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Public Response to Forest Recreation in Northern Ireland ¹

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Summary

For one week in July 1964, 50 per cent of the people visiting Tollymore Forest Park were given a questionnaire to complete. About one third of the forms were returned. This paper is an analysis of the results.

INTRODUCTION

Tollymore Park, an area of 1,200 acres near Newcastle, Co. Down, forms the major part of Newcastle State Forest. It was opened as Northern Ireland's first Forest Park on 2nd June, 1955, and has remained the only Forest Park in the province for a period of 10 years.

During that time a steadily mounting number of visitors have been drawn to the park so that it has become one of the province's main tourists attractions. This is borne out by the figures in table 1 below.

TABLE 1
Annual Number of Visitors

Year	Number of Cars	*Calculated Number of Visitors
1955	7,000	33,600
1956	10,892	45,000
1957	12,529	60,100
1958	15,008	72,000
1959	16,800	80,600
1960	20,272	97,200
1961	23,275	111,700
1962	26,792	128,600
1963	28,324	135,900
1964	33,898	162,710

*The number of visitors has been calculated by the formula, No. of cars \times 4.8 = No. of visitors. The average number of visitors per car was found to be 4 but some arrived by other means of transport.

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1. Based on a paper read at a symposium on Forest Recreation at Pomeroy Forestry School, Northern Ireland, September 24th, 1964.
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The time seemed opportune to evaluate the success of the Forest Park and to draw conclusions for future guidance based on the opinions of the visitors themselves.

PROCEDURES

The survey was carried out in two stages:—

(a) For a period of one week at the beginning of every month from April to September a careful check was kept of the number of cars and their occupants and the numbers of those arriving by other means. The driver of every tenth car was asked two questions.

(1) Where is your home?

(2) How often have you visited the park before?

(b) A questionnaire containing 21 questions was given to the occupants of every second vehicle for a period of 7 days, (20th-26th July).

Each person over 12 years was asked to complete the form in the Park if possible and to place it in one of the boxes provided or to return it by post in the stamped addressed envelope supplied. Five thousand forms had been printed and of these 4,474 were issued. Of the forms issued, 1,145 were returned completed in the Park and 420 were returned by post during the subsequent fortnight giving a total of 1,565 forms or 35% of those issued on which to base the conclusions.

On receipt of the forms in Forestry Division Headquarters they were sorted according to the day of issue and the answers to the various questions coded, the code numbers being entered in the margin. The forms were then sent to the Ministry of Finance Central Automatic Data Processing Unit where punch cards were prepared for each form. These were machine-sorted and the response to each question tabulated. This made it possible to have a series of cross-references and to compare the answers from different groups of people.

RESULTS OF MONTHLY SAMPLE

Seasonal Variation

The number of visitors rises almost immediately to a peak in April and then drops markedly in May rising again to a new peak in July and August, though never reaching the same level as April. This appears to be due to the fact that the public wish to get out into the open air at Easter while it is as yet too cold by the sea side.

Table 2 below gives the total numbers of visitors arriving by various means during a sample of one week in every month.

TABLE 2
Number of Visitors
 100% Count for a period of 1 week in each Month

Month (7 days only)	Mode of Travel			Total Visitors (during sample period)
	Car	Cyclists	Bus	
April	9,772	589	365	10,726
May	2,790	161	232	3,183
June	3,431	495	1,156	5,082
July	4,846	152	397	5,395
August	6,102	302	1,721	8,125
September	2,733	140	766	3,639
Total	29,674	1,839	4,637	36,150
Percentage of				
Total	82.08%	5.09%	12.78%	100%

RESULTS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE

Sex, Marital Status and Groupings in which they arrived

Sex

Those completing the forms are called "respondents" and were fairly evenly divided between the sexes with a slightly higher number of females. This is as would be expected as there are slightly more females in the whole population.

Marital Status

Married persons made up a considerably higher proportion of respondents than single persons especially among the males, there being considerably more single females than single males.

Age

All age groups with the exception of the over 65's visit the park roughly in the proportion that each forms of the whole population.

Table 3 below shows that the three main groups are:—

Children (0 - 14 yrs.)
 The young adult (20 - 39 yrs.) and
 The middle-aged adult (40 - 64 yrs.)

Teenagers and the over 65's do not form large groups among the visitors.

TABLE 3

Age in Years	No. of Respondents	% of Respondents	% of N.I. Population
0 - 14 (Estimated)	520	31.9	28.9
15 - 19	199	12.72	8.45
20 - 39	590	37.7	25.0
40 - 64	543	34.7	27.5
65 Plus	86	5.49	10.1

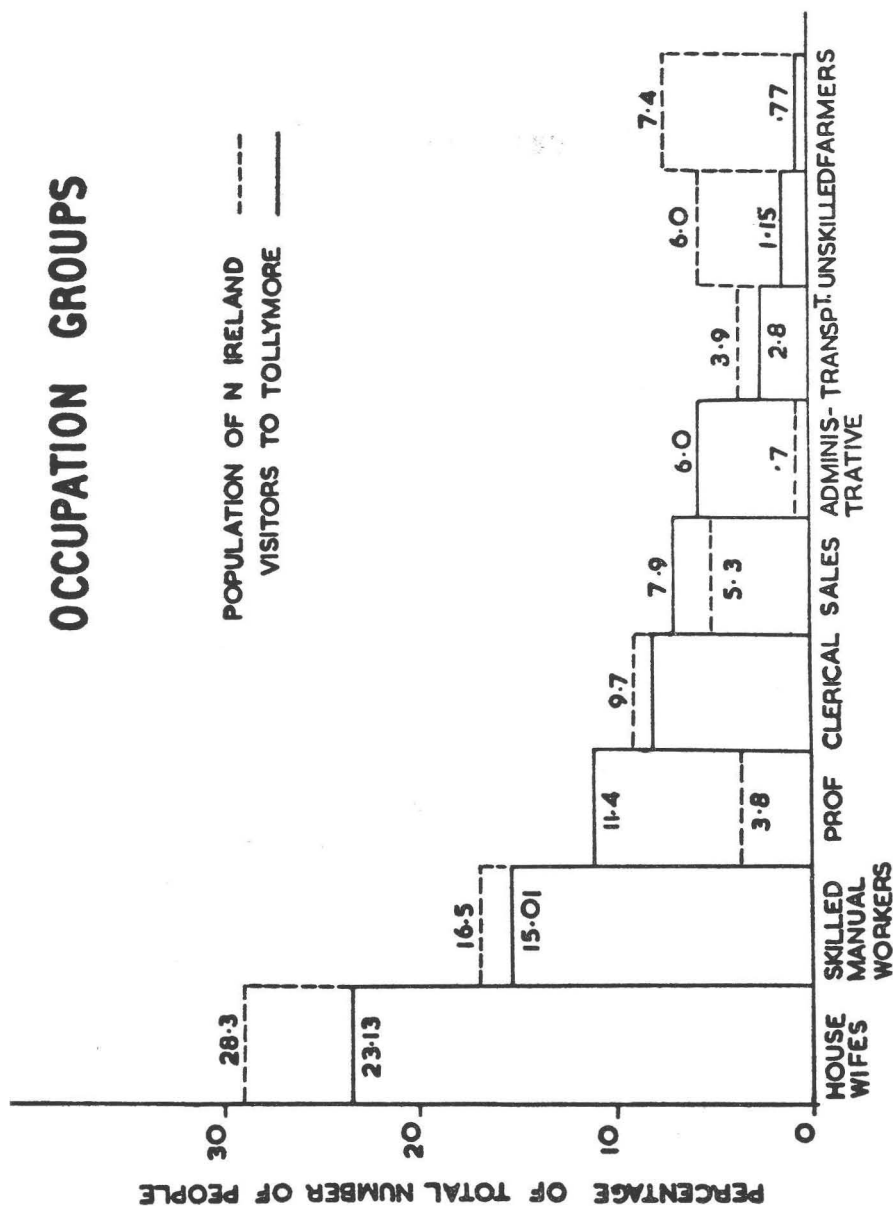


FIGURE 1. Occupation of respondents compared with occupation groups in Northern Ireland.

Middle-aged single persons are not attracted to the Park in anything like the number of middle-aged married persons probably because forest recreation is essentially a family or group activity.

Grouping in which Visitors Arrived

This point is even more clearly demonstrated by table 4 showing the groups in which people arrived. Those arriving alone form a minute proportion. It is clear that people prefer to arrive in parties either with families or friends and preferably with both.

TABLE 4		
Group	Number of Persons	Percentage
Alone	14	.89
With friends	382	24.41
With family	556	35.53
With family and friends	563	35.97

Occupations

The various answers given by visitors in reply to the question, "what is your occupation?," were grouped into 11 groups to meet the full capacity of the computer. These were based on the census of population to allow comparison with the population at large. (see Fig. 1).

It may be surprising to find that skilled manual workers make so high a proportion of the visitors, but car ownership is no longer the monopoly of the privileged. It should, however, be noted that if related groups are merged that "White Collar" workers make up a higher proportion than manual workers. The almost complete absence of two major components of the population is significant.

(a) Farmers—It is an interesting fact that in a rural community a Forest Park can only draw 12 farmers, foresters and fishermen. It is perhaps understandable that for them this would be a "busman's holiday" and that they get enough of the open air and the countryside in their everyday work. They are of course also known for their dislike of form filling.

(b) Unskilled Manual Workers—The small number of visitors in this group may be due to lack of interest or transport, or to a reluctance on the part of human beings to admit of being unskilled.

Domicile and distance travelled

The domicile of visitors was approximately as follows:—

Belfast	43%
Antrim and Down	30%
Rest of Northern Ireland	10%
Outside Northern Ireland	17%

Four per cent of the visitors were from the 26 counties.

It is noticeable that people in the 11-20 mile bracket make up a smaller proportion of the total than those in the 31-40 mile range. This would appear to be because they are neither sufficiently near to be very convenient nor sufficiently far away for the visit to be a real "outing". (See figs. 2 and 3).

The surprising jump in the numbers in the 71-80 mile range is caused by C.I.E. bus parties travelling from Dublin, (Fig. 2).

Length of Stay and Frequency of Visits

It is clear that about half of the visitors are regular callers who return time and time again and that about a quarter are first time visitors.

The majority of visitors stay for more than 2 hours but less than 5 hours (see Fig. 4). It is, however, surprising that 15% stay for more than 5 hours. It is also surprising to find that the regular visitors as a group tend to stay longer than less regular visitors, or first time visitors. Teenagers, the over 65's and persons travelling from the 11-20 mile area, and farmers tend to stay for shorter periods than other groups. Skilled manual, and transport workers, and those travelling from 31-40 mile radius tend to stay for longer periods.

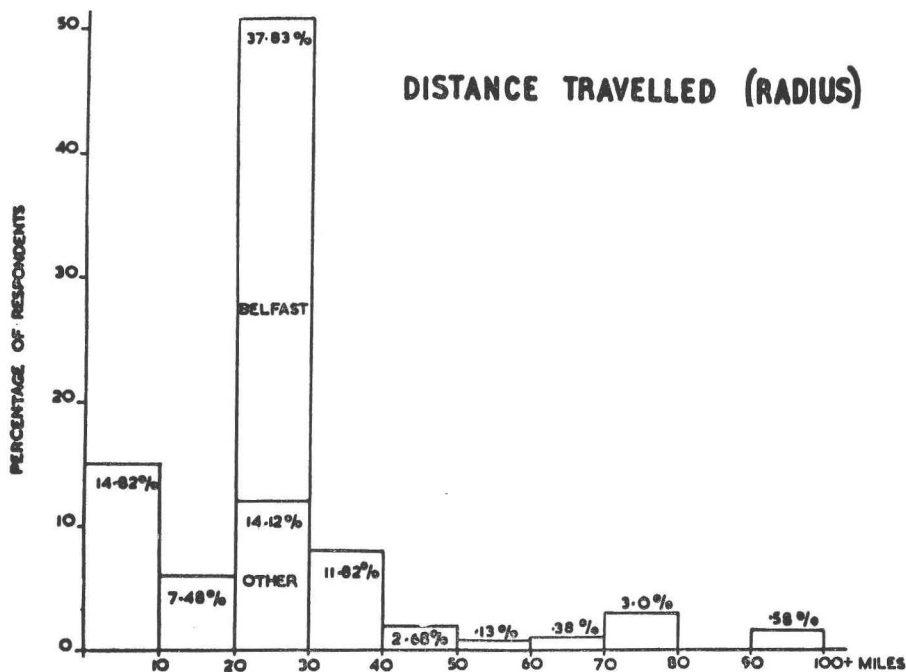


FIGURE 2. Respondents related to distance travelled to visit Tollymore Park.

Enjoyment of Visitors

The vast majority of visitors (87.6%) stated that they enjoyed their visit "very much". Only eight out of 1,565 visitors stated that they enjoyed their visit "not at all".

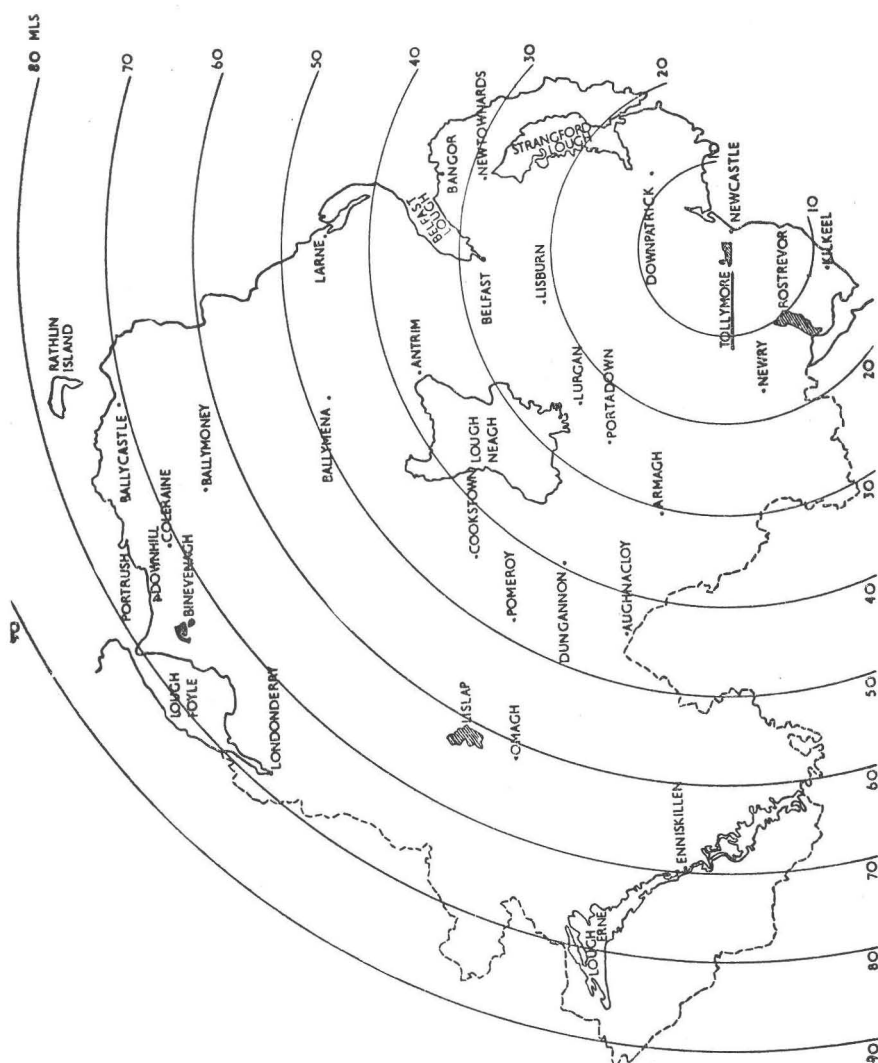


FIGURE 3. Map showing radial distances from Tollymore Park.

From an analysis of the response of different groups of visitors it can be seen that the following groups showed the greatest appreciation :

- Large groups travelling together.
- Visitors staying for longer periods. (See fig. 5).
- Married persons.
- Children and adults in the 40 - 60 age group.
- Housewives and professional people.
- Persons domiciled in Belfast.
- Frequent visitors.

The following groups showed the least appreciation :—

- Persons arriving alone.
- Visitors who stayed for the 1 - 2 hour period. (See fig. 5)
- Persons in the 15 - 19 year old bracket.
- Persons travelling a distance of 11 - 20 miles.
- Farmers and the Sales and Commercial group.

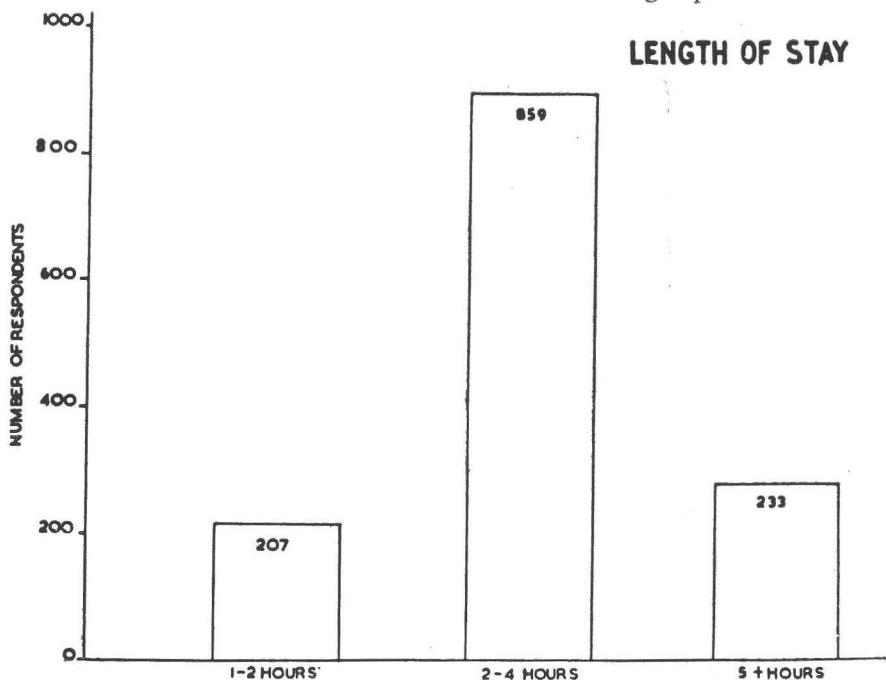


FIGURE 4. Number of respondents related to duration of visit to Tollymore Park.

Reasons for Visiting the Park

Generally the reasons given for coming were vague and seemed to portray a general urge to get out and away rather than any particular interest.

The attraction of the Mourne Mountains and the proximity of the seaside, while being important considerations, do not appear to be vital to the success of the Park.

A selection of the "off the cuff" answers are given below as they speak for themselves.

"Peace and tranquility. Atmosphere of Forest restful and refreshing to weary spirits. Seclusion. Pure fresh air and admire God's handiwork. Ideal for children. Something about the Park which compels me to revisit it. Always something new on the walks. Fault of C.I.E.—we should have gone to Armagh! Exercise large dog—dog's paradise. Wish to be alone with my boyfriend. Heard so much about it, had to see it—100% smashing. Ideal for honeymooners. Dogs enjoy walks, plus us. The family insisted. Getting away from it all. No room for parking at Newcastle. Parents (from a teenager). Interested, as a visitor from another State, in how a forest can be developed for public enjoyment (Civil Servant—Dublin). Freedom from milling crowds. Beauty unspoilt. Picnic meal without being encrusted with

ENJOYMENT RELATED TO LENGTH OF STAY

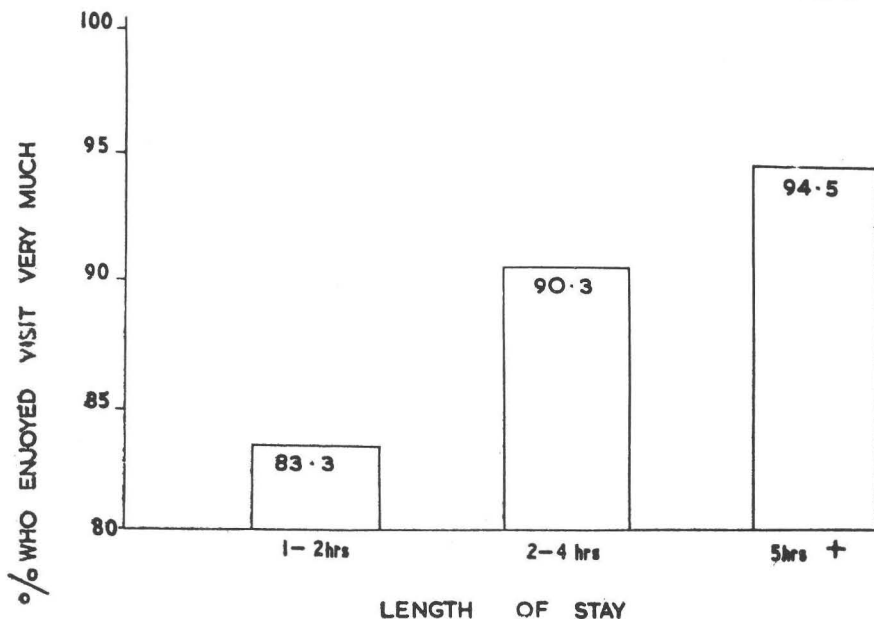


FIGURE 5. Association between enjoyment and duration of visit.

sand. We find Newcastle too busy and Tyrella beach too dangerous (so many people learning to drive on the beach). Ornithology. "Bird" watching!"

Participation in Recreation Activities

The questionnaire listed 15 possible activities and asked visitors to tick those in which they had taken part. The activities listed included camping, caravanning, sitting and watching, picnicking, visiting the arboretum, forest plots museum, cafe, and the various planned walks of 1, 2, 3 and 4 miles.

The under 15 year olds have the highest percentage of any age group visiting the museum, cafe and doing the 3 and 4 mile planned walks. The teenagers have the highest percentage doing the shorter unplanned walks. The young adults have the highest percentage picnicking and doing the 2 mile walk. The middle aged adults have the highest percentage visiting the arboretum and doing the 1 mile planned walk. The 65 year olds have the highest percentage sitting and watching ; followed by the teenagers.

The percentage of persons picnicking rises with distance travelled up to the 40 mile radius and thereafter it falls regularly.

During their first visit visitors tend to sit and watch, visit the cafe and do the 1 mile walk. Visitors who have been at the Park from 2 to 5 times have a higher percentage camping, visiting the arboretum, forest plots and the long 4 mile walk. The regular visitors have a higher proportion of their number who do the 2 and 3 mile walk and who caravan.

It is possible that visitors only do the 4 mile walk once and find it too long. Probably 2 and 3 mile walks are repeated more often for pleasure and therefore rate higher among the persons making their sixth and subsequent visits.

The Sales and Commercial group have the highest proportion among the occupational groups caravanning and students have the highest proportion camping. Housewives and skilled manual workers had the highest percentage picnicking.

Some people noted additional comments about their activities in in their own words :—

"Painting and sketching"

"Photography"

"Could not get out of the car because of the rain"

"Watched fish in the river"

"Just relaxed"

"Filled in forms"

"Amused children who love following arrows in woods"

"Details confidential"

"Talked at great length to one of the rangers and found him very helpful about the history of the area"

Opinions on the level of charges

Actual charge per car for admission is 1/6. Campers pay 1/- per tent per night plus 6d. per person but youth organisations pay only a nominal sum. Caravaners pay 4/- per caravan per night or 24/- per week.

Many people stated that the charge of 1/6 was reasonable for admission but too high for parking only. It would appear that the public would be more satisfied if the charge is known as an admission fee for entrance.

The caravaners appear to be well satisfied, 85.7% of actual caravaners stated that the charge was reasonable or surprisingly low. The campers, however, were less satisfied except for the youth organisations.

Park Booklet

29.65% of those who filled in the forms had read the park booklet and a further 10% had glanced at a copy. The vast majority of these expressed themselves well satisfied.

Criticisms and Suggestions

No less than 1,336 remarks in the form of criticisms or suggestions were made and proved to be of great practical value in improving and adding to the amenities of the Park.

One quarter of all remarks concerned the walks and picnic sites and the most numerous complaint was that the labelling and signposting was misleading and inadequate. The most numerous suggestion was for more tables and seats for picnic parties.

The next most numerous number of complaints was about the car park surface and the roads, which were rough and dusty.

Comment about the toilets was extremely varied and seemed to depend on the time of arrival. Persons arriving at slack periods probably in the morning were very complementary but those at peak periods thought otherwise. Many complained of the lack of soap and towels. The most usual suggestion about the ablutions was for the provision of hot water.

Many proposals for entertainment were made. Thirty-nine people wanted a children's playground and others wanted putting greens, boating and bathing facilities. On the other hand some complained that there were too many noisy games and wanted transistors banned.

The cafe came in for a lot of criticism as it was often closed when required and did not provide full meals. Caravan and camping visitors wanted a shop to sell general foodstuffs.

The Boy Scouts were in some cases dissatisfied with their camp sites and the wet firewood sold to them by the Forestly Division. The general campers felt that youth organisations had preferential treatment and asked for additional sites.

Twenty-six people wanted more animal and bird life but a similar number wanted fewer insects, midges and wasps.

Some caravaners thought that their site was too far away from the toilets and ablutions and wanted more sites for caravaners.

Seventeen people pleaded that nothing be done to commercialise or develop the park in an unnatural way.

CONCLUSIONS

Forest recreation is seen to be an activity mainly for family parties with all ages participating fully except the over 65's. Its greatest appeal is for the urban, industrialised or office worker and its least appeal for the farmer and rural dweller. Teenagers and over 65's enjoy their visits less than other age classes though, of course, for different reasons.

It would be accepted that the numbers of people travelling would diminish uniformly with distance but this does not prove to be the case. They travel in greater numbers from certain zones:

- (a) those within a radius of 10 miles;
- (b) those at a distance between 20 and 40 miles, at an average travelling time of one hour. In between these two zones there is an area, 10 - 20 miles radius from the Park, from which people travel in smaller numbers, stay for a shorter period and show less appreciation of their visit. A higher number of cross-channel and overseas visitors are attracted than might have been expected and make up a sizeable proportion of the visitors.

The effective range of a forest park appears to be only 40 miles as only $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of visitors travelled from beyond that ring.

People tend to return very frequently and the more often they return the longer they tend to stay and the more they enjoy their visit. The dominant reason for coming for adults seems to be getting away from it all while children find adventure in exploring.

The participation pattern is obscure largely because scope is limited and the Park small, but some conclusions can be drawn. The number picnicking is closely related to distance travelled and as a typical forest park activity this is an important indicator. The proportion of persons from different zones picnicking drops away very rapidly after its peak at the 40 mile radius.

The present level of charges seems to be acceptable but those for the general camper least so.

The current park booklet appears to meet what the public require though it is not read by a very high percentage. There may be a case for a simpler cheaper forest map on the Dutch model.

A determined effort must be made to improve the labelling of the planned walks and to provide American type picnic tables and seats, to

tarmacadam the car park, extend the toilet facilities, and to supply hot water in the ablutions and showers.

It must, however, always be remembered that if the forest park is to keep its appeal as a sanctuary for the urban dweller, it must be kept natural and free from artificial attractions and noisy entertainment.

Other forest parks are urgently needed both to relieve the pressure on Tollymore Park by providing an alternative for visitors travelling from Belfast and also to provide for those areas which lie beyond the 40 mile radius from Tollymore.