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“A Right to Roam”: Perceptions of recreational access
to the countryside around Manchester, England

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Abstract

The aims of this thesis were to analyse perceptions of recreational access to nature, and factors that might impact on those perceptions, as well as to propose an argument for wider access as a way of fostering environmental awareness. The investigations were carried out by way of interviews with members of two of the foremost organisations in Britain representing the interests of outdoor recreationists – the Ramblers and the British Mountaineering Council – and through a number of surveys with recreationists. The results of the investigations indicate that there is fairly widespread contentment with the extent of access in the area, that knowledge regarding access legislation is somewhat patchy and that a fair amount of conflicts and constraints to access are regularly encountered by outdoor recreationists. These perceptions appear to be shaped by a societal structure in which a relative minority of landowners possess the power to shape how the remainder of society relates to these spaces. The political ecology of the English countryside – the effects of power and social differentiation – is thus clearly manifest in how recreational access is perceived and contested. My final conclusion is that facilitating recreational forays and a widening of access should be regarded as key ways to achieve a fair and environmentally aware society.

Swedish title: "A Right to Roam": Uppfattningar om tillträde för friluftsliv till landsbygden omkring Manchester, England

Keywords: Access, conflict, constraint, outdoor recreation, political ecology.

There once were lanes in nature's freedom dropt,
There once were paths that every valley wound, -
Inclosure came, and every path was stopt;
Each tyrant fix'd his sign where paths were found,
To hint a trespass now who cross'd the ground:
Justice is made to speak as they command;
The high road now must be each stinted bound:
- Inclosure, thou'rt a curse upon the land,
And tasteless was the wretch who thy existence plann'd.

- John Clare, 1821. Stanza XCIV from *The Village Minstrel*.

I've been o'er Snowdon, I've slept upon Crowdon
I've camped by the Wainstones as well
I've sunbathed on Kinder, been burnt to a cinder
And many more things I can tell
My rucksack has oft been me pillow
The heather has oft been me bed
And sooner than part from the mountains
I think I would rather be dead

I'm a Rambler, I'm a Rambler from Manchester way
I get all my pleasure the hard moorland way
I may be a wage slave on Monday
But I am a free man on Sunday

The day was just ending as I was descending
By Grindsbrook, just by Upper Tor
When a voice cried "Hey you" in the way keepers do
He'd the worst face that ever I saw
The things that he said were unpleasant
In the teeth of his fury I said
"Sooner than part from the mountains
I think I would rather be dead"

He called me a louse and said "Think of the grouse"
Well I thought but I still couldn't see
Why all Kinder Scout and the moors roundabout
Couldn't take both the poor grouse and me
He said "All this land is my master's"
At that I stood shaking my head
No man has the right to own mountains
Any more than the deep ocean bed

- from the *Manchester Rambler* by Ewan MacColl, 1932.

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Table of Contents

- Chapter I – Introduction 1
 - Research questions 2
 - Method & Material 2
 - Interviews 2
 - Surveys 3
 - Theory 3
 - Ethical considerations..... 5
 - Explanations of key terms 6
 - Previous research..... 7
 - Outline..... 7
- Chapter II – The Road Before Us..... 8
- Chapter III – The Manchester Ramblers, Amblers & Climbers..... 10
 - Motivations and preferences 12
 - Perceptions of the legal extent of access. 13
 - Knowledge of access & its implications for recreational participation 15
- Chapter IV – Get Off My Land!..... 20
- Chapter V –The (Right of) Way Forward?..... 25
 - Access in the future 27
- Conclusion..... 30
- Bibliography 32

- Figure1 – Map with the Peak District National Park and key locations marked out.....8
- Figure 2 – Experiences of obstruction.....22

- Appendix A – Interview guide: the Ramblers & the BMC
- Appendix B – Interview subjects: the Ramblers & the BMC
- Appendix C – Survey for outdoor recreationists

Chapter I – Introduction

Growing up in a rural environment in northernmost Sweden, where hills and forests were freely accessible playgrounds stretching from the edge of the garden to the horizon and beyond – a playground open to the play of local children and outdoor enthusiasts from near and far alike – is something which I believe has given me a certain outlook on what access to nature and the opportunity to spend time in it can mean for the shaping of an individual's attitudes to the environment. Now, having spent a number of years in Manchester, England, I have become increasingly aware of how the access freedoms I could take for granted as a child are far from available to all. Here, a far less open access regime, combined with and, arguably, a product of greater social stratification, appears to have considerable effects on the nature relations and recreational habits of whole strata of society, with the landless, predominantly lower socioeconomic groups feeling these limitations especially strongly. This makes it clear that recreational access and the opportunity to develop relationships with nature is, in essence, an issue of power and of social differentiation – that is, an issue of political and human ecology. Additionally, when I consider the environmental issues our global and local communities are facing, the fostering of positive emotional connections which could help build a culture of care and respect for the natural environment stand out as being of vital importance if we want to change our destructive course. I see access to nature for recreation – and the perception of accessibility – as being a key starting point for enabling the establishment of such feelings of connection and care.

My aim with this thesis was thus to uncover and analyse perceptions of access to natural environments as venues for outdoor recreation. I endeavoured to investigate how recreationists in the Manchester area perceive access, what factors impact on their perceptions and how these perceptions might in turn affect their relationships with nature. Based on this analysis I then put forward arguments for the protection and extension of access, for giving the whole populace the possibility of using and appreciating the natural environment, and for the importance of facilitation of recreational access to the countryside.

Focusing the scope of research on the activities of walking and climbing – two activities which can be undertaken with relatively little equipment – helps constrain the analysis to perceptions that are not solely dependent on economical factors, as research of such factors have already been undertaken elsewhere (Fredman & Heberlein 2005, Suckall, Fraser, Cooper & Quinn 2009). As walking is a more widespread activity, involving a greater number of participants and one that often relates to the concept of access in a different way to climbing – as a journey where the potential for encountering access difficulties is multiplied whereas climbing often can be carried out as a more geographically stationary activity – this activity will have the greater focus, though references to climbing will add some perspectives not as easily uncovered through a singular focus on walking. The limiting of the geographical focus to the area of and around Greater Manchester is based partly on the history of the area – being something of a hotbed of the access conflicts that led to the recent transformation of access legislation – and partly on the basis of its vicinity to one of the best areas in England for engaging in outdoor recreation: the Peak District National Park.

Recreational access is a vital and under-researched component of the general field of human ecology, clearly tying in with efforts to reinforce a strong connection between the components of the human ecological triangle – the individual, society and the environment. By providing opportunities to develop affinity for the natural environments surrounding us, I believe recreational access can help mend the disconnect between culture and nature – a disconnect which has become characteristic of our modern society. It also addresses a key area of inquiry within human ecology: claims over and varying uses of natural resources.

Research questions

- How do outdoor recreationists in the Manchester area perceive access, and what factors impact on these perceptions?
- What can be done to improve perceptions of access, and what should future access provision be like?

Method & Material

The decision to use a qualitative methodological approach – here being a small number of semi-structured interviews accompanied by more structured surveys – is based on a wish to uncover how recreationists in the Manchester area perceive access and the potential implications of these perceptions for their recreational behaviour and their ways of relating to the natural environment. I also believe that a qualitative approach facilitates utilisation of the findings of academic research for addressing the issues that shape our everyday lives. Additionally, like Yngve Ryd (2010:241), I believe that a qualitative approach is the most appropriate to use when attempting to analyse human perceptions, as it allows for consideration of the highly relative nature of emotions and behaviours.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with members of the Ramblers and the British Mountaineering Council (BMC). Five interviews were with the Ramblers and one was with the BMC (see appendix B). This seeming imbalance results from the different structures of the two organisations: while the Ramblers carry out a lot of their groundwork (such as arranged walks and contacts with local authorities regarding access issues) through their many local groups, the BMC is a somewhat more centralised organisation whose regional groups cover larger areas. The structure of the Ramblers thus facilitated addressing potential differences in accessibility between localities within the Manchester area, while the interview with the BMC by necessity had to cover ‘wider ground’. Contact was established through emails sent to local groups, or in the case with the BMC, by contacting their head office.

All interviews were carried out face-to-face in a location of the informants choosing. This was done as I believe that face-to-face interviews facilitate greater depth, allowing for not only verbal answers to be relayed clearly, but also for other aspects such as body language to be observed. Also, I wanted the respondents to feel comfortable in the interviewing environment, as I believe this makes possible the most open interviews and as I feel it is very important when addressing potentially sensitive issues such as conflicts. One interview was carried out at the informants’ place of work, two in the informants’ homes and three at cafés of each interviewee’s choosing. I opted for a semi-structured interview technique (see Appendix A), as this enabled me to bring up some key topics I wanted to cover, while allowing plenty of possibility for my informants to, in their own words, make me aware of factors of strong importance to them, factors which I might otherwise have overlooked and which could potentially have led to a flawed analysis (Valentine 2005:110-111). The interviews varied in length from 45 minutes up to, in one case, 2 hours 15 minutes – all depending on the respondents’ preference. All interviews were, with the respondents’ permission, recorded and thereafter transcribed and analysed.

Surveys

In addition to the semi-structured interviews I conducted 30 surveys with recreationists, covering topics such as experiences and perceptions of access, knowledge of access legislation, and also, briefly, demographics as well as some questions regarding interest in furthering recreational skill-sets through facilitative efforts. The surveys were conducted by way of a visitor study. Participants were approached and the surveys carried out at Hayfield and Edale – two key access points to one of the most well-known and well-visited places in the Peak District National Park, Kinder Scout (which at 636 metres is the highest point in the Peak District and famous as the location of the 1932 mass trespass). This area was chosen as it is a prime recreation spot for people from the Manchester area and as it was likely to draw in both more initiated and more novice recreationist. It also offered more established path alternatives – even paths surfaced with old paving stones (done to remedy the erosion this very popular recreation area has suffered) – along with access land and opportunities for more rugged adventures involving pathless excursions, scrambling and climbing.

When planning to administer the surveys I accounted for weather conditions as well as the more common working schedule, something which Emmelin et al. (2010:125) note is essential when undertaking studies of outdoor recreationists, as such factors can significantly impact on the composition of visitors and their behaviours. Consequentially, I chose to go out on a weekend in early spring, with clear but cool conditions, believing this to be the most likely way of getting to survey not just more hardened recreationists but also some more casual walkers. As a result, the surveys cover a range of individuals, from one doing a third ascent of Kinder Scout in one day, to those just taking a short stroll from the car park before settling down to Sunday dinner in a nearby pub. The respondents were found by asking the first person who walked past my survey point for a few minutes of their time, followed by the first person who did so once the previous survey was completed. Those who were surveyed appear to be a fairly accurate representation of the general composition of the passers-by, with the exception of groups with children, who were not surveyed. It should be noted that Emmelin et al. (Ibid.:123) state that population studies – accounting for the perceptions of non-recreationists as well as active recreationists – tend to be optimal for studies of this type. I agree, and believe that accounting for the perceptions of non-recreationists and landowners could have made for a more nuanced study. I have however chosen to limit my focus to analysing the perceptions of those recreationists who have managed to navigate the initial hurdles to getting out into the recreational environment, and hope that examining the hindrances active recreationists have encountered will be of good use in facilitating for others getting out there. With the above in mind, it should be noted that the surveys do not make any claim to statistical representativeness – being non-random – but are rather intended to allow for various perspectives to be uncovered and individual viewpoints to be heard, whether or not they might be shared by many or few-to-no other recreationists.

Theory

Three theoretical approaches provide the analytical basis for this thesis. The main foundations are provided by a political-ecological micro-perspective, through which is considered how social structures and differing interests affect relationships with the natural environment – in this case specifically as a place for outdoor recreation (Gezon & Paulson 2005:1, Paulson, Gezon & Watts 2005:26). The political ecology approach focuses on how environments – local ones through to the global environment – are politicised and how differences in power, knowledge and interests affect people's use of natural resources and environments (Gezon & Paulson 2005:1). This clearly relates to the actions and events that have shaped and continue

to shape use of the English countryside, where social differentiation has long influenced perceptions of who has the right to be in what environment, with landowners often doing their utmost to exclude those they regard as ‘outsiders’.

Taking a cue from Paul Robbins, the clear acknowledgement in political ecology of the power-laden nature of access and land use is what gives this approach its strength, making it relevant to analyses of nature relations within any stratified society, be it the global society or a specific locality, such as the Manchester region (Robbins 2011:13-14). The English countryside is thus investigated here as a microcosm of concepts more often addressed on a larger scale. As Gezon and Paulson (2005:8-9) note, creating an understanding of how global structures are acted out within local contexts – and vice versa – is crucial for understanding the causes and remedies of the environmental crisis, wherefore this investigation into how societal structures and differing interests affect people in England is both politically-ecologically interesting and human-ecologically relevant.

A key part of how these structures manifest themselves is, as Fabinyi, Evans and Foale (2014:28) note, in whose voices and claims to the environment are being prioritised, and what the consequences of this might be for social justice as well as for the environment. It is my clear opinion that increasingly, over the last few hundred years, there has been an ever greater imbalance in which groups of English society have had their wishes and claims to the natural environment heard and acknowledged, with a landed minority possessing almost sole power to shape countryside agendas. Through this thesis I want to analyse the effects of this history on recreational uses of and relations to nature.

Along with the foundations provided by the political ecology approach, two other theoretical frameworks are employed in the thesis in order to analyse perceptions of recreational access – constraint and conflict theories. Both these approaches aid the investigation of the effects of social structures and differing interests on perceptions of access.

Constraint theory – within the field of recreation rather than within its more frequent application in economics – addresses both individual perceptions and socio-structural factors of constraint, all of which to varying degrees can affect the likelihood, form and frequency of participation in recreation and contact with the natural environment. As the motivation for writing this thesis stems from a wish to further the potential and frequency of outdoor recreation and to inspire – through the use of outdoor spaces for recreation – environmental awareness and concern for these spaces as well as the wider natural environment, I find it essential to attempt to understand how perceptions of access and accessibility are shaped and how they affect use of these environments. Understanding potential constraints thus becomes essential. In the thesis, the greater societal structures and their effects, addressed through the political ecology perspective, are through this framework related to their effects on individual recreationists as well as on recreationists collectively.

A key application of constraint theory onto recreational research was developed by Crawford and Godbey (1987) and expanded upon by Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991). They defined and divided factors of constraint into three main categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural. Intrapersonal constraints were defined as an individuals’ feelings, for example of stress, anxiety and self-perceived skill, which affect recreational preference; interpersonal constraints as those encountered in social contacts which can affect both preferences and participation; and structural constraints as the effects on recreational participation that stem from factors such as one’s financial situation and – crucially for my research – recreational opportunities and knowledge thereof (Crawford & Godbey 1987:122-124, Fredman & Heberlein 2005:178-179). In the still relatively stratified society that is modern England, where the landed few possess the power to shape the land use of the remainder of the population, the political ecology of access becomes apparent. Here, structural constraints such as differences in financial and social standing have huge potential

to affect perceptions of access, which ties in with an observation made by Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991:317), who note how “Social class may have a more powerful influence on leisure participation and nonparticipation than is currently accepted, that is, the experience of constraints is related to a hierarchy of social privilege.” My thesis focuses on the structural aspects of constraint theory, particularly on how knowledge of and opportunity for access affects recreation. It also touches upon intrapersonal constraints.

The third analytical framework is provided by conflict theory. Research regarding perceptions of access within the English context is likely to at some point address issues of conflict, not least conflicts between the landed possessors of countryside spaces and the landless who wish to access the same spaces for recreation, which shows how the political ecological focus on addressing differing claims to and differing ways of using the environment manifests itself locally, just as it does in the greater global context. Conflict, as relates to recreation, was described by Gerald R. Jacob and Richard Schreyer (1980:369) as “goal interference attributed to another's behaviour.” Many recreational users of English countryside spaces have encountered conflicts of varying magnitudes that interfere with the pursuit of their goal – participation in their chosen activity. These conflicts range from direct and physical confrontations with individuals who wish to exclude them, to sabotage of navigational aids such as signage to less overtly hostile behaviours such as landowners neglecting to undertake statutory maintenance of public paths. I will employ this theory to my investigations of the frequency and impact of such conflicts on recreationists in the Manchester area.

In the development of their theory, Jacob and Schreyer described a number of circumstances – termed propositions – where they believed recreational conflicts would be most likely to arise. Propositions 2 and 3 are especially relevant to my study, relating to differences in social status as a basis for conflict, occurring for example when participants in a chosen activity pursued for its status connotations find themselves having to share a space with people they see as interrupting their pursuit of status (Jacob & Schreyer 1980:372). The conflicts surrounding hunting is a key example of this, and arguments regarding the detrimental impact of the presence of walkers on the quality of the hunts have long been employed against widening of access. While the enactment of the Countryside Rights of Way Act in 2000 might have defused conflict somewhat, the power structures that propped up these arguments still remain largely intact, which brings me to the relevance of Jacob's and Schreyer's 7th proposition, which focuses on possession as a potential ground for conflict, with possessors of countryside spaces regarding other users as interfering with tradition and accepted norms (Ibid.:374).

The reasoning behind the application of these theoretical frameworks is that I see the power-based claims addressed through political ecology and the resulting perceptions and experiences of constraint and conflict as being key factors to account for in any study addressing claims to natural resources and spaces. As such, political ecology can be seen to address the seemingly ever-present conflicts over use of spaces and resources, and makes the connections between socially differentiated viewpoints of nature and resources and environmental issues clear (Paulson, Gezon & Watts 2005:17). Complementing this broader discussion, constraint and conflict theories facilitate the analysis of factors that could prevent recreational use and thereby potentially also the development of affinity with the natural environments.

Ethical considerations

Research on perceptions of access in the English context are likely to at some point encounter discussions regarding the lawful limits of access and where these should be drawn. As I

touched upon such potentially contentious issues and also asked questions regarding experiences of conflict and violence, such as exclusion and threatening behaviour, and as questions of interest in participation in an illegal activity (wild camping) were broached, I felt it necessary to consider how my respondents felt about having their views publicised. Thus, I ensured all respondents – interviewees and survey respondents alike – that they were free to decline to answer any questions and that they were free to, at any time, stop the interview/survey and to have all of their answers discarded. No participants opted to do so. In addition, the organisational interviewees were given the option to remain anonymous, should they prefer, while all survey respondents were informed that their answers would be treated confidentially and that their anonymity would be ensured. As one of my interviewees wished to remain anonymous, I carefully considered what I wrote about them and how I relayed their words. As Kaiser (2009:1636) notes, revealing potentially “unique combinations of traits” could lead to the identification of an informant, and with this in mind I have used a pseudonym and omitted any information which could be used to identify the person.

Explanations of key terms

Access, within the context of this paper, refers to the interrelated concepts of **access** – formal rights of use of a space – and **accessibility** – a wider concept covering the perceptions of rights of use and access among the populace (Jenkins, Pigram & Snead 2003:1-3). Access as a formal, legal right is defined in Chapter I of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 as entering and remaining on access land and using rights of way shown on a definitive map as a route for the purposes of recreation (UK Parliament 2000:3). This definition will be a key point of reference throughout this paper. As noted by Emmelin et al. (2010:123), however, discussions about perceptions of access should not be limited to access in its limited, legal sense, and thus the concept of accessibility – perceptions of access and the consequences of these perceptions – is essential to my research. Lastly, it should be noted that, in spite of extensive legal strictures which use the term, such as the CRoW Act, there is no actual legal definition of “access” (Pearlman Hougie & Dickinson 2000:233).

The **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**, sometimes referred to as the CRoW Act or simply CRoW, is an act of parliament that came into effect on the 30th of November 2000 and thereafter went through a gradual implementation process, concluding on the 31st of October 2005 (Ramblers 2015a). The CRoW Act brought with it considerable changes for the English and Welsh populaces regarding the amount of land they could lawfully access for the purposes of outdoor recreation and enjoyment (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 2000:13, 113). In popular usage, this act is sometimes referred to as the “Right to Roam” (Baker 2005).

Access land, as specified in the CRoW Act, is any open country, i.e. land in the main made up of mountain, moor, heath or down and defined as access land on a map issued by a relevant authority, i.e. a National Park or local highway authority, with the exception of land excluded for reasons such as agricultural, building or other works being undertaken (UK Parliament 2000:1-2, 74). Land registered as common land and land located at an elevation of at least 600 metres above sea level are also included, whether or not mapping has been issued for the area in question (UK Parliament 2000:1-2). Access land is land that recreationists are free to cross – have “the right to roam” across – outside of paths and other rights of way (United Kingdom 2015a).

A **right of way** is a route, i.e. a path, track or road, which can run over countryside, private land (including farmland and garden), or through villages and towns, that can be used as a thoroughfare for recreationists. Walking is permitted on all rights of way, while some are also legally usable by horse riders, cyclists and in some cases even motorised vehicles. Rights of

way are marked on Ordnance Survey maps (United Kingdom 2015b, United Kingdom 2015c).

A **White Paper** is a document produced by the government specifying details of policies it intends to implement and enabling feedback on plans before they are finalised (UK Parliament 2015). A **Rural White Paper** specifically sets out policies which affect the rural sector.

Previous research

Previous research of relevance to my research includes an investigation carried out in Sheffield, which aimed to determine how class and ethnicity affect perceptions of the Peak District National Park (Suckall et al. 2009). This study concluded that the effect of class on perceptions of and interest in visiting this National Park were significant, with the same being true, although to a lesser degree, for ethnicity. The results suggested that members of higher socioeconomic groupings and members of the White ethnic majority show considerably more interest in using the National Park for recreation (Ibid.:1200-1201). Research undertaken on behalf of the government, addressing socioeconomic structures and their effects on attitudes and behaviour towards the environment are also highly relevant, again indicating higher interest in outdoor recreation among those belonging to higher socioeconomic strata (DEFRA 2007:162-163).

With regards to one of the aims of my thesis – to argue for access to nature as a way of fostering environmental awareness – there exists substantial amounts of research on correlations between participation in outdoor recreation and environmental awareness, displaying varying and sometimes inconclusive results, some of which I will refer to in my discussions. One key text is that by Dunlap and Heffernan (1975), in which it was concluded that while overall the connections between outdoor recreation and environmental concern are weak, for some activities – such as hiking – they are of considerable magnitude and that concern for the specific resources necessary for one's chosen activity is widespread across the spectrum of outdoor recreational activities. The summation of research on the matter made by Berns & Simpson (2009:88) concludes that while the connections can be hard to chart, the overall conclusion that must be drawn is that there is a definite connection.

Outline

The second chapter, *The Road Before Us*, gives a brief historical background to the current access system, presents the two organisations consulted during the investigative process and describes some factors specific to the Manchester context. The third chapter presents the results of the research into perceptions of and knowledge regarding access and analyses the implications of these findings. These investigations fall squarely within the human ecological field, as they attempt to uncover how human relationships with and uses of the natural environment are shaped by varying conceptions of nature, even by the micro-cultural differences between different social strata, by societal structures and by various powers. The fourth chapter further investigates how access is often denied various sections of society, with specific focus on conflicts and experiences thereof. It thereby delves deeper into some of the more problematic aspects of the issues which were addressed in chapter two. Finally, in the fifth and final chapter some thoughts for the future are put forward. On the basis of the findings of the previous chapters, arguments are made for the facilitation of recreational forays and for a widening of access as key tools not only for reaching greater social equality but, crucially to human ecology, also for fostering environmentally positive attitudes.

Chapter II – The Road Before Us

Conflicts over access have for a long time been prominent issues in Great Britain. While the foundations of the current land rights system were laid during the Norman Conquest of 1066, when a theretofore fairly egalitarian land rights system was replaced by a system where ownership and use of land was a privilege afforded a minority (Shoard 1997:16, 1999:3, 99), it is the events which have taken place in the last three hundred years or so that more strongly have shaped the access structures which even today affect use and perceptions of the English countryside. Two events had an especially large impact on access: the enclosures of common lands between 1760 and 1820 and the industrial revolution, which initiated a massive process of urbanisation, with large parts of the population being forced to uproot from rural spaces and resettle in urban areas to find work (Hall 2003:354, see also Mayfield 2010 & Shoard 1999). Side by side with these events developments in agricultural production techniques have had a massive effect on rural labour structures, a key consequence being an ever decreasing demand for labourers. All in all, these events have resulted in a continuous process of stratification of the rural sphere, and a concomitant differentiation of access perceptions among different strata of society, with the landed having had almost exclusive rights to define what constitutes appropriate uses of rural natural environments, thus constituting a microcosm of the issues addressed through political ecology – how use of land and resources is determined through differences in social standing and power. The exclusion of large parts of the population from the countryside that these events led to has long been and is still felt by many to be unjust. As Ben Mayfield (2010:64) notes, many of those who in the early access movement fought for countryside access were often only a generation or two removed from those who had worked the very same soils their descendants were barred from setting foot on.

The city of Manchester is quite unique in England, as it is one of the largest cities in the country, yet it is located just a short train journey from the first and largest National Park in the country – the Peak District National Park. It also has an especially rich history of these access struggles. It was here, on the moorlands of the Peak District, that the access struggles perhaps showed themselves in their most fierce guise, with a key event being the 1932 mass trespass on Kinder Scout, the highest point in the Peak District, an elevated moorland area only a relatively short train ride from Manchester that has long been an important place of recreation for the city’s people (see for example: Hill 1980:50-73).

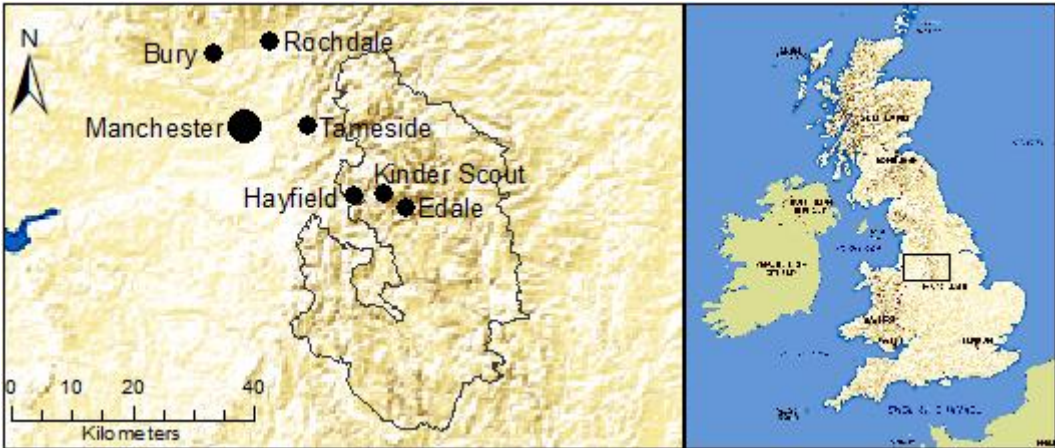


Fig. 1. Map with the Peak District National Park and key locations marked out.

The 1932 trespass was the culmination of decades of conflict between walkers and gamekeepers, who on behalf of their landowning bosses attempted to keep the ‘intruders’ out. On the 24th of April 1932 approximately 400 walkers set off from the village of Hayfield

towards Kinder Scout, and while they never reached the summit, having encountered gamekeepers who with physical force stopped them from doing so, resulting in the walkers being subjected to several arrests and subsequent imprisonments for riotous assembly and assault, the trespass did carry the access movement forward, setting the scene for how access struggles ever since have played out and shaping what is probably the most notable access rights organisation in modern British history: The Ramblers. Originally formed in 1935 as the Ramblers Association, they were a pivotal force in the campaign for the forerunner to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, which gave the public extended access rights in the shape of long-distance paths and National Parks. They were also instrumental in the passage of the CRoW Act itself (Ramblers 2015b).

CRoW's introductory paragraph states that it is:

An Act to make new provision for public access to the countryside; to amend the law relating to public rights of way; to enable traffic regulation orders to be made for the purpose of conserving an area's natural beauty; to make provision with respect to the driving of mechanically propelled vehicles elsewhere than on roads; to amend the law relating to nature conservation and the protection of wildlife; to make further provision with respect to areas of outstanding natural beauty; and for connected purposes (UK Parliament 2000:1).

CRoW constitutes the latest chapter in the long running struggle over access to the English countryside. Its key aims were twofold – to provide access to natural spaces for recreation, and to enable protection and conservation of the natural landscape. Furthermore, it also set out plans to publicise these new rights widely, through the issuance of a code of conduct covering rights and obligations for users of rights of way and access land, the provision of procedures to inform these users of the extent and ways of accessing these facilities, and the mandate that local authorities were to, at regular intervals of no more than 10 years, make so called Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs), in which they are required to consider if the existing rights of way in their respective areas meet, and are likely in the future to meet, needs for exercise, recreation and enjoyment (UK Parliament 2000:13, 39-40). CRoW aimed high – and part of my research aims to uncover to what extent these aims have been met.

The crucial role played by the Ramblers in the access movement means that addressing them in research on recreational access to the English countryside is essentially a given. Who are they then? The Ramblers of today are a charity which describes its aims as protecting and furthering the rights of walkers, hikers and participants in other outdoor pursuits, and they continuously work to preserve and extend access rights, as well as to protect already established rights of way in town and countryside alike (Southworth 2015). The membership in 2010 amounted to 123,000, down from approximately 140,000 just a few years prior (Milton 2010). Another organisation working for the rights of recreationists and users of natural spaces is the British Mountaineering Council, often referred to simply as the BMC. The BMC sees their mission as one of promoting and protecting the interests of climbers, walkers and mountaineers in England and Wales (BMC 2015). Formed in 1944, the organisation is still very active in campaigning for access rights for outdoor recreationists and it also sees it as part of its mission to safeguard the conservation of the recreational environments, as well as providing information and services to its more than 75,000 members (BMC 2013:6, BMC 2015). It is still a growing organisation – and is as such very well placed to continue the struggle for access retention and extension into the future (BMC 2013:6). As outdoor recreation and nature experience have been found to have good potential to inspire appreciation of and care for nature (Berns & Simpson 2009:8, Dunlap & Heffernan 1975:25, Theodori, Luloff & Willits 1998:105), I believe the Ramblers and the BMC have a key role to play in furthering recreational access – potentially now more than ever.

Chapter III – The Manchester Ramblers, Amblers & Climbers

The investigations into perceptions of recreational access were initiated by a number of interviews with the Ramblers and BMC, upon which followed surveys with 30 recreationists.

Most of the Ramblers I spoke to described the members of their local groups as generally being of middle to retirement ages (Brady, Ramsden), with many being from higher socioeconomic groups and more “professional backgrounds” (Smith, Ramsden). This was not true for all groups, however. Roy Thorniley of the Rochdale Ramblers noted that while the age composition was similar to that of other localities, the membership of his local group encompassed essentially “the whole spectrum, really, of people that like the countryside, so, you know, they’re not all professionals”, as did Stewart Brady, stating that he thought memberships tend to represent “the social cross section of the area that you are drawing people from” For those groups where it was noted that higher socioeconomic groups had greater representation, a number of factors were noted as potential explanations, with a key one being how the cost of membership, at £33 per year, might constitute a structural constraint, preventing some from participating (Smith, Thorniley, Crawford & Godbey 1987:124, Ramblers 2015c). The fact that memberships of organisations such as the Ramblers, who provide a good introduction to outdoor recreation, are reasonably costly likely is part of the explanation of the existing recreational stratification, and shows the need for an approach to recreational and access research which accounts for the effects of social inequality – a key approach within political ecology (Paulson, Gezon & Watts 2005:26).

As for the ages of Ramblers’ members several potential explanations were suggested, a key one being that many are retired and thus are more likely to have the time and the free bus pass – which up until 2010 was given to all over-60s in Manchester, since then modified to when one reaches state pension age (Transport for Greater Manchester 2015) – to allow them to get out walking when others cannot (Ernstbrunner). All groups noted that there was a very low presence of participants from non-white backgrounds, for example stating that the memberships were “All white. We have had a couple of Asian members that’ve come and gone (Thorniley)”, while Smith noted how there had been few if any members of ethnic minorities on their walks. All-in-all, the higher representation of individuals with more professional and ethnic majority backgrounds among the local Ramblers constitute fairly accurate reflection of the statement contained within the Rural White Paper of 2000, which reads that “most country pursuits such as walking are now largely the preserve of the white, middle-aged, middle-class and able-bodied” (DEFRA 2000:137), a statement which echoed in the words of Edgar Ernstbrunner, who said that the “immediate thing that comes to mind is that walking tend to be [...] a male, white [...] an ethnic majority thing.”

As for the BMC, national statistics show a significant slant to male dominance among the membership (with nearly 4 out of 5 respondents to the 2010 member survey being male), a clear majority of 98% being of white ethnic backgrounds, while the age composition is considerably more diverse than that of the Ramblers (Sport Structures 2010:6-7).

Regarding the participants in the survey we again see a fairly accurate reflection of the aforementioned quote from the Rural White Paper (RWP). Average age of the participants was 46.2 years, with none being younger than 25 and the oldest just having turned 70. Two-thirds of the respondents were over 40 years of age. 60% were men and 40% women. All respondents except two – both from the Middle East – were white. All were at present living in the UK, 16 in Greater Manchester, another 8 in other parts of the North West and the remaining 6 in other parts of the UK. Sixteen respondents had completed higher education studies, while 14 had not. As figures from the last national census in 2011 show that 29.7% of the working age population (16-64) hold degree-level qualifications, and that fewer over-65s do so, my sample again suggests consistency with the RWP-statement (Office for National

Statistics 2014). As for ethnic backgrounds, the sample showed considerable lack of representation of the area's sizeable ethnic community, which makes up approximately 33,3% of Greater Manchester's population (Manchester City Council 2014:1).

The demographics of the recreationists thus suggest consistency with political ecological and constraint theories which note how different sectors of society, be they divided by ages, ethnicities or financial positions, tend to differ considerably in interests, prioritisations and not least in their uses of natural environments and resources (Gezon & Paulson 2005:1, Crawford & Godbey 1987:124, Crawford, Jackson & Godbey 1991:315). The overrepresentation of members of higher socioeconomic groups constitutes a stark contrast to the infant access movement around the turn of last century – which was often described as a working man's movement (Milton 2010). Part of the explanation likely stems from a growing division of how social strata demarcate differentially the urban and rural spheres. The British countryside, once rather more mixed in its composition, with both well-to-do landowners and agricultural labourers co-existing there, has in later years increasingly become the domain of the more well-off, as is indicated by how rural dwellers on average have higher weekly earnings than their urban counterparts, and how rural areas have fewer households living in poverty (Pateman 2011:35, 37, Shoard 1999:154).

There is a significant possibility that, as a consequence of this stratification of rural spaces, outdoor recreation might have become something of a status marker, where one associates oneself with a class or group by choosing, if only for the one's limited time of leisure, to share their space. Another factor likely to affect the demographic composition of recreationists is how issues are prioritised in local politics, and how this in turn affects the ease of access in different areas. This has especially been an issue during the last near-decade of economical recession and cutbacks. Several interviewees and respondents noted how they had seen access problems which they believe stem from local authorities' financial constraints, and how there sometimes were quite noticeable differences in accessibility between areas. That generally less well-off urbanites, living in localities with limited access opportunities and often higher pressures on their budgets, will not regard recreational access as a prime prioritisation is unsurprising, while more well off localities, where the demographic on average belongs to higher socioeconomic strata and shows more interest in recreational access are more likely to push for provision of access.

Additionally, the fact that landowners often have significant, even unfairly large influence on politics through having a disproportionately high representation in rural local authorities (compared to their proportion of the population), is likely to have a significant effect on how political prioritisations relating to issues of access are dealt with (Shoard 1997:192, 198-199). This overrepresentation of the landed strata among those who decide budget priorities, shape access legislation and decide what constitutes appropriate uses of rural spaces (with hunting and agriculture – the activities of the landed – often receiving priority) will certainly shape perceptions of access and will thus serve to exclude or make feel constrained all but the most determined outdoor recreationist. This can be seen to constitute a manifestation of Jacob's and Schreyer's 7th proposition of conflict theory, showing how landed powers attempt to restrict access they believe could interfere with their traditions and interests (Jacob & Schreyer 1980:372, 374). This stratification could also have far reaching consequences, with whole strata of society missing out on the benefits outdoor recreation can offer, such as health and relaxation, as well as stopping them from developing affinities with the natural environment. In the long run, there is even a risk that these individuals, who are never given the chance to foster pride over their countryside, could come to feel a simmering animosity to those who exclude them – and in turn a likely disrespect for the holdings of these excluders. As Jacob and Schreyer note, it is not uncommon that the causes and consequences of recreational conflicts, such as over access, get confused with each other, and that instances of vandalism,

which could well result from exclusion and resentment thereof, are used as arguments against access (Ibid.:369).

Motivations and preferences

Regarding which environments the local recreationists predominantly access, the majority of Ramblers' outings tend to be fairly local. For the Tameside group approximately one third of walks take place within the borough itself, another third in the nearby Peak District and the remainder somewhat further afield, but generally still within neighbouring counties (Ramsden). The other groups reflected a similar division of walks. John Smith (pseudonym) described the majority of their walks as taking place in the local area, sometimes venturing into neighbouring counties, with a small portion of trips to other locations in the north of England. Roy Thorniley stated that "70% of the walks we do are within easy travelling distance of Rochdale", and also noted that walks further afield tend to not be as well attended, something which he put down to the time consumed by and the cost of travel. The surveyed recreationists expressed a somewhat higher level of interest in venturing further afield. 23% (seven respondents) stated that they mainly carry out their activities in the local area, with a key reason for them not venturing further afield being structural constraints, such as financial limitations preventing travel. Of the 23 other recreationists, 19 stated that the Peak District National Park was a key area for their outdoor recreation activities. 18 stated that they also frequented other British national parks, especially the Lake District and Snowdonia in North Wales, for recreation. Only three individuals mentioned preference for environments to which access tends to be more restricted – local forests. The favouring of the Peak District National Park and other National Parks – areas with well-established and secure access – could likely stem from recreational goals being defined in a way where they can be met and satisfied, tying in with explanations for recreational participation offered by Jacob and Schreyer, who note that the behaviour of others – or concerns thereof, whether founded or unfounded – can result in a redefinition of recreational preferences (1980:370). In a political ecological context where recreationists move in limited spaces, defined by and for a landed minority, much effort would likely have to be expended to make claims to further access, and many experiences impacting negatively on the recreational experience might be encountered in such a process, wherefore all but the most hardened access proponents will redefine their goals to fit within lawfully permitted boundaries such as national parks.

23 of the 30 individuals surveyed stated that walking is their main activity, 3 that their primary activity was climbing, and the remainder that it was a mix. Four were members of an outdoor organisation; four were Ramblers, one of which was also in the BMC. No discernible differences were noted between the access perceptions of walkers and climbers.

Regarding motivations for outdoor recreation, many stated that seeing nature was a key reason for their forays, with 20 out of the 30 giving it a 5 on a scale from 1-5 and with a further 8 giving it a 4. This rather significant focus on environmental experiences ties in well with studies investigating the potential of participation in outdoor recreation for inspiring environmentally positive attitudes, several of which conclude that they do indeed make for good inspiration (Teisl & O'Brien 2003:519), making a clear case for furthering of both recreation and access as part of the endeavours to create an environmentally sound society.

The preference for well-established and secure access such as national parks might also explain the proclivity for certain types of access. Tameside Ramblers' Stewart Ramsden said his group, due to participant preference, mainly arranged walks on public rights of way rather than pathless open country. Ramsden also noted that the longer and harder walks tend to receive less interest from the members than shorter walks on local rights of way. This preference might be due to ingrained perceptions of exclusion, with those less initiated more

inclined to get out when having the support of a group? The respondents to the survey indicated somewhat more interest in straying off the beaten track, with 17 stating a preference for venturing into remote locations, while only 3 preferred staying near populated areas. 10 expressed a preference for using pathless land while 11 preferred rights of way.

The differing perceptions of access noted here and their effects on recreational participation do, as Paulson, Gezon and Watts note (2005:32), indicate how analysing social differentiation in micro-contexts such as the community of outdoor recreationists in the Manchester area can provide insights into greater structures of power and knowledge which shape interactions with and uses of nature, while also tying well in with more recent developments in the field of political ecology, which focus on delving deeper into not only the greater global structures but also more localised structures (Gezon & Paulson 2005:13). The fact that many of the surveyed recreationists were from more socioeconomically secure backgrounds, as indicated by their educational backgrounds, might go some way to explain their greater confidence regarding the use of recreational access, and clearly manifests how social stratification and its effects can shape use of natural environments and resources in more localised micro-contexts, just as well as it does in the greater global context.

The lack of representation of lower social strata among the recreationists indicates that widening recreational access is likely to be a good way of creating more widespread environmental concern – this as it has been noted how social inequality tends to have strong influence on environmental attitudes, with those suffering the worst social exclusion often finding the effects of these inequalities to be a major hindrance to the development of environmentally positive attitudes (Paraskevopoulos, Korifiatis & Pantis 2003:772). Thus, while some access proponents argue that focusing on catering to existing demand rather than increasing the supply of access is the appropriate way forward (Curry & Ravenscroft 2001), I, like Marion Shoard (1999:367), believe that as the attitudes of the English to their countryside have been strongly shaped by hundreds of years of landowner dominance and exclusion of the common man, it needs to be taken into account how this history likely has had strong effects on how individuals define their recreational preferences and resulted in a deeply rooted perception of being disallowed in the countryside, especially so for poorer urban-dwellers.

Perceptions of the legal extent of access.

In the interviews with the Ramblers, many expressed that they themselves, along with what they perceived to be the majority of members in their local groups, did not to any noteworthy degree feel limited with regard to the extent of legally accessible spaces for recreation. Tameside's Stewart Ramsden said "Personally I'm quite happy with the access, because... we've got a public rights of way network, and... access land is freely available. We don't necessarily want to go tramping across lots of other land.", while Edgar Ernstbrunner emphatically stated that "The absence of access land I do not see as a deterrent to walking." John Smith appeared to agree, as did Roy Thorniley, who answered the question regarding what his ideal access structure would look like in this way: "I have to say, without thinking about it in any great detail, I am probably... I'm happy, inasmuch, there's more than enough...access land...and rights of way and footpaths, to keep us...more than happy." He also elaborated by describing some circumstances more specific to the Rochdale area:

Rochdale has got the biggest network in Greater Manchester, you know, 1800, probably, rights of way, you know. You'll never ever walk all those [...] there is more than enough...available to us...you're not gonna get total access to everything because of landownership and rights of way issues and things like that. You just can't go where you want to go, in certain cases, can you, cause it's not legally, not legally right.

BMC's Catherine Flitcroft also seemed fairly content with the current extent of legal access. Still, while noting CRoW had brought about significant positive changes, she stated: "I'd say it's not perfect but I think [...] it's amazing in comparison [to before CRoW]!" – she also pointed out some areas where it has not delivered, claiming that "there are also pockets of land where...people can't access...and we would like to, particularly around crags like Vixen Tor and Dartmoor, you know, great crag but the landowner just says no, no access."

Several of the Ramblers interviewees thought it would generally be the more initiated and independent recreationists that would feel that current access is insufficient. This would include, for example, hikers or climbers who in addition to current permitted access, might like to be able to stray more freely or to wild camp (i.e. camp outside areas specifically designated and maintained for the purpose of camping). Through the surveys I attempted to garner the views of some of these individuals. While the results do indeed indicate a somewhat lower level of satisfaction with the extent of legally available access, a majority still regard it as sufficient. Of the 30 recreationists surveyed 8 (26%) answered the question regarding whether they felt that the current amount of accessible land was adequate by stating that they thought it perfectly sufficient, giving it a 5 ("very much so") on a scale from 1-5, 1 being "not at all" and 5 "very much so". Another 14 (46%) seemed largely happy but saw room for improvement, giving a score of 4. A smaller number, 16.6%, or 6 out of 30 thought access is entirely or largely insufficient, with two giving a score of 1 and four giving a score of 2. A third also stated that they regularly participate in wild camping. Interestingly, a majority of these wild campers – 7 out of 10 – stated that they found access to be wholly or near sufficient. This discrepancy – statements about contentment with the amount of access while partaking in an activity which is illegal in most recreational countryside spaces in England is interesting, and again hints at a reluctance to define access as insufficient, showing how ingrained perceptions of access to natural spaces are within the English context.

While both interviewees and survey respondents appear reasonably satisfied with the extent of recreational access, several mentions are made of issues and impairments, such as landowners who remain exclusive and specific areas which are still off-limits. The reluctance to define these issues as significant likely results from a combination of factors, with a key one being how individuals' wishes – or goals – of maximising their own recreational pleasure might result in them avoiding situations which could impair satisfaction – what Jacob & Schreyer (1980:369-370) define as goal interference – which in turn can lead to goal redefinition. Another factor is how landowners will claim that certain uses, including recreational activities such as walking, clash with what they see as more important and appropriate uses of land resources – with agriculture and hunting being key. Such arguments made by the landed manifest Jacob's and Schreyer's 7th proposition of conflict theory, as they are likely to be based on concerns of interference with status pursuits and traditions (Ibid.:372, 374). These claims, though largely false – with agriculture, for example, being all but a marginal activity in the modern English countryside – have led to deeply ingrained perceptions of what constitutes appropriate uses of rural resources, and clearly shows how the political ecology of access can affect recreationists, as those landowners who recreationists might fear conflict with often possess significant political clout (Shoard 1997:192, 198), and could use their influence to, on a legislative level, restrict access. With the limits of pre-CRoW access in fresh memory, and with a return to a Conservative-led 'landowners government' in 2010, such factors could have strong effects on access perceptions. Interesting when considered in light of the above is how a 76% majority of the survey respondents said that they, in general, felt welcome in the countryside, with 26.6 % or 8 responding with a 5 ("very much so") on a scale from 1-5, and 50%, or 15 individuals, responding with a 4. It is worth noting that several respondents, without prompting, pointed out that this very much depends on the area, and that all those who pointed this out also noted that the north of the

country in general and the Peak District National Park more specifically, is unusual in this respect. It is reasonable to suspect that had this study been carried out in a different locality, i.e. one with less legally accessible areas for recreation, the results of the investigations could potentially have been more negative, with more recreationists likely feeling constrained. In the less densely populated and less intensely agricultural north, perceptions of access could naturally be significantly different to those in the densely populated south where more land is subject to commercial interest. Again, this would be worthy of further investigation by way of comparative studies carried out in other areas.

The stated satisfaction with the current amount of access, in conjunction with proclaimed access preferences tie well in with both constraint and conflict theories, which note that structural constraints such as perceived appropriateness of activities and knowledge, and worries regarding conflict are both strong shapers of recreational preferences (Crawford & Godbey 1987:124, Jacob & Schreyer 1980:370). I believe the most effective way of addressing the effects of constraints and conflicts, as well as the most efficient way to a fair and environmentally connected society, is to widen access as far as is possible, thereby placating many of the fears and reluctances which shape forms and frequencies of recreational ventures.

Knowledge of access & its implications for recreational participation

As Paulson, Gezon and Watts (2005:26) note, addressing knowledge differences among those who make differing claims to natural spaces is a key part of uncovering the power structures that shape preferences and uses of these spaces. The impact that knowledge – or lack thereof – can have on perceptions of access and by extension also on the likelihood and form of participation in outdoor recreation was noted in the 2000 Rural White Paper as well as by Marion Shoard (DEFRA 2000:138, Shoard 1999:60). As noted previously, those who possess the power to allow or deny access to specific areas often also possess the power to influence society on a more general level, including how knowledge about access is or isn't disseminated, showing how the form of power that is knowledge is as unequally divided as access itself is. The fact that so much power lies in the hands landowners, who often are reluctant to allow others access and who define what activities are appropriate to undertake in specific areas, serves to further disadvantage potential recreationists by making the hurdles they have to negotiate considerably harder to overcome. For example, with the mandate to inform the populace of their rights often being wilfully neglected, budding recreationists are left to themselves to seek out the necessary knowledge about their access rights, while the potential of widespread information to inspire those who are not already interested is likely lost altogether. These hurdles also serve to prevent the development of environmental appreciation which, as Kaiser et al. (2011:370, 391-392) note, could be the way forward if we wish to foster environmentally proactive populaces. This again suggests that a generalised right of access to most land, accompanied by widespread information, needs to be considered if we wish to create an egalitarian society where all have the same potential to form connections with and care for their surrounding natural environments.

While the CRoW Act, in addition to providing much improved access rights, aimed to widely publicise these new rights, my investigation suggests that the dissemination of information does not appear to have been very successful. Both interviews and surveys suggest that few recreationists seem to know much about CRoW, or indeed very much about their access rights in general: all Ramblers interviewees believed that the members of their local groups would not be familiar with the CRoW Act to any meaningful extent, while the survey revealed that only 5 of the respondents (16%) had knowledge of the Act, let alone were aware of its contents. Tameside's Stewart Ramsden stated that he believes those who

were walkers before 2000 will have reasonable awareness of it: “If they’ve been a regular walker, and they were walking prior to 2000, then yes they would be aware of that, cause there was a lot of campaigning, a lot of publicity at the time”.

Even this assumption might however be optimistic; 17 of the 30 respondents stated that they had been active recreationists before CRoW but, with the exception of two individuals, these too were unfamiliar with it. It thus seems the uptake of information has been very patchy and that CRoW might not have lived up to the hopes and plans expressed in the 2000 Rural White Paper: that countryside pursuits should be a “source of enjoyment for all sections of society” (DEFRA 2000:137). Among the 13 more recent recreationists – beginning after the introduction of CRoW – three were aware of it. Two of these three also noted that it had had an impact on how much they partake in their activity – potentially giving an idea of how inspiring secure knowledge might be.

None of the Ramblers believed CRoW had brought about an increase in the number of walkers, and the data collected for this paper is not statistically representative enough to draw any conclusions. Research on outdoor recreation participation has noted minor increases, but these have been assumed to stem mainly from economical factors – with the 2008 recession making people more likely to holiday domestically being key (Swanwick 2009:S65). Whatever the case may be, providing knowledge regarding access is likely to be a crucial way of addressing the ingrained perceptions of exclusion and the effects of structural constraints such as concerns regarding the appropriateness of one’s chosen recreational activity (Crawford & Godbey 1987:124), and could well, in addition to inspiring those too reluctant to head out, improve the quality of experience for those already “out”.

Unlike the Ramblers, the BMC’S Catherine Flitcroft believed a lot of their membership would be at least vaguely familiar with The CRoW Act: “I’d probably say BMC members know more about the CROW act than the actual general public, the non-BMC member, because [...] we specifically look at how its’ impacting on our activities.” She also noted that while the membership reaps the benefits of CRoW and the work of the BMC – as access is maintained to crags across the country – it doesn’t necessarily mean that they know how the good access came about – whether it is thanks to CRoW or the efforts of the BMC. Still, when asked if she believes climbers feel limited with regards to where they can legally climb, she answered: “I think probably not [...] if they can go to a crag, fine, but they won’t be thinking about the legislation behind it...if they can’t go to a crag...they’ll probably try and climb there anyway until somebody tells them not to, and at that point we get involved”. This might indicate that the facilitation provided by and the knowledge that the BMC attempts to equip its membership with makes its members more confident and consequentially better able to take advantage of their rights, as would the security of having a big organisation working for their rights behind them. This also shows how organisations such as BMC and Ramblers can act as a force counteracting landed powers and help change the perceptions that shape use of countryside spaces, giving an indication of the role they could play in future access efforts.

It thus seems that in spite of the much widened access and improved rights provided by CRoW, knowledge of it is rather patchy. The lack of success in meeting the goals of information dissemination could, as previously noted, partly be explained through politics. As Stewart Brady noted, some councils – and the nation as a whole from 2010 to the present – are run by the Conservative Party, and: “traditionally, the Tory Party were the party of the landowners, so anything that improves access is poor...I mean historically, they’re the ones who’ve always opposed...the CRoW Act.” The ‘party of the landowners’ is not likely to want to end up on a collision course with landowners over access-related policies – and as Shoard (1997:192) noted, sometimes the landowners even are the party – especially not when they know that these people are the very voters and donors that they rely on for political rule. And not only is it the spreading of information that has suffered due to political prioritisations: in

times of Conservative rule and austerity, many councils have had to de-prioritise access-related maintenance. Both the Ramblers and the BMC brought up the effects of the cuts on local authority budgets. As Catherine Flitcroft expressed it:

I'd say the main thing actually that is affecting access today is...local authority budgets have been massively slashed... [...] there's just no money to upkeep of footpaths, there's no money for access and it's not prioritised nationally, you know, from the government either.

Stewart Brady expanded on the issue by describing how the cuts had hit in his locality, by noting how Bury's right of way budget had been cut by nearly three-fourths – going “from £100,000 a year to 25-27 grand” – and how one of the council's two rights of way officers had lost their job. Similar issues had hit Rochdale, where Roy Thorniley described how the two rights of way officers had been there years, gotten to know the local landowners and issues as well the complexities of access legislation. As their posts had been abolished, one had left and the other had become a corporate enforcement officer, meaning right of way-related issues was now only a minor part of their work. Edgar Ernstbrunner also noted significant impacts on access related to the cuts: “Stockport has deteriorated significantly too. It used to be one of our really good ones. [...] The impression we get there that the rights of way officer is overloaded. There used to be three. It was cut down to two.” However, it isn't all doom and gloom, as Ernstbrunner noted: sometimes local areas had found ways of overcoming the worst effects of the cuts, one actually being “Rochdale, who used to have two [rights of way officers], they [...] abolished both posts, but amazingly it works actually fairly well because they recognise that they can't just let these things drift.” Still, there were worries about the future impacts of cuts and political prioritisations on access. Ernstbrunner saw the lack of implementation of Rights of Way Improvement Plans as a potentially major issue – what with them being “aspirational, that is, if any authority didn't have any money to actually implement it [...] there would be no onus on them for not doing anything.” He further expressed some disappointment with the extent of access that CRoW had brought about:

when access land was mapped, quite a few areas were left out where the landowners appealed successfully against parcels of land being included in access land, which meant it didn't really go as far as we had hoped. [...] it was due to be reviewed I think 2012, but that didn't happen because of shortage of money [...]. So that I think has been postponed for at least five years, and it isn't entirely sure that will actually happen. Which means that we're still left with a somewhat unsatisfactory situation, because it obviously means that land that we'd originally hoped would be accessible isn't going to be in the foreseeable future.

It should be noted that there is a significant risk such land might be lost to access forever (bar a large-scale turnaround in political prioritisations), this as the goals of the RoWIPs are not being met, and (as is set out in Sections 53 to 56 of the CRoW Act) the cut-off date (1st of January 2026) for the extinguishment of unrecorded rights of way is drawing ever nearer (UK Parliament 2000:34-38). Essentially, it all comes down to power dynamics which determine access policies and budget priorities, showing how perceptions of access are shaped by political powers (Gezon & Paulson 2005:1). What are then the effects of these issues and the lack of knowledge? Through the interviews I gathered that such issues do not seem to be a major issue for most Ramblers. As Roy Thorniley put it, for most walkers in their local group:

focus is on the social side and the getting out into the fresh air and the exercise and seeing the sights. [...] Some of our people don't even know where they've been. Because every walk is led. The leader knows where he's going, the others are quite happy to just follow and be taken back to the car, cause what they want, they want to get out of the house, to get some fresh air, get some exercise, meeting their mates.

Thorniley did however state that he believes it is likely to be more of an issue for independent recreationists, and illustrated how a lack of knowledge could impact by considering how a family setting foot on Scout Moor for the first time might feel:

A husband and wife, taking their two children out...into Scout Moor, would they feel comfortable? Are the facilities there good enough for a young family to go out and find their way around, something like Scout Moor, are the waymarkers available there, do they know what's private land, what isn't private land? They haven't got that knowledge, so that...I would think that would tend to put people off going for walks.

He believes many might simply not venture out because of such uncertainties – they do not know where they are legally allowed to go – and he suggests that, unless clear and welcoming information is provided in the relevant areas, many people are likely to be put off. In addition, he considers that the existence of gates, stiles and animals in fields combined with the absence of waymarkers can add to the feelings of uncertainty, as it often isn't clear if access furniture is there for farm or public use and if the existence of animals in a field precludes access. This again ties back to the structural constraints that result from how the landed possessors of the English countryside has successfully managed to instil perceptions of access that could, with widespread acquisition of relevant knowledge, be changed. Stewart Ramsden provided an additional aspect on this issue, by pointing out that for some, even the existence of navigational aids such as waymarkers might not sufficiently disperse uncertainties. Where signposting exists, he says, “mostly they just say public footpath, you might get a post pointing four ways, footpath, footpath, footpath...oh, what use is that?”, a statement which reinforces the argument for a instating a more generalised right of access, where individuals would not have to feel any great concern over straying off a narrow, permissive route.

To further clarify how uncertainties can impact on perceptions of access I asked the 30 surveyed recreationists a number of questions about their knowledge and experiences. When asked “Would you say you feel certain about where you can go in the countryside?” many expressed some level of uncertainty, with only 20%, or 6 respondents, expressing full confidence in their knowledge of where they can go. 16,6% (5 individuals) responded that they had fair confidence in their knowledge – giving a score of 4, 12 (40%) gave a score of 3, 6 (20%) answered 2, and 1 responded “1” – “Not at all”. Still, most – 70% – stated that they think that there is enough easily available information regarding access: 33% answering with a “5” – “very much so” and 37% giving a score of 4. Two-thirds – 20 respondents – stated that they know what is meant by a ‘a right of way’ (most also stating they know how to find out where they are located), while somewhat fewer – 46,6% (14 individuals) were familiar with what is meant by ‘access land’ and knowing how to find it. 87% or 26 of the 30 survey respondents tend to carry some form of maps with them, though not all are the Ordnance Survey maps where rights of way and access land are clearly marked out.

These types of recreational constraints, stemming from a lack of knowledge, were noted by a small number of recreationists as having some influence on their perceptions of access and their recreational forays, with 5 survey respondents (16,6%) answering the question “In general, do you know where you're legally allowed access in the countryside?” by stating that they felt they did, but that this is only because they intentionally stick to paths. While, all-in-all, uncertainties did not seem to prove a significant influence on the recreational patterns of those interviewed and surveyed, some concern was noted regarding potential effects on less initiated recreationists. I, with reference to the hierarchical model of constraints developed by Crawford, Jackson and Godbey (1991:310), believe there is a significant potential that intrapersonal constraints such as a lack knowledge can affect how individuals perceive their rights to access various environments, and thus their preferences and how likely they are to participate in outdoor recreation. Whether the fact that many of respondents appear to be from higher socioeconomic groups, as is indicated by the higher than average education level, has

helped them to more successfully navigate the hurdles to access appears likely, but further investigations would be needed to confirm or discard this hypothesis.

While the focus of this paper lies on the perceptions of access held by recreationists it is worth considering what the effects of insufficient knowledge and perceived constraints can be not only on recreation but also on social equality in wider sense: in the modern rural sphere, where the landless rural are less essential to the working of the countryside via their agricultural labour and thus more likely to be excluded. As Marion Shoard (1999:229) notes, it used to be in the interest of landowners to keep paths accessible and permit the use of them, as it provided a way for the working classes to get to work) – it isn't only recreating urban incomers who stand to benefit from more access, it is also – if not *more* so – the rural landless that would benefit from increased rights to the spaces in their local communities. For the urban recreationist to be excluded might affect them on the weekends when they venture into the countryside for a walk, while for the rural landless it might mean that their everyday possibilities are curtailed significantly, forcing them to choose ways to work, to shops, to friends and family, all based on where they might or might not be allowed to tread. Additionally, a lack of access could have other significant effects on rural lives: as Graham Bathe notes, access is not only a drain on but an important contributor to the public purse, something which became very clear during the foot and mouth crisis when the economical consequences for agriculture paled into insignificance compared to the losses of forgone recreation-related incomes, access for which was significantly curtailed at the time to prevent the spreading of the disease (Bathe 2007:5). Access and facilitation thereof could thus provide a crucial stimulus to a rural economic sector where many of the not-landed and not-so-powerful are at present struggling.

Whatever the impacts of a lack of knowledge and perceived constraints are, a likely even bigger influence on the likelihood and form of recreation is likely to be that of conflict or concerns thereof. As ecologist Derek Ratcliffe pointed out in 1992, the “wonderful freedom of the spirit and uplift of the senses that goes with untrammelled access to wild places can easily be diminished, if not completely destroyed, by the sense that others object to my presence there, and seek to prevent it” (quoted in Cox 1993:274). To this issue I now turn.

Chapter IV – Get Off My Land!

The narrative of the excluding landowner is a recurring one in access debates in the English countryside, and one which is essential to address in any investigation into perceptions of access. It is also by addressing this that we find some of the most overt manifestations of the concepts that political ecology seeks to address – how certain interests and groups have long had the privilege of deciding what constitutes appropriate uses of natural environments and resources – with the result that recreation has often been regarded as being something of a hindrance to agriculture, to hunting, and even as an environmentally destructive use of natural resources (Buxton 1999:113-4, Shoard 1997:251). These ways of defining appropriate uses has long disregarded that it might actually be those dominant, “appropriate uses” that have been more environmentally destructive, such as modern agriculture and the over-production that has been a mainstay of British land use ever since the second world war (Shoard 1997:398). This is not to mention the aspect I want to bring forward – how the claims of exclusivity to countryside spaces that these uses have carried with them, through their large scale exclusion, might have had far-reaching effects on the mentality of the English populace by preventing them from developing an affinity with nature. The focus on recreational access as a supposedly destructive force thus wilfully disregards and denies the effects of often far more destructive land uses, which ties in with Paul Robbins words about how contestations over nature are won – with certain voices not dominating the conflict because they are right, but simply because they are in a position to shape the discourse about nature and land use (Robbins 2012:128).

The words of the late Lord Aubrey Buxton (1918-2009), a TV executive who also held prominent positions in several conservation organisations, paints a clear picture of a not uncommon attitude among landowners to ‘intrusions’ by recreating ‘townies’. In 1999, just before CRoW was introduced, he wrote that most of those who favoured the introduction of a right to roam (i.e. the CRoW Act) were “clueless” and “inexperienced” city people (Buxton 1999:114), while also referring to the wishes for extended access as a minority demand, in spite of a majority of 80% being for a right to roam and in spite of outdoor recreation being the nation’s favourite pastime (Ibid.:113-114, Butler & Comley 2014). To give an idea of how landowners feel about recreational access, we can look at a study carried out prior to the introduction of CRoW, which concluded that as many as 73,5% of the landowners questioned either disagreed or strongly disagreed (39,5% and 34%, respectively) with the idea of giving wider access to uncultivated land (Cox 1993:273). On what grounds have landowners then opposed access – and how are their arguments and actions perceived by organisations such as the Ramblers and the BMC, as well as by my survey respondents?

Marion Shoard recounts just a few of the many reasons landowners have given for why they want the right to exclude, such as worries regarding theft and damage to property and landscape, disturbances to wildlife and livestock and loss of privacy (Shoard 1997:231, 1999:8-9). Out of these concerns, some of the most frequently brought up have been regarding the effects of open access on hunting and concerns about the effect of recreational activity on the natural environments. With regards to hunting, many opponents of access extensions have long argued that it is unfeasible to combine such different uses of countryside spaces as hiking and hunting, as access for walkers would have a detrimental impact on the number of game (Buxton 1999:113-114, Ravenscroft 1998:39). Research into such claims however indicates that most concerns regarding recreational impact are unjustified – with any effects generally being minor and rarely justifying exclusion. For example, the number of grouse, a key prey for many English hunters, appears to not at all be affected by recreational disturbance (British Ecological Society 1990:5). These arguments against access provide a clear manifestation of Jacob’s and Schreyer’s seventh proposition of conflict theory, that is,

that landed hunters feel that having to share what they feel is their exclusive space with others denigrates their status claims (Jacob & Schreyer 1980:372, Shoard 1997:21-22). Again, the differing claims to the rights to use a natural space has clearly affected the perceptions of access in the English countryside, and it's not hard to see how concerns regarding people who don't want you there, carrying guns, could deter many current or would-be recreationists.

As for the other key argument against widening of access for recreational use – that it causes damage to the natural environment – it has again been all but written off. Among those who have addressed this issue is Nigel Curry, who concluded that carrying capacity – here referring to how much recreational use a land resource can sustain without degrading – should not be considered a major issue in England, essentially as the supply of recreational areas is far larger than the demand (Curry 2001:410). How much increased use these spaces could sustain is of course important to establish, but if increased use coincides with increased access – potential impacts would likely be spread thus not causing great issues, reinforcing previously noted arguments for a wider generalised access. As for arguments such as those put forward by Lord Buxton – purporting that the demand for a wider right to roam is all but non-existent – they essentially nullify themselves; if the demand is so small, surely not much damage would arise from giving people these rights?

To disperse concerns about recreational impacts further, one could refer to studies conducted on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which are defined as such due to the presence of specific fauna, flora geological or physiographical features and deemed to be worth preserving for the future. These studies conclude that of the 55% of access land that has SSSI status (of which 75% is bordered or crossed by rights of way) only 1% requires exclusion of recreational activity – in most cases only seasonally (Bathe 2007:6-8, UK Parliament 2000:24, Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs & Natural England 2013). In spite of all this evidence to the contrary many still perceive wear, tear and other impacts resulting from recreation as a major problem, manifesting how the political ecology of the English countryside, where power of use and definition of appropriate utilisation belongs to a privileged minority, affects perceptions of access. Remarkably, one of my informants even recounted the issue of environmental damage due to recreational use being raised during a meeting with Queen Elisabeth II. As Stewart Ramsden told me:

Three years ago I was very fortunate to be invited to a royal reception at Windsor Castle by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip. We got presented to her and she comes around chatting and says “why are you here?”, and it was for work I'd done with the Ramblers, so she said “the Ramblers, but they cause lots of erosion don't they?” And I say well, yes they do, they create paths, but there's more erosion on my local hills and the Peak District caused by sheep than by people.

Regardless the validity of landowners' arguments against access, the perceptions of exclusion and of hostile landowners is a deeply ingrained one, one which has not gone away even after CRoW was introduced. Nor has the foundations for these perceptions. Roy Thorniley immediately answers “Landowners!”, when asked what, if any, hindrances to access they encounter in their area, while Stewart Ramsden also mentioned that “There are some farmers, landowners that will block rights of way”. Edgar Ernstbrunner also describes an instance on the southern edges of Manchester where a landowner has continuously, over several years, obstructed access. When the landowner in question has been served notice by local authorities to remove obstructions, he has done so, but immediately put up another one, and thus this case has dragged on for years, with court proceedings having been necessary. It should be noted that the prevalence of such issues often vary from one area to another. John Smith, for example, describes the relation between his local group and landowners as generally friction-free, saying “we get on quite well” and notes how problems with obstructed paths are,

compared to many other areas, few and far between – though he also noted how the group has worked hard to get to this good state. Clearly it isn't a clear-cut issue.

To get an idea of how the actions of obstructing or excluding landowners affect recreationists, I asked the survey respondents about their experiences of such issues. The results suggest a fairly high prevalence of encountered contestations over access – with only 10% (3 out of 30 respondents) answering they had never encountered any of the obstructions described – making clear how landed powers use their positions to attempt to exclude other interests, such as the recreating public. It should here be noted that obstructions come in the guise of not just overt verbal or physical behaviours, but also through more indirect actions which serve as a hindrance to the pursuit of recreational goals (Jacob & Schreyer 1980:369), and I thus divided them into the following types: verbal hindrances, threats (including physical altercations), off-putting signage, a lack of signage (including deliberately removed waymarkers), a lack of maintenance and, lastly, intentionally placed physical obstructions. Figure 1 shows how many of the 30 respondents have encountered each type of issue.

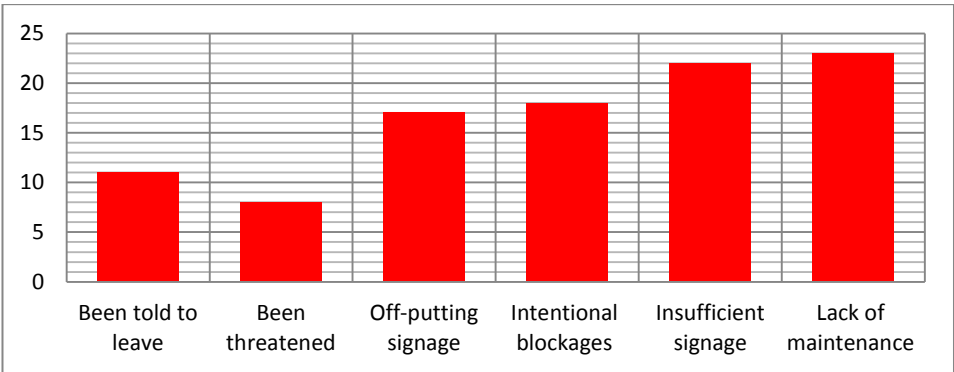


Fig. 2 – Experiences of obstruction.

Several of the issues constitute obvious attempts by landowners to prevent access – telling people to leave, threatening, displaying off-putting signs and intentionally blocking access. Other issues, such as insufficient signage, should not be presumed to exclusively stem from landowner actions – though landowners have been known to cause such issues by removing waymarkers – but can sometimes simply stem from intrapersonal or structural constraints (i.e. depend on recreationists' confidence and knowledge, with a self-assured, proficient map reader likely able to negotiate the issue). Lastly, a lack of maintenance is another issue where the origins can be somewhat dubious; it could be conscious negligence from a landowner essentially constituting an intentional blockage, or, often on public land, a consequence of budget constraints (which can stem from a political agenda to de-prioritise access, again showing how rural political powers, often in the hands of the landed, can be used to exclude and obstruct). Many of the above noted issues thus illustrate how power structures and political prioritisations affect recreational access, and how this in turn is likely to shape the relations of the populace with their surrounding natural environments.

While many who had encountered obstructions said they were fairly rare, six stated that they were fairly frequent, occurring on so many as 30% of their excursions. 17 (56,6%) out of the 30 surveyed also answered that they had had to make detours or in a few cases even had had to abandon their activity for the day due to obstructions of some description. I believe it is also worth noting that the three who had never encountered obstructions also stated that they predominantly tend to stay on official paths – potentially suggesting how far-reaching the effects of perceptions of exclusion can be – while most of those who had encountered obstructions had encountered more than one type thereof.

According to the Ramblers, the most frequent type of issues they encounter tend to be a lack of upkeep of paths resulting in them being obstructed and, to a lesser degree, non-confrontational conflicts, such as landowners causing obstruction, either intentionally by blocking or by sabotaging rights of way or routes leading on to access land (for example by removing waymarkers or by posting misleading signs) or through neglecting their statutory duty to maintain and keep usable any right of way on their land (UK Parliament 2000:9. 23-24, 31). It should be noted that posting signs containing misleading and deterring information regarding access is an offence (Ibid.:9), a fact which does not appear to stop some – as 17 (56,6%) of those surveyed noted that they had encountered such signage. Tameside Ramblers' Stewart Ramsden described the most frequent hindrances to access in his area: "that is a good right of way, and you can see it is a bit like a jungle. [...] There's another photograph, it's on the same walk... Quite a narrow path, and there was barbed wire, and there is no need for barbed wire there". He put a lot of these issues down to the budget cuts which have affected councils in recent years. Roy Thorniley noted how landowners often drag their feet regarding rectifying access issues, even after being repeatedly notified of the existence of the issues and of their obligations by local authorities. Whether this is the case with the specific cases described here is unknown, but it is highly likely what with the previously noted landowning prominence in many rural authorities, that landowners and authorities will collude in attempts to either restrict access or ignore demands for rectification of obstructive issues.

Roy Thorniley also provided a clear example of the types of issues they encounter and how they deal with them – on the day of the interview he asked me to come and inspect a footpath with him: footpath number 18 in the Heywood area – which the landowner had made impassable at two points. The footpath runs across a field, which appears to lie fallow. At point A the wide gate leading into the field had been locked with a chain and padlock. At point B there was simply a wire fence, with no gates or access furniture installed. After a first address by the highway officers the landowner removed the chain and lock, but didn't do anything about the other point of access. After a second address a stile was built, which Roy notes is not entirely correctly placed according to the maps. He however concludes that it is now satisfactory and not worth expending more energy on. He also notes how long it took to reach this point of satisfaction – "we first reported that in September 2012. We've...I visited it with John Molyneux on 24th of March...it was still obstructed on the 24th of October...and since then he's had that extra stile put up". It thus took 14 months for this, relatively simple, remedial action to an unusable right of way to be completed. It is evident from this example how such issues can affect perceptions of access – with landowners blocking off paths with padlocks and omitting installing stiles or gates to enable passage likely stopping all but the most confident or the most proficient map readers from using a right of way.

While the results from both interviews and surveys suggest a fairly high level of satisfaction with the extent of legal access, it still seems there are some significant issues affecting perceptions of access. Again, Jacob's and Schreyer's idea of re-evaluation of goals becomes a plausible explanation, meaning that, as recreational activities such as walking and climbing are largely pursued for enjoyment, one is likely to attempt to avoid situations where conflicts would be more likely to occur (Jacob & Schreyer 1980:370). There is also a potential that recreationists might have encountered conflict in specific areas or environments which they thereafter avoid, or that they are aware of place where conflicts are more likely to arise, which they again avoid – and consequentially express a lack of interest in access to. In light of this I believe it is also worth noting that many members of the Ramblers often, if not primarily, tend to go on the organised walks the groups arrange, rather than planning their own walks. Walk leaders are of course unlikely to plan a walk along a route they know or are highly concerned about the accessibility and usability of, which is something that could affect

Ramblers members perceptions by making them less inclined to regard access as problematic or insufficient, as they are unlikely to encounter any considerable conflicts.

The conclusions I draw regarding the perceptions of access as well as the frequency and types of issues encountered by recreationists in the area is that the concepts of political ecology – how different social groups define uses of resources and environments – appear to have notable effects on recreationists in the area. These constraints and conflicts over access clearly show us how landowners' interests shape local and national access structures and demonstrate recreationists in the Manchester region have their lives shaped by the political ecology of access (Paulson, Gezon & Watts 2005:17, 26).

Chapter V –The (Right of) Way Forward?

While the results of this initial investigation are somewhat inconclusive, I, like Jacob & Schreyer (1980:372-373) believe it is important to minimize the effects of such issues on outdoor recreation to achieve the most egalitarian land use as well as the most inspiring natural experiences. While many of the recreationists I interviewed were fairly initiated, and would not let the issues preclude recreational forays, as David Scott (2003:75-78) has shown, a lack of motivation can actually be considered a constraint stemming from perceptions of exclusion. Potentially, if such constraints to the formation of motivation were addressed, the interest in outdoor recreation might rise, resulting in a more fair land use system and hopefully even creating a greater potential for people to develop an affinity with nature? As noted previously, the potential of recreation to inspire environmental awareness and concern has long been a subject of academic debate. While the connections are difficult to chart, the overall indication is that it can inspire at least some level of concern (Dunlap & Heffernan 1975:23-24, 26-27, Kaiser et al. 2011:371, 378, Theodori, Luloff & Willits 1998:100). The results of my survey certainly do suggest that participation in outdoor recreation can affect attitudes to the environment: when asked if they felt that participation outdoor recreation had affected their attitudes to the environment 16 answered “Yes” or “Definitely” and a further 8 stated that it might have had minor effects. This must, in our era of environmental alienation, be seen as a step in the right direction, even if just a small one.

In light of the above findings, to further participation in outdoor recreation, a fairer use of land and hopefully even an increased level of environmental concern, assistance in overcoming the inhibitive effects of constraints and concerns regarding conflict appear necessary for many. It is here that the concept of facilitation comes in – i.e., assisting in the acquisition and development of knowledge and skills. What would the benefits of such efforts be, and how could they be undertaken? I believe inspiration can be found by looking at the activity of climbing, as it seems that constraints and conflict have a considerably weaker effect on climbers forays, compared to walkers. As BMC’s Catherine Flitcroft notes:

I think climbers are quite passionate, so even if they can’t go somewhere they probably will go somewhere... And, yeah, they can kind of...I don’t think, I think if there’s, if there’s a crag that people know that they can’t climb at, I don’t think it’ll stop climbing, I think they’ll just go somewhere else...

It is likely that some of these differences might be explainable through how people get involved in climbing, which is in most cases through some form of facilitation. Flitcroft explains: “Climbing is not something you just kind of do yourself. You do have to...it does have to be through facilitators, somehow... [...] It isn’t...as easy as just obviously going for a walk, it does require equipment...and...and some sort of facilitation”. This facilitation might also help explain why a lack of established legal access is less likely to stop climbers pursuing their activity. Flitcroft further notes that when access issues do arise – for example when a landowner tells climbers not to climb at a crag – the BMC often gets involved and tries to negotiate with the landowner concerned. BMC will also often approach private landowners to enquire regarding establishing access to a crag, as Flitcroft says “If there is a crag for example, on private land, and...to which there is no access, we will try and negotiate so we can have some access.” An aspect affecting this might of course be the more limited – compared to venues for walking – amount of suitable places for the activity. It could be assumed that this limitation in suitable venues might adversely affect climbers’ perceptions of access, but is likely weighed up by the more concentrated efforts that can be expended in establishing access. In addition to dealing with access issues, the BMC also works to ensure concerned landowners that people partaking in such a potentially risky activity on their land

will not place any burden of liability on them, as well as educating climbers regarding appropriate behaviour, all with the aim of ensuring retained access. As Flitcroft notes:

There are some issues around...people not really respecting access furniture and also going to the loo [...] that's a job for us, to try and educate people, and [...] to liaise with the landowner to say we got a pot of money, we can help repair that, we'll put up notices and try and monitor that a bit better and spread the word.

For walking, such concentrated efforts on establishing access to specific, geographically limited areas, is much more unfeasible, as any efforts are likely to be more “watered down” by personal landscape preferences and differences in amount of suitable venues for each activity – i.e., much more for walking – which I believe makes the argument for a widening of access even stronger, something I shall return to shortly. Another difference to climbing is of course that walking can be done with less technical knowledge and investment, and thus many proponents of walking may not consider the hurdle to getting out as being particularly substantial. Compared to climbing, walking is thus much less likely to be regarded as being an activity one needs facilitation to partake in. I believe this is a mistake, as several of my informants point to the significant hurdles uninitiated walkers are likely to encounter – both physical barriers such as obstructions and mental, intrapersonal constraints such as a lack of knowledge. Stewart Brady, for example, notes how many members of his group are all but self-sufficient walkers, not seldom possessing the material goods needed to navigate – maps and compasses – but not having skills to read and use them. Or as he puts it, some “couldn't navigate to save their lives”. With many of these constraints stemming from the effects of power structures and deeply ingrained perceptions of appropriate uses of countryside spaces, addressing them will likely need concerted facilitative efforts. Disregarding the importance of facilitation and development of skills with regards to less ‘demanding’ activities like walking, might thus be a very unfortunate oversight.

Notably, where facilitative efforts have taken place, they have generally been very well-received. Stewart Ramsden notes how the Ramblers, in addition to arranging walks for members of local groups, also have been involved in projects like “Get Walking, Keep Walking”, an initiative which focused on getting inhabitants of deprived inner-city areas and minority groups to use local areas for walking. He describes how one of the groups he worked with during this project expressed great positivity about this facilitative effort and what it had meant for them: “they were very, very keen... and was surprised how many public rights of way there were, and how much green space there was in the inner city”, a feeling echoed in the general response to the project: “people would say I never knew I could get from here to there that way, I have had to go all the way around... you know, or get a bus or something...”

Still, there are areas where I, in spite of these very positive examples of facilitation, believe more needs doing. For example, there was little, if any, mention in the interviews of attempts to provide deeper knowledge and facilitating self sufficiency – such as map reading courses and equipping recreationists with deeper knowledge of access rights. Such knowledge could help them challenge hindrances and erroneous arguments against access, as well as enabling them to experience what I believe might be some of the most environmentally inspiring recreational experiences – such as wild camping, an activity which was also spoken very favourably of by some of my informants, one being Edgar Ernstbrunner, who described it as “a lovely thing to do”. The provision of such knowledge would likely be imperative in any attempt to tear down the perceptions of exclusion that the political ecology of the English countryside has instilled in the minds of the population.

To further make the case for the necessity of facilitation, one could consider the potential side-effects to a lack thereof: with the widening of access provided by CRoW, some of the more adventurous members of the populace have eagerly ventured out into previously inaccessible landscapes. Often unaccustomed to the rigours of a remote environment and

lacking navigational knowledge, some end up in dangerous circumstances. One example of this is brought up by Stewart Ramsden:

there's some statistics I've read about the Lake District, where the number of rescues have increased, because of the use of mobile phones... people with their mapping on mobile phones... Battery's gone, or they just don't understand... they've done surveys... have you got a map and compass? Yes. Do you know to use it? Well, no, not really.

In one survey, one of the more initiated individuals, who had been an active walker for most of their life, as well as having spent significant parts of it climbing, wanted to add to the questions I addressed in the survey. This individual thought awareness of access needed to be increased substantially, as they felt that media and other education on such issues is virtually non-existent! While they thought access land and rights of way generally are well marked out, most people simply do not know how to find it in the first place, and what's more do not know how to take safe and beneficial advantage of it, relying far too much on fallible "gizmos". Some incidents that result from such lack of knowledge then get reported in the media, especially more sensational ones, including those with fatal outcomes. Such incidents might to an extent be preventable through facilitation, but could, if not addressed, in combination with perceptions of exclusion, serve to discourage potential recreationists.

Is there then interest in such efforts? Certainly, the results to my investigations suggest there is: 14 of 30 survey respondents stated that they would definitely be interested in and believed they would find such efforts beneficial, with another 5 indicating potential interest. Out of the 19 showing interest, 5 also noted that they had made previous use of such efforts.

How should facilitation then be undertaken? In addition to basic provisions such as map reading courses some larger scale efforts would be crucial in tackling the deeply ingrained perceptions of exclusion and the perceived omnipotence of landowning powers. Catherine Flitcroft of the BMC noted something which could be of fantastic use for budding and initiated recreationists alike when she pondered how it could be a job for the BMC to produce a Code of Conduct that would go along with CRoW, a sort of enhanced Countryside Code (a set of rules for users of natural spaces, noting a number of things to consider when in these spaces, such as respecting local communities and environments by not littering and keeping dogs under control, among other things (United Kingdom 2015d), which would tell recreationists, "Did you know you could do this?". Such accessible guidance would help tackle deep-rooted perceptions of exclusion and would hopefully increase the impact of the enactment of CRoW on recreational interest and participation. This seems especially important when one considers how the CRoW Act itself is, while publically available, a highly complicated document, very inaccessible to the general public.

Access in the future

2015 marks a decade since the full working implementation of the CRoW Act, and while it could be assumed that this should still be a honeymoon period of sorts for outdoor recreationists, new threats to access are now discernible on the horizon – one such being the Infrastructure Act, which could significantly impair the newly won access freedoms, as it, were it to go through, could mean the transferral of all public land in the U.K. to the government Homes & Communities Agency, from where it could then in turn be sold off to private companies who would likely undertake actions which would have significant impacts on access – such as building works (Ramblers 2014, Monbiot 2014). At the time of submission there is growing concern among England's recreationists of what the newly elected Conservative majority government might have on the cards in the way of legislative changes that could affect access (Ramblers 2015d). In spite of these concerns, my

investigations suggest that there largely appears to be a feeling of contentment, even complacency, regarding access. Edgar Ernstbrunner sums it up succinctly when he draws parallels between the current state of the access movement and the trade union movement: “...it’s only when something they got is under threat that they will...” And most of my informants do indeed seem blissfully unaware of these threats – during my investigations, they were only ever mentioned once.

Complacency or not, Edgar Ernstbrunner has certainly not descended into such attitudes himself, as he firmly makes the point that the CRoW Act and the improved access it gave should not and must not be seen as a final goal achieved, but rather only as “a halfway house”, stating that “in the long term we have to go on campaigning for much more extensive access rights.” He provides a significant counterweight to the arguments that have shaped perceptions of access when he notes to how it has been said – when the far more open and permissive access systems such as the ones in place in Scotland or in Scandinavia have been mentioned as a wished-for-ideal – that the extent of access is as permissive as it can ideally be without causing significant issues for commercial interests, and counters by noting that northern England, outside the population centres, “is almost as thinly populated as large parts of Scotland” and continues by suggesting that “all of the Pennines could, down to 200 metres or 300 metres down to be open access rather than this, what is it 600...2000 feet, 600 metre line that was arbitrarily defined at the time”, referring to how the CRoW Act had defined land located more than 600 metres above the level of the sea as openly accessible land (UK Parliament 2000:1-2). Catherine Flitcroft seems largely to be in agreement with Ernstbrunner, and is equally free of complacency. Regarding the possibilities of a more general widening of access she is, however, somewhat more hesitant, noting that while a Scottish-style access system “would be amazing”, she also harbours some doubts: “I don’t know if it would work, just purely because land management in England is so much more intense.” While sweeping statements about the possibility of widening access cannot be made for the whole of England in one go, to assume that, at the very least, the lesser populated places might be able to accommodate wider access is unlikely to be erroneous.

Considering the deep-rooted perceptions of exclusion that colour much of the attitudes to access in England, I believe, that for access to be truly democratic and of relevance to all sectors of society, clear information and facilitation, along with the widest possible access, should be supplied. The argument for wider access has not lost force even with the introduction of CRoW, because, as noted above, it actually hasn’t had very far reaching impacts – yet – and as several writers have pointed out, its introduction might actually have reinforced feelings of exclusion, as the specifying of areas where access is allowed could actually have strengthened perceptions of exclusion from the remainder of the countryside (Ravenscroft 1998:43, Shoard 1999:105, 308). Another argument for wider access – one which could help counter landowner arguments of access as being of detriment to them – is made by Peter Donnelly (1993:193-194), who notes that geographically limited access will invariably lead to geographically concentrated use and wear on a resource, wherefore a wider right to roam could disperse many worries regarding carrying capacity.

Disregarding the difficulties of enacting large-scale changes to a property rights system which continually, over nearly a millennia, has been increasing its grip on a nation and the fact that the power to enact such changes largely rests in the hands of a minority of landed and powerful individuals, a system based on universal access, with exceptions only where access can be proved to be of significant detriment to society and/or nature would be fairer and, once enacted, likely carry with it fewer “philosophical, legal and practical difficulties” (Shoard 1999:298). And such systems *can* work, as Sweden is testament to. While Sweden’s Allemansrätt – a right which in essence entitles the populace to move freely across land, as long as they do not cause disturbance or destruction (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm 2015) – puts a

lot of responsibility on individual recreationists, this responsibility is met with good acceptance and has likely helped foster environmentally positive attitudes and pride in these unparalleled rights. In England, however, the situation could be seen to be almost the reverse – the public has never really been handed anything other than strict conditions for their use of wild spaces. They have never really been trusted with the responsibilities Swedes have come to accept so gladly, and are told they are incapable of understanding the intricacies of countryside management (Buxton 1999:114). The political ecology of access thus might even mean that, contrary to landowning arguments that it is access which causes problems, as people are denied the right to interact with the natural surroundings, they also are denied the ability to develop environmentally positive attitudes. Thus facilitating, along with building pride and appreciation for “England’s green and pleasant land”, must be the way forward. The Ramblers and the BMC are well placed to assist in such efforts. After 80 and 71 years, respectively, of fighting for recreational rights and access they possess intricate knowledge of the access system as well as of recreationists’ interests and preferences and can thus be of great help in both guiding recreationists to use the natural environment in appropriate ways and in defusing conflicts between landowners and landless recreationists. Catherine Flitcroft’s thoughts, noted above, about the BMC producing a code of conduct for recreational users of countryside spaces would be a perfect example of this. I also believe that these organisations as well as those pushing for environmental efforts in government and non-governmental environmental organisations could gain by forming alliances.

One argument against that would doubtlessly be made against widening of access is the costs that would be associated with such a huge turnaround in national policy, but while it would be costly, it is likely to be a worthwhile expense, as, in a time when many rural areas are struggling, recreation can provide new economic stimulus (DEFRA 2000:134). As for concerns about the specific costs incurred for local areas, one can point to Bennett and Tranter’s research on the public benefits of countryside access, which concludes that while the provision of paths and access can be a significant expense for local authorities, the benefits tend to far outweigh the cost to the public purse – with their example from Windsor Forest coming in at a rate of 17:1 (Bennett & Tranter 1997:220). Stewart Brady of the Bury Ramblers agreed – noting that “You can argue, well everything is cutting back, but I would say it is a fairly short-sighted policy, cause the health benefits and even the economic benefits, of people who come in to an area and walk around are well worth the fairly modest sums involved”. Charging for access, addressed by Bennett and Tranter as a potential way of dispersing concerns over the costs of access provision, I believe would certainly be the wrong way forward, as putting outdoor recreation out of the easy leisure options for significant parts of society – those with the least financial ability – would be decidedly counterproductive if widespread fostering environmental concern is a genuine aim. The fact that we at present see considerably lower participation in outdoor recreation among the lower socioeconomic groups reinforces this point and makes me believe further access is an essential part of any endeavour to create an egalitarian and environmentally sound society.

Conclusion

A brief look at the history of recreational access to England's countryside reveals how the right to utilise these spaces has ever increasingly been defined by and reserved for a landed minority, while the landless recreating public largely has been excluded. Such stratification of the rural sphere and its effects on local recreationists' perceptions of access were in this thesis investigated through interviews with the Ramblers and the BMC and through a number of surveys with recreationists encountered out on the trails. The interviews and surveys attempted to establish how recreationists' utilise these environments, how they perceive access to them, and the constraints and potential conflicts over access that they encounter. Lastly, interest in and facilitative ways of dealing the effects of these constraints and conflicts were addressed.

Chapter 3 presents the results of my investigations on perceptions of access. The data collected suggests that the majority of local recreationists are from the white ethnic majority and from fairly secure socioeconomic backgrounds. This skewed representation of the general composition of current British society shows how the theories proffered within the political ecological approach – which addresses how social differentiation and differences in power and interests shape perceptions of and relationships with the surrounding natural environments – are highly relevant to the English context. The fact that rural landowners tend to have considerable influence on local politics is postulated as one likely explanation for this apparent recreational stratification, in that they often put forward strong arguments against access, which likely reinforce the feelings of exclusion among less socioeconomically secure members of society.

While the results of the investigation suggest a fairly high level of contentment with the present extent of access, this satisfaction again was analysed through a political ecology perspective, from which it was considered whether or not it might stem from deep-seated ideas – ideas shaped by and permeating the stratified system – of what constitutes 'appropriate' uses of the English countryside. The investigations also suggest that a lack of knowledge about access rights is a key constraint affecting many recreationists, something which again likely stems from the effects of social differentiation, with the long dominance of the landed in rural politics meaning that there is little interest within many authorities in educating their landless constituents about their rights. This lack of confidence-instilling knowledge appears to have significant effects on perceptions of access and on participation in outdoor recreation, with the results of my research suggesting a fairly widespread reluctance to step off the beaten track (i.e. to venture outside of such obviously permissive areas as public rights of way and national parks) and to challenge access limitations. It also seems that the CRoW Act, in spite of its ambitious aims to make access and knowledge thereof common property, has not had the far-reaching effects intended – with my data suggesting that a only a minority of recreationists are aware of it.

Chapter 4 delves deeper into the factors that shape perceptions of access, through a focus on experiences of conflict. The investigation suggests a relatively high frequency of conflict, suggesting that the power of landowners to define 'appropriate' ways of using natural environments, go as far as inspiring them to – sometimes even forcefully – prevent others from accessing said environments. Again, the political ecology of the English countryside seems clear, as uses of spaces and resources are defined by and for a powerful minority that long has been and seemingly wants to remain the almost exclusive recipients of the benefits these resources and spaces offer.

Finally, in chapter 5 some potential strategies for dealing with the consequences of how the political ecology of the English countryside has shaped perceptions of access were considered. My belief is that, in such a stratified society as England still is, facilitative efforts

are going to be essential to instil confidence regarding the right of access for much of the populace. Such efforts, I believe, could go a far way in dealing with the effects of recreational stratification and lack of knowledge, and are, as my research suggests, likely to be met positively – with a significant number of those surveyed showing interest in making use of various facilitative efforts such as map reading courses and guiding.

To conclude, it seems that in spite of the introduction of CRoW, and in spite of continued efforts from organisations like the Ramblers and the BMC in furthering access and access knowledge, power structures, constraints and conflicts still have notable effects on perceptions of access and on recreational patterns. With a growing body of research indicating that the opportunity to experience natural environments and their recreational offerings can serve to inspire environmental awareness and concern, furthering of recreational access becomes a matter of not only social justice but of environmental necessity. Considering how the environmental issues we are facing largely are of a scale removed from everyday life and perception, all ways available to create environmental awareness and affinity need acknowledging. Efforts will thus be necessary to counteract the deep-rooted perceptions of exclusion and the inhibitive effects of constraints and conflicts (or fears thereof) that have long shaped land use in England. A key way to meet these goals is to provide recreational opportunities for all (via widened access) and especially to help novice recreationists to overcome the initial hurdles (via facilitative efforts).

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Appendix A – Interview guide: the Ramblers & the BMC.

- Personal** Name, residence, education & occupation, organisational position?
OR participation: started, how often, motivations, where, environments?
- Local group** What are the main objectives of your group & how do you go about achieving them?
What is the local membership base like (ages, genders & social backgrounds)?
How long has your local group been going?
If relevant:
Did you see any changes in membership when CRoW was introduced?
Where does your local group primarily go walking (local paths, PDNP, further afield)?
What kind of environments is it (access land, land with 'only' ROW paths)?
- Access** How do you perceive the current access circumstances in the area?
If relevant:
Are there any specific issues in the area?
Do they affect local walkers/climbers, and if so, how?
To what extent does the membership bring up access issues?
How do you deal with & prioritise working with ROW vs. Open Access issues?
Being in an urban/rural area, how do access issues differ to rural/urban contexts?
- How do you think access in England compares to other countries?
How does this part of England compare to the rest of England?
In an ideal world, how would you like the access for your activity to be?
- To what extent does your membership seem aware of the CRoW Act & access law?
How do they seem to perceive current access circumstances?
What factors would you say are likely to affect participation in the activity?
- Environment** Do you think having access to the outdoors can influence environmental attitudes?
To what extent you think this is true for your members?
What types of environments would you say seem to have the biggest influence?
What factors cause changes in environmental attitudes (positives or negatives)?
How would you describe your members' attitudes to the environment?
Do they seem concerned about the environmental impact of the activity; how?
If relevant:
Does the organisation do anything to remediate impacts; what?
Is affecting environmental attitudes of importance to your organisation?
Would you say your organisation is (referred to as) an environmental organisation?
- Membership** To what extent is your (local) membership a cross representation of British society?
If relevant:
Does the group encourage underrepresented groups to participate; how?
Can you identify any specific reasons why certain groups aren't represented?

Appendix B – Interview subjects: the Ramblers & the BMC.

Stewart Brady is the Footpaths Officer for the Bury Ramblers, and as such deals with local authorities when access issues arise. He is a long time members of the group, and has a keen walker, with a lifelong involvement in the activity. Before retiring, he was a teacher. The interview took place on the 21st of November 2013.

Dr. Edgar Ernstbrunner is the Vice Chairman and Footpath Coordinator for the Ramblers groups in the Manchester and High Peak areas, and as such has a thorough overview of the local groups. The interview took place on the 27^h of November 2013.

Dr. Catherine Flitcroft is the Access and Conservation Officer for the British Mountaineering Council, managing relations to Government and other organisations with a countryside and/or recreational focus and lobbying for outdoor recreationists rights. The interview took place on the 5th of December 2013.

Stewart Ramsden is the chair for Tameside Ramblers. He has been a walker for close to 50 years, ever since getting “hooked” on the activity in his teens. He walks every week, mainly locally or in the Peak District. He is retired. The interview took place on the 28th of November 2013.

Roy Thorniley resides in Rochdale, where he is the Footpath and Countryside Secretary for the local Ramblers group, Rochdale Ramblers. He has a lifelong interest in the outdoors and is a keen walker. The interview took place on the 6th of December 2013.

“John Smith” is a member of a branch of The Ramblers. As this person wanted to be anonymous, they have been given a pseudonym and their personal details have been omitted. The interview took place in November 2013.

Appendix C – Survey for outdoor recreationists

This survey is done as research for a bachelor thesis on perceptions of access. Your participation is greatly appreciated & your answers are anonymous.

Q1. Gender?

Q2. Which year were you born?

Q3. Where are you from?

Q4. At present, do you live in...
An urban area A rural area

Q5. When you grew up, was it mainly in...
An urban area A rural area

Participation in outdoor recreation

Q6. Which of the following countryside activities do you participate in & how often?

	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Never
Walking / Hiking				
Climbing / Bouldering				
Fell running				
Mountain biking				
Hunting				
Horse riding				
Off-roading				
Camping (on established sites)				
Wild camping				

Q6b. Main activity?

Q7. Would you like to spend more time on this activity?

Q8. If yes, what stops you from doing so?

Q9. How long have you been doing this activity?

Q10. Why do you do this activity?

	Not at all important					Very important				
Exercise	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Physical challenge	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Relaxation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Peace & quiet	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
See nature	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
See wildlife	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
See local heritage	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Spending time alone	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Spending time with friends/family	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
To meet new people	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Q11. Where do you go to pursue these activities?

Q12. How did you get here today?

Q13. Do you prefer... Venturing into remote areas

Both Staying near populated areas

Q14. Do you prefer... Rights of way (est. paths)

Both Pathless access land

Q15. What do you use to navigate?

Access

Q16-21. Knowledge of access legislation.

In general, do you know where you're legally allowed access in the countryside?	Yes	No
Do you know what is meant by 'right of way'?	Yes	No
Do you know what is meant by 'access land'?	Yes	No
Do you know how to find out where rights of way are located?	Yes	No
Do you know how to find out where access land is located?	Yes	No
Do you know what the Countryside and Rights of Way Act is?	Yes	No
If yes, did its introduction affect your recreational patterns?		

Q22-33. Perceptions & Experiences.

To what extent do you feel...	Very much so			Not at all	
certain about where you can go in the countryside?	5	4	3	2	1
welcome in the countryside?	5	4	3	2	1
that the current amount of accessible land is adequate?	5	4	3	2	1
that there is enough easily available info re: access	5	4	3	2	1

Would you say you know...

how to read a map?	True	False
how to use a compass?	True	False

Have you ever...

been told to leave land (which you believe to be legally accessible)?	True	False
experienced threatening behaviour from someone wanting to deny access?	True	False
come across off-putting signage?	True	False
struggled to find your way because of a lack of signage? (incl. missing waymarks)	True	False
come across a lack of maintenance on rights of way (f.ex. brambles)?	True	False
come across intentional obstructions on rights of way (f.ex. barbed wire)?	True	False

Q34. How frequently do you tend to encounter obstructions such as the ones above?

Q35. Have you ever needed to change route/abandon your activity due to obstructions?

Q36. Do you tend to notify anyone of obstructions you've encountered? If so, who?

Q37. Are you a member of any outdoor organisations?

Q38. Who do you mainly do your activity with?

Facilitation

Q39. Have you ever done an outdoor skills course, hired a Guide, etc.?

Q40. Would you like to/do you think you'd find it beneficial?

Environment

Q41. How concerned would you say you are about environmental issues?

Q42. Do you think doing this activity has affected your attitude to the environment?

Demography

Q43. What is your occupation?

Q44. What is your educational background?