information can be collected and the problems therein.

Fig 1. National Parks in England and Wales



1. Northumberland
2. North York Moors
3. Lake District
4. Yorkshire Dales
5. Snowdonia
6. Peak District
7. The Broads  
*In 1989 the Broads were effectively given National Parks protection.*
8. Brecon Beacons
9. Pembrokeshire Coast
10. Dartmoor
11. Exmoor

**Exam Hint** - Too many geographical reports begin with an introduction which pre-judges the outcomes or which confuses the reader with too many aims or objectives. Keep it simple!

The **Brecon Beacons National Park** is a good example of this and in the late 1980s the Park authorities expressed concern that rising visitor numbers would begin to detract from the experience of other visitors; in other words, that visitors would begin to damage the very landscape which they had come to experience.

In 1994, as part of a unique All Parks Visitor Survey, a comprehensive analysis of visitors to the Brecon Beacons was attempted. The survey had several objectives:

- To estimate the total number of visitor days
- To identify where visitors come from and how they travelled to the Park
- To establish why people had chosen to visit the Brecon Beacons and which parts of the Park were visited.
- To determine which features the visitors enjoyed and which aspects spoiled their enjoyment.

The National Parks (Fig.1) were established under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. They had two purposes:

- To preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.
- To promote their enjoyment by the public.

The landscapes of the Parks are man-made but are nevertheless considered to be of national importance. National Parks in England and Wales differ from all international counterparts in that they are designated on the basis of landscape, and recreation within them is encouraged, whereas the internationally accepted definition

of a National Park is of an area little affected by human activity and where visitor access is controlled.

It is in the National Parks of England and Wales therefore that the conflict between landscape conservation and the promotion of recreation is at its greatest. The annual total of visitors to the National Parks continues to increase, with most visitors travelling by car. Whilst traffic congestion is a problem in all of the Parks at certain times of the year, it may become particularly acute in Parks which have a high percentage of narrow, winding roads and which have extremely limited potential for the development of new roads.

Whilst such information is vital to the managers of the Park, it is actually very difficult to obtain. The Park covers an area of 1351 km<sup>2</sup> and contains 113 major roads and hundreds of smaller access routes. The survey wanted to exclude the 32,000 people who live and work within the Park and who often travel in and out of the Park on a daily or weekly basis. Finally, the survey needed to try to obtain as representative a sample as possible but clearly was limited in the number of samples it could take because of cost. The first decision which had to be taken concerned the definition of a sample. In all outdoor recreation surveys there are three potential populations from which samples can be taken - **visitors, visits and visitor days**. These are summarised in Table.1 overleaf.

**Carrying out the survey.**

The survey had 3 main components:

- Private motor vehicle surveys on 5 major roads between July and September. Sampling points were positioned close to the Park boundary.
- Site surveys at 12 important recreation sites within the park between March and November.
- Self-completion questionnaires designed to investigate why people had chosen to visit the Park, how long they were staying, what they were doing and their perceptions of the Park.

**The findings**

Most visitors to the Brecon Beacons travel by car. Of an estimated 3.3 million recreational visitor days, 1.7 million were day visits from home, and 1.6 million were holiday days spent by people drawn from all over the country or from overseas.

As Fig.4 indicates, a significant proportion of day visitors had driven considerable distances to get to the Park. Whether these visitors were attracted to the Park for the same reasons as more local day visitors was not ascertained. Perhaps equally importantly, no information was gathered about whether long distance or local visitors agreed on those aspects which detracted from the quality of their visit. Are long distance travellers more or less tolerant of other car travellers than local visitors, for example?

**Table 2. Reasons for visiting the Park**

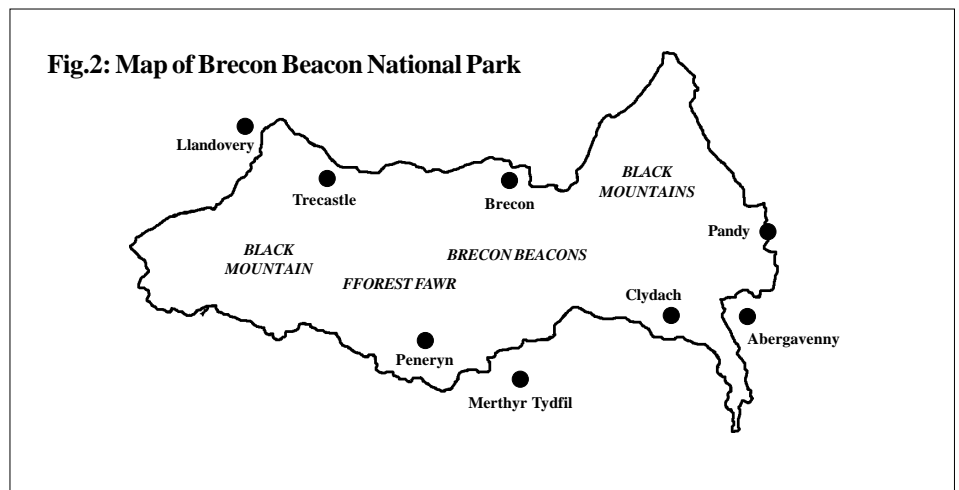
	All reasons	Only or most important reason
	% of respondents	% of respondents
Scenery/landscape	61	30
Enjoyed a previous visit	28	12
Peace and quiet	27	7
Never been before	22	8
Easy to get to	20	5
Specific place/attraction/event	20	9
Take part in a outdoor activity	17	9
Come every year	8	2
Friends/family live here	7	3
Because it is the National Park	5	1
Recommended by a friend/relative	4	2
Own caravan/accommodation in area	2	1
Other	16	11

**Exam Hint** - The more rigorous students are aware of the need to discuss, in detail, the problems associated with their data collection and methodology.

**Table 1. Outdoor recreation survey - who or what should be sampled?**

Criteria	Definition	Comment
Visitor	An individual who makes a recreational visit to the park. A visitor may stay in the Park for one or more days.	Every visitor must have an equal chance of being selected but it is very difficult to obtain a representative sample of visitors because they visit with different frequencies and stay for different lengths of time.
Visit	A single attendance at the park - the visit may last 1 day or more than 1 day	Each visit must have an equal chance of being sampled but this is difficult because visits are of different lengths (the longer the visit, the greater chance it has of being sampled)
Visitor day	A day spent by a visitor in the park e.g. a holidaymaker staying in the park for 3 days = 3 visitor days	Overcomes the problem of gaining a representative sample of visitors or visits. However, it is a tricky concept to understand since it is neither a person nor a single visit to the park.

**Fig.2: Map of Brecon Beacon National Park**



**Fig 3. Aspects of Brecon Beacon National Park enjoyed**

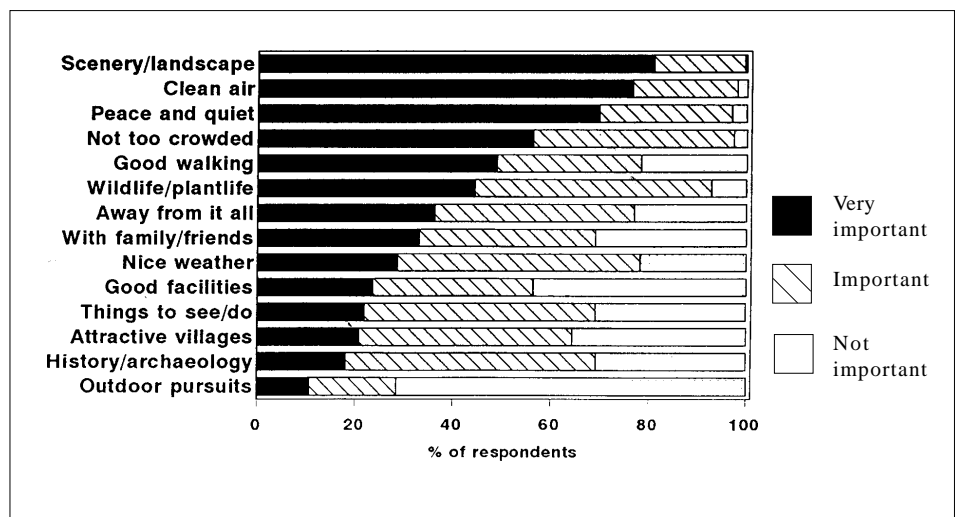
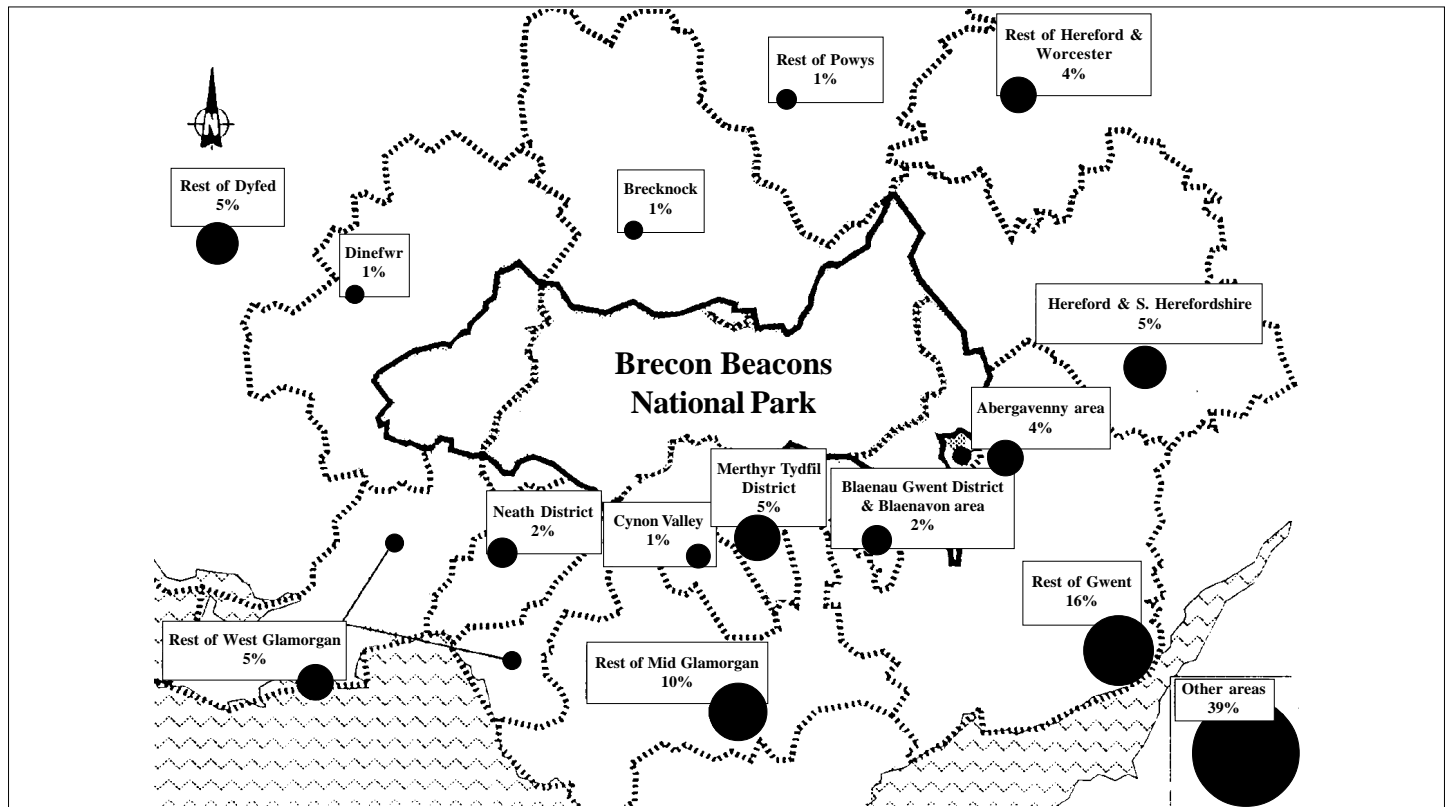


Fig 4. Origin of day trip visitors



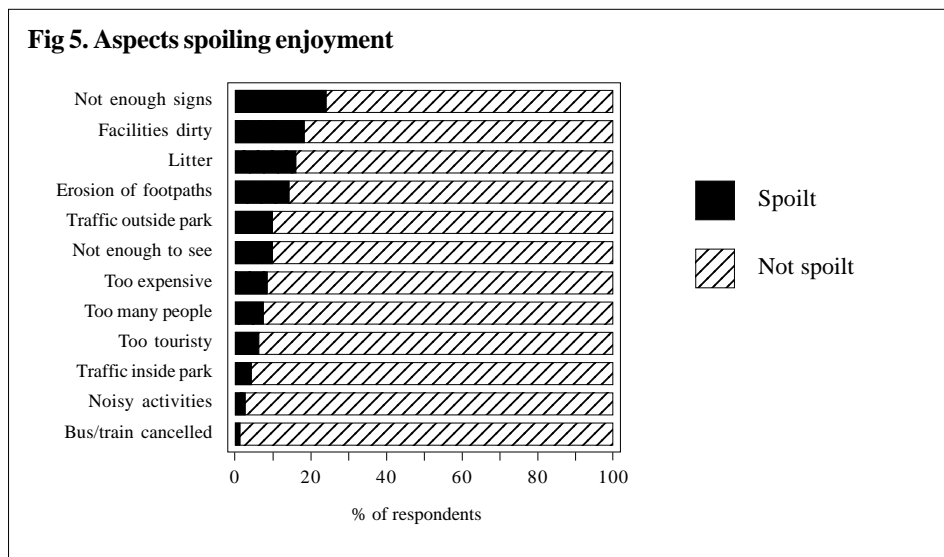
Most holidaymakers were self-catering but bed and breakfast dominated those who were serviced. As might be expected, the majority of visitors did so because of the quality of the scenery or landscape and over 60% of visitors felt that peace and quiet was one of the most attractive features of the Park. Nearly 80% valued clean air. Perhaps equally surprisingly, a lack of adequate signs was the most commonly quoted negative aspect and the vast majority of respondents did not view the number of cars inside the Park as a problem.

It is worth noting that the majority of respondents reported that none of the things listed in Fig. 5 had spoilt their enjoyment. The fact that 'not enough signs' was the most common complaint may, of course, do little more than illustrate the priorities of car owners; hillwalkers, ponytrekkers and mountaineers may well have given much greater priority to factors such as footpath erosion or visitor density. The way in which the questionnaire was designed inevitably influenced the conclusion; respondents were asked to rate factors such as 'not enough signs' rather than suggest, in their own words, what, if

anything, had detracted from their visit.

Such information is obviously of immense use to a Park authority which wishes to encourage quiet outdoor recreation whilst minimising conflict between different users of the Park. It is often argued that tourist or recreational carrying capacities are commonly exceeded in certain parts of many National parks but it is possible that such sweeping generalisations may not apply to the Brecon Beacons.

Fig 5. Aspects spoiling enjoyment



**Exam Hint** - Candidates' conclusions should summarise, synthesise and evaluate by making direct referral to the original aims.

**Acknowledgements;**

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