



Scottish Natural Heritage  
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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# Scotland's People and Nature Survey

## Participation in outdoor recreation



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# SCOTLAND'S PEOPLE AND NATURE SURVEY - PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR RECREATION



## 1. Background

This summary report on participation in outdoor recreation is one of a series describing how people in Scotland use, value and enjoy the natural environment. It uses data from Scotland's People and Nature Survey (SPANS), conducted in 2013/14 and 2017/18, and historical data from the Scottish Recreation Survey (ScRS), conducted annually between 2003 and 2012.

The research methodology used for SPANS is identical to that used for the ScRS meaning that data from both surveys are directly comparable. As the survey findings are based on interviews conducted with a representative sample of adults living in Scotland, all estimates are subject to a margin of sampling error<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Definitions

In SPANS and the ScRS the term '**outdoors**' includes mountains, moorland, farmland, forests, woods, rivers, lochs and reservoirs, beaches and the coast and open spaces in towns and cities. '**Visits to the outdoors**' refers to leisure trips taken from home or while away from home on holiday, provided the holiday was in Scotland. '**Outdoor recreation**' is defined as any non-motorised activity carried out for leisure purposes. It can include informal everyday activities (e.g. walking the dog, family outings) as well as a range of other types of activities such as cycling, hill walking or watersports.

## 3. Why are outdoor visits important?

Enjoyment of the outdoors, including greenspaces in towns and cities, the countryside around urban areas and more remote and wild areas of land and water, can provide many social, environmental and economic benefits. These include better health and well-being, an improved quality of life, greater empathy with the natural world, wider use of sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling, and economic benefits derived from expenditure incurred by outdoor visitors. Increasing the proportion of adults visiting the outdoors at least once a week and ensuring that the benefits are shared by everyone in Scotland is a key target of the Scottish Government which measures progress via its [National Performance Framework](#).

## 4. How frequently do people in Scotland visit the outdoors for recreation?

Most people in Scotland visit the outdoors for leisure and recreation with just over half visiting on a regular weekly basis.

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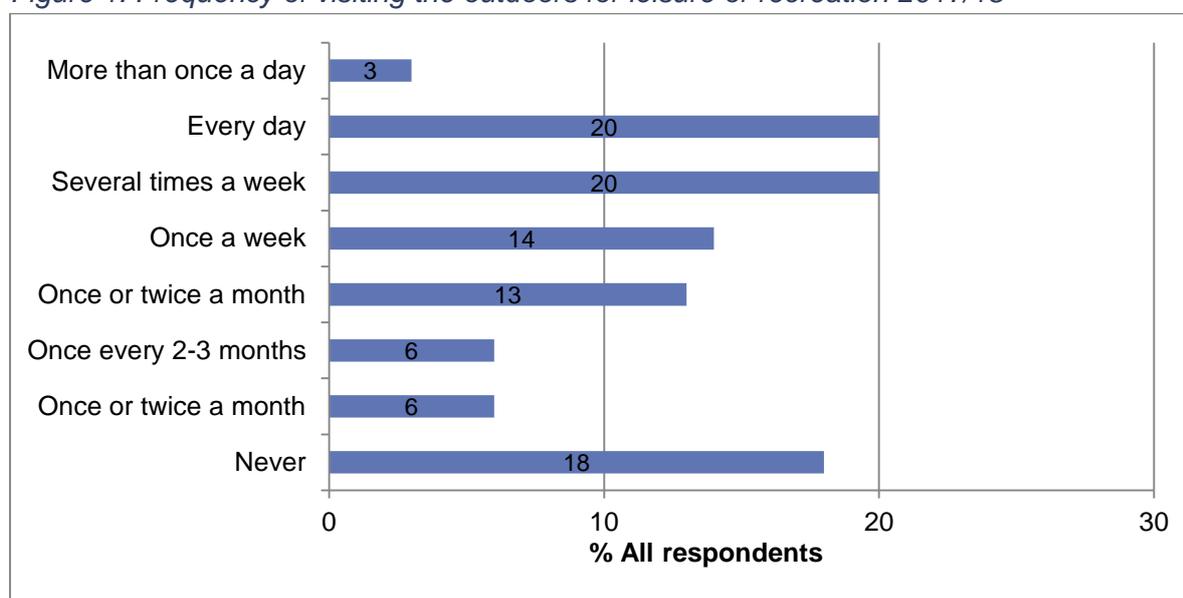
<sup>1</sup> See SPANS Technical Report <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/increasing-participation/measuring-participation>

Between May 2017 and April 2018, 82% of adults in Scotland visited the outdoors, taking an estimated 546 million outdoor visits.

More than half of all adults visited the outdoors at least once a week during this period (57%), including 23% who visited every day. A quarter of adults visited less frequently than once a week (25%) and almost a fifth didn't visit the outdoors at all (18%).

The proportion of adults visiting the outdoors in 2017/18 (82%) is the same as the proportion reported in the 2013/14 survey; the proportion of adults visiting the outdoors on a **regular weekly basis** has, however, increased significantly since 2013/14 (up from 50% to 57% in 2017/18) as has the total number of visits taken (up from 396 million to 546 million in 2017/18).

Figure 1: Frequency of visiting the outdoors for leisure or recreation 2017/18



Base: 12,502 respondents

Source: SPANS 2017/18, Question REC1

## 5. What are the main barriers to visiting the outdoors?

In 2013/14<sup>2</sup> 'lack of time' (mentioned by 36% respondents) and 'poor health' (mentioned by 23%) were the main reasons given by respondents who rarely or never participated in outdoor recreation. Those more likely to mention 'lack of time' included younger people (aged under 55), people working full-time and those with children in their household. Those more likely to mention 'poor health' included older people (aged 55 and over), people in the DE social grade<sup>3</sup> and those who are retired or not working.

There has been relatively little variation over the last ten years or so in the proportions of respondents mentioning each of the barriers shown in Table 1, below.

<sup>2</sup> This question was not included in SPANS in 2018/19

<sup>3</sup> Social grade is a household classification system based on the occupation of the Chief Income Earner in the household: AB - higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional; C1 - supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional; C2 - skilled manual workers; DE - semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, casual and lowest grade workers, state pensioners and others who depend on the state for their income.

*Table 1: Main reasons for never or rarely visiting the outdoors for recreation 2013/14*

	<b>All adults who never or rarely visit the outdoors for recreation</b>	<i>Adults who never visit</i>	<i>Adults who rarely visit</i>
<i>Reason given</i>	%	%	%
<b>Lack of time</b>	36	31	42
<b>Poor health</b>	23	33	12
<b>Poor weather</b>	14	9	20
<b>No particular reason</b>	11	12	10
<b>Old age</b>	8	12	3
<b>Not interested</b>	5	7	2
<b>Can't afford it</b>	4	2	6

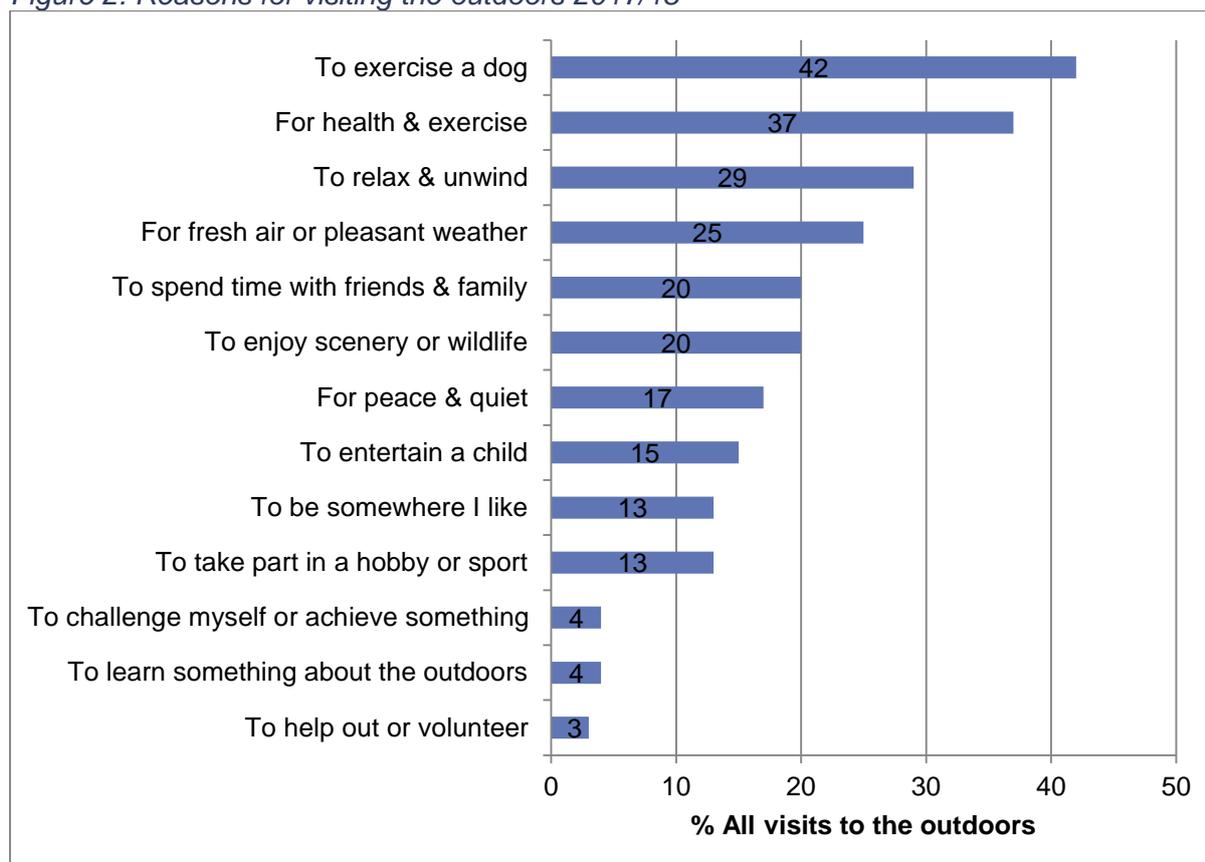
Base: 833 respondents                      481 respondents                      352 respondents

Source: SPANS 2013/14, Question REC2

## 6. What motivates people to visit the outdoors?

People in Scotland visit the outdoors for a variety of reasons but ‘every day’ reasons like ‘dog walking’ (42% of outdoor visits) and ‘health and exercise’ (37% of outdoor visits) are mentioned most frequently. These findings are very similar to those reported in the 2013/14 survey.

*Figure 2: Reasons for visiting the outdoors 2017/18*



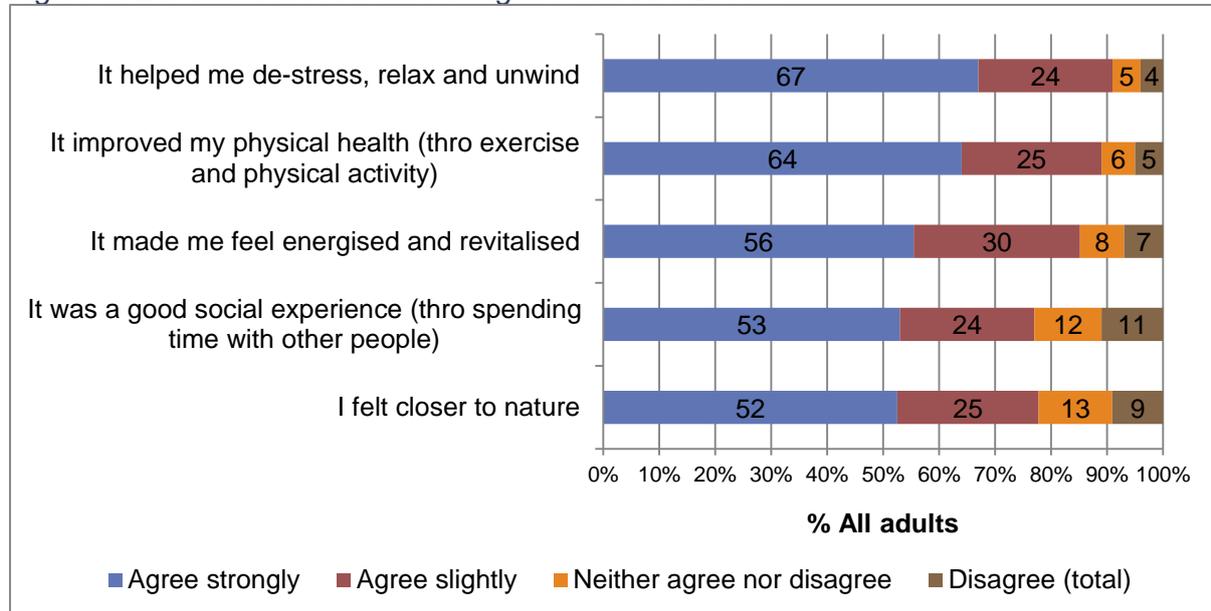
Base: 1,335 respondents

Source: SPANS 2017/18 Question BEN1

## 7. What benefits do people feel they get from their outdoor visits?

As in the 2013/14 survey, most people agree, when prompted, that they benefit from their outdoor visits, with around 9 in 10 visitors reporting improvements to their mental and physical health and an increase in their energy levels.

Figure 3: Benefits derived from visiting the outdoors 2017/18



Base: 1,335 respondents

Source: SPANS 2017/18 Question BEN2

## 8. Are some population groups more likely to visit the outdoors than others?

People's propensity to visit the outdoors is influenced by a variety of demographic and other factors, with age, social grade, where you live, employment status, health and ethnicity all playing a role. Younger and more affluent adults along with people living in rural areas<sup>4</sup> are more likely than average to visit the outdoors on a regular basis; those with a long-term illness or disability and those who describe their general health as 'bad' are less likely than average to do so; and people from minority ethnic groups are less likely than those of white ethnicity to be regular outdoor visitors.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/Methodology/UrbanRuralClassification>

Table 2: Visiting the outdoors by population group 2017/18

Population group	Visit the outdoors at all % all respondents	Visit the outdoors at least once a week % all respondents
<b>All adults</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Age</b>		
34 or under	90	60
35 - 54	85	61
55 or over	73	52
<b>Social grade</b>		
AB	92	67
C1	87	62
C2	82	58
DE	68	44
<b>Residency – Urban/rural</b>		
Urban	81	56
Rural	87	66
<b>Residency - SIMD<sup>5</sup></b>		
15% most deprived areas	73	44
Other areas	84	60
<b>Employment status</b>		
In paid employment	90	63
Not in paid employment	74	52
<b>Have long-term illness or disability</b>		
Yes	63	40
No	88	62
<b>Self-reported general health</b>		
Good	88	62
Fair	73	46
Bad	47	27
<b>Ethnic origin</b>		
White	82	58
BME <sup>6</sup>	84	47

Source: SPANS 2017/18 Questions CLASSIF1, CLASSIF2 and CLASSIF3

## 9. Where do people go on their outdoor visits?

We know from the Scottish Recreation Survey that 95% of the outdoor visits taken by adults in Scotland start directly from home with the remainder taken while away from home, for example, while on holiday elsewhere in Scotland.

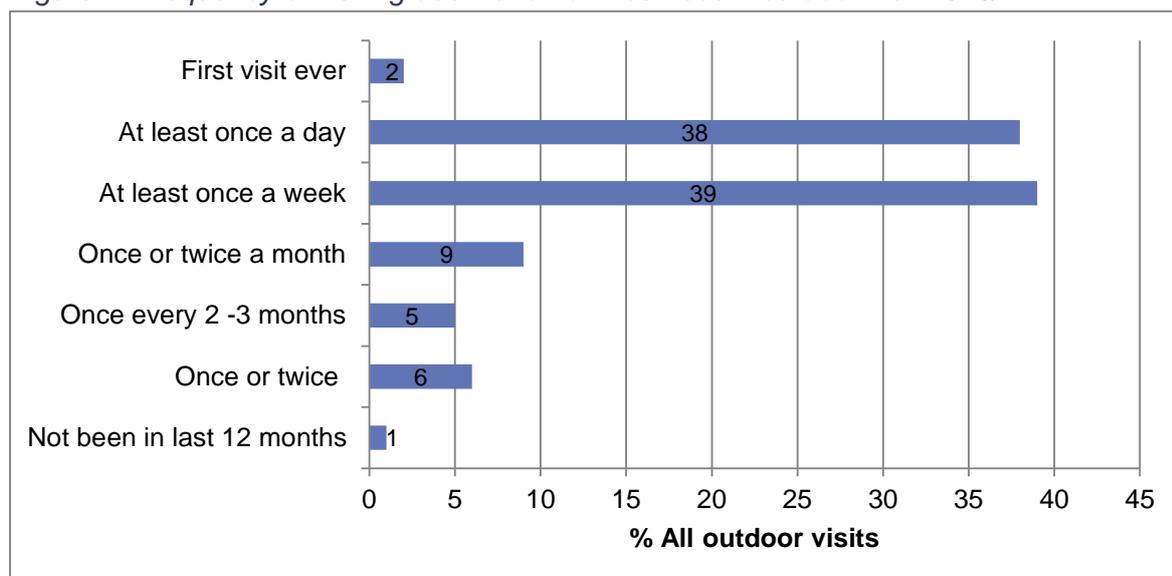
In 2013/14<sup>7</sup> SPANS estimated that almost all visits to the outdoors were ‘repeat visits’ to familiar places (98%). As many as three quarters were taken to places which are visited at least once a week (77%), perhaps underlining the ‘every day’ nature of many outdoor visits.

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation <http://simd.scotland.gov.uk/publication-2012/introduction-to-simd-2012/overview-of-the-simd/what-is-the-simd/>

<sup>6</sup> Black and minority ethnicity

<sup>7</sup> This question was not included in SPANS in 2017/18

Figure 4: Frequency of visiting destination of most recent outdoor visit 2013/14



Base: 2,294 respondents

Source: SPANS 2013/14 Question REC13

In terms of the type of **environment** visited, trips to the countryside account for around half of all visits to the outdoors (49%); trips made to or within urban areas account for 40% of visits; and trips to the seaside account for the remaining 11% of visits.

Over the last ten years or so the proportion of visits being made to countryside locations has declined slightly (down from 56% of all visits in 2004 to 49% in 2017/18) while the proportion of visits made in urban areas has increased (up from 30% in 2004 to 40% in 2017/18).

Table 3: Location of visits to the outdoors 2017/18

Location	No. visits	% visits
Town/city	216 million	40
Countryside	269 million	49
Seaside	61 million	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>546 million</b>	<b>100</b>

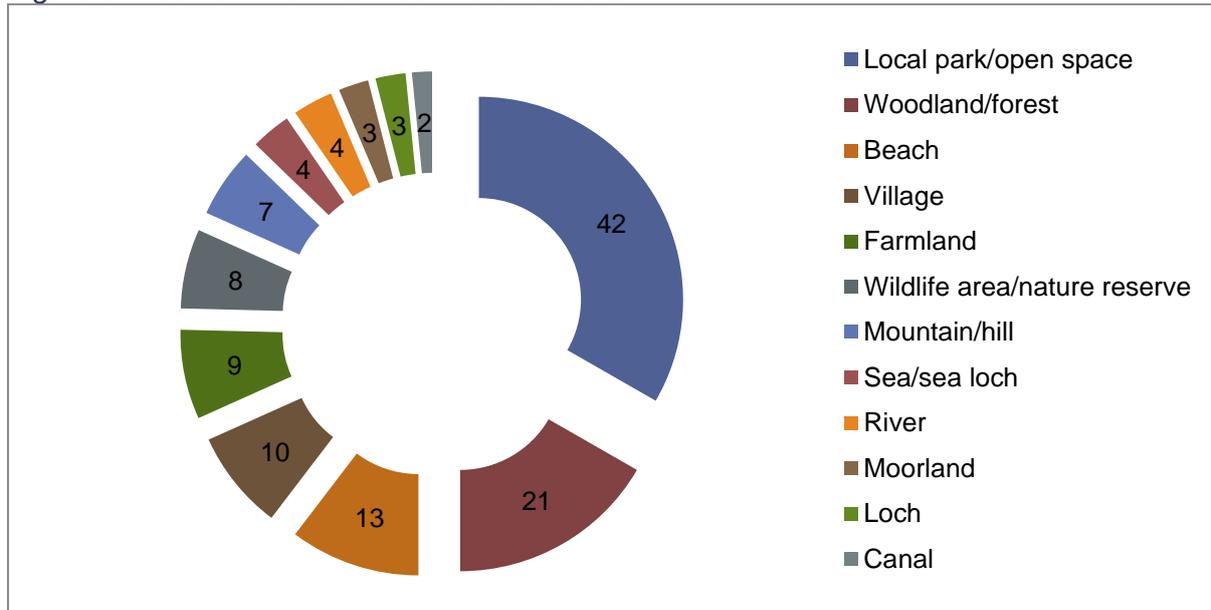
Base: 4,113 respondents

Source: SPANS 2017/18 Question REC5

In terms of the specific **destinations** visited, local parks and other open spaces remain most popular, accounting for 42% of all outdoor visits. Parks are a particularly important resource for people living in Scotland's more deprived areas (accounting for 62% of outdoor visits taken by people living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland), as well as for people in the BME population (61% of outdoor visits) and people living in urban areas (52% of outdoor visits). After parks, woodlands and forests (21% of all visits) and beaches (13% of all visits) are most popular.

While there has been some year-on-year fluctuation, the relative popularity of each of the destination types shown in Figure 5 has remained fairly stable over time.

Figure 5: Destinations of outdoor visits 2017/18



Base: 4,113 respondents

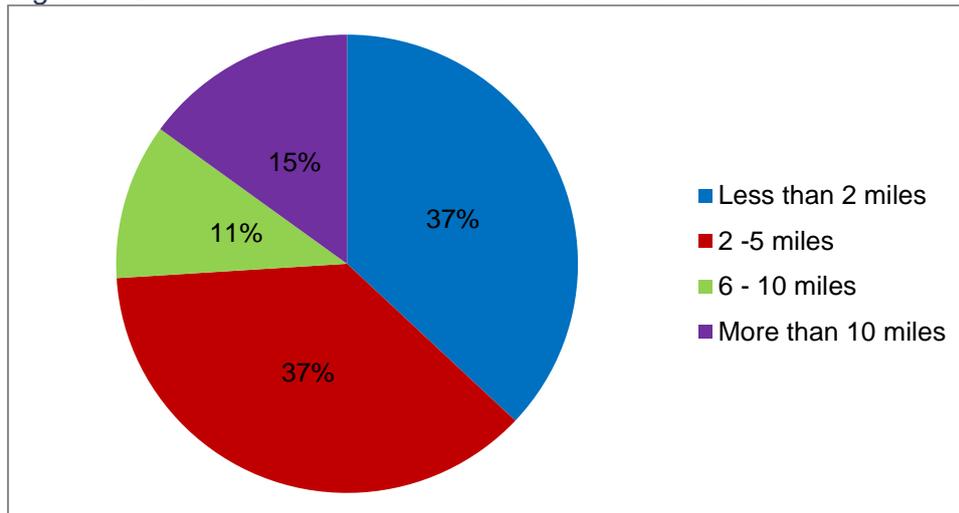
Source: SPANS 2017/18 Question REC6

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 as some visits involved more than one type of destination

### 10. Outdoor visits – distance travelled, duration of visits and transport used

Most outdoor visits are relatively short, both in terms of their duration and the distance people travel to and from the destination. Eighty five per cent of visits involve a travel distance to and from the destination of ten miles or less, with more than a third of visits taken within 2 miles of home (37%). In 2017/18 the average distance travelled to and from the destination on visits to the outdoors was 8.4 miles.

Figure 6: Distance travelled to and from destination on visits to the outdoors 2017/18

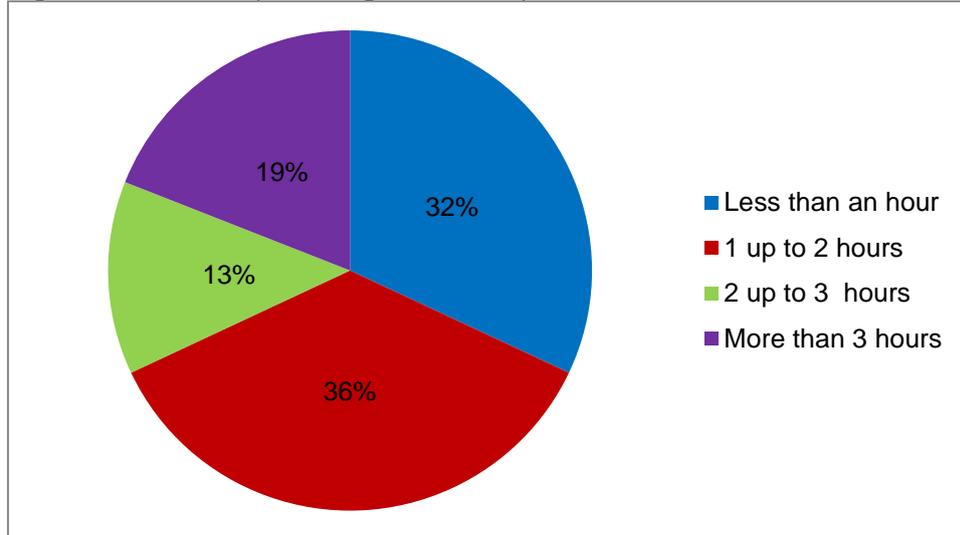


Base: 2,713 respondents

Source: SPANS 2017/18 Question REC10

Most outdoor visits last for three hours or less, including any travelling time (81%), with around a third lasting for less than an hour (32%). In 2017/18, the average duration (including travelling time) of visits to the outdoors was just over 2 hours.

Figure 7: Duration (including travel time) of visits to the outdoors 2017/18

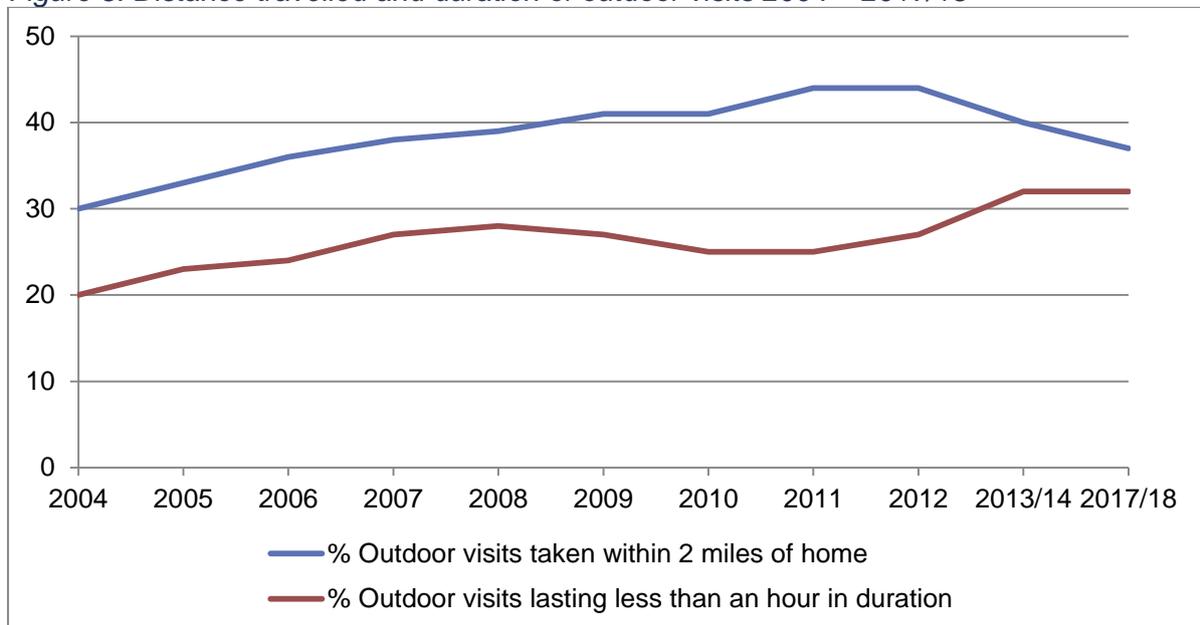


Base: 2,713 respondents

Source: SPANS 2017/18 Q REC11

The last ten years or so has seen an increase in the proportion of shorter duration visits and visits taken close to home, suggesting that more people are finding opportunities to enjoy the nature on their doorstep. The proportion of visits taken within 2 miles of home increased from 30% in 2004 to 37% in 2017/18, with the average distance travelled on outdoor visits falling from 16 miles to just over 8 miles over the same period. At the same time, the proportion of visits lasting for less than an hour in duration increased from 20% to 32%.

Figure 8: Distance travelled and duration of outdoor visits 2004 – 2017/18

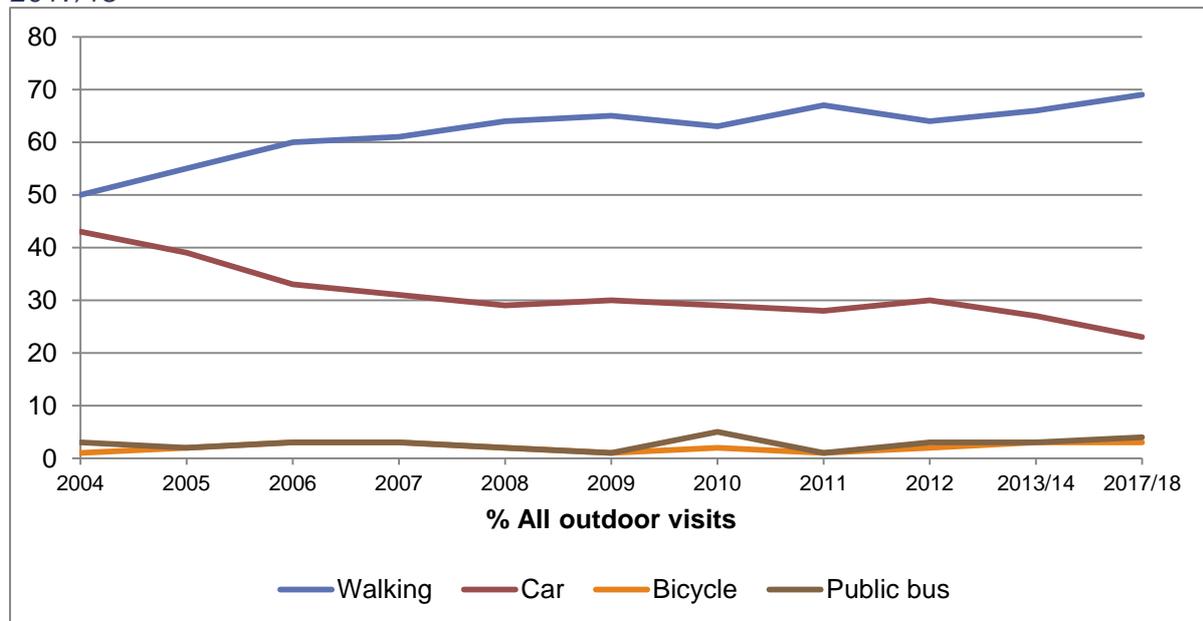


Source: ScRS 2004 - 2012, Question 13 and 14; SPANS 2013/14 and 2017/18, Questions REC10 and REC11

Walking is the main mode of transport used to reach the destination on most visits to the outdoors (69% of the total). In comparison, cars are used on 23% of visits and public buses and bikes are used on 3% and 4% of visits, respectively.

The increase in the proportion of shorter duration visits being taken closer to home is reflected in an increase in the proportion of visits being made entirely on foot and a corresponding decrease in the proportion involving the use of a car. Between 2004 and 2017/18, the proportion of outdoor visits where walking was the main method of transport used increased from 50% to 69% while the proportion involving travel by car decreased from 43% to 23%.

Figure 9: Main means of transport used to reach the destination of outdoor visits 2004 - 2017/18



Source: ScRS 2004 - 2012, Question 21; SPANS 2013/14 and 2017/18, Questions REC10 and REC11

## 11. The use of paths on outdoor visits

In 2013/14<sup>8</sup> SPANS estimated that around three quarters of outdoor visits involved the use of a path or path network (76%) and more than half involved the use of paths with signposting or waymarking (58%). The proportions of visits involving the use of paths, and specifically signposted or waymarked paths, was significantly higher in 2013/14 than in the early years of the Scottish Recreation Survey (e.g. 66% and 49% respectively in 2004).

## 12. Who do people visit the outdoors with?

In 2013/14<sup>9</sup> SPANS estimated that almost half of visits to the outdoors were taken alone (48%), with the next greatest proportion taken in the company of family members (39%).

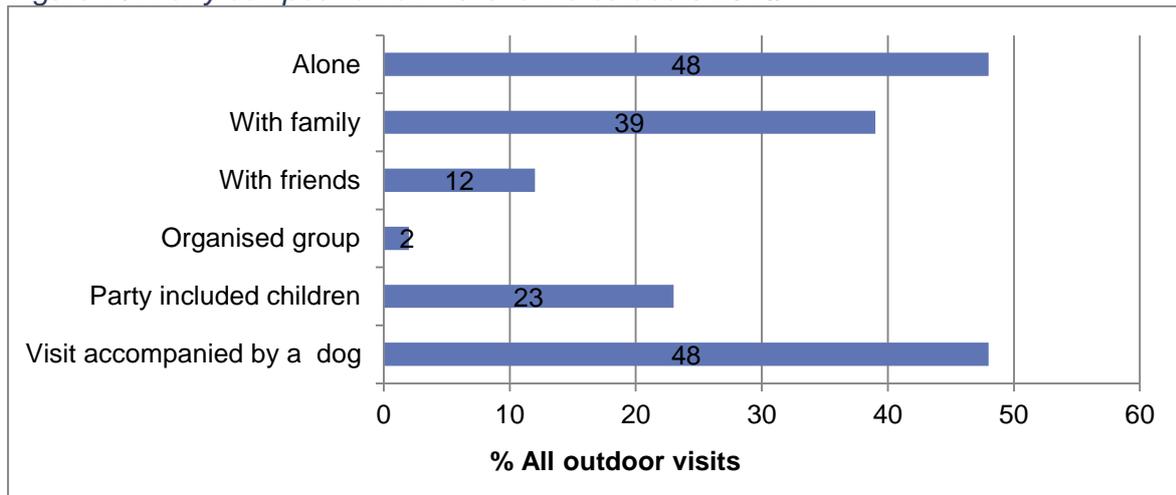
The proportion of visits taken alone has increased over the last 10 years or so (up from 41% in 2004) and this may be linked to the increase (highlighted previously) in the proportion of shorter duration visits being taken close to home. The average party size on visits to the outdoors in 2013/14 was 2.6 people.

Children were included in the party on 23% of all visits to the outdoors in 2013/14 and on 44% of visits which weren't taken alone. The proportion of visits accompanied by a dog has increased over the last 10 years or so, up from 41% in 2004 to 48% in 2013/14.

<sup>8</sup> This question was not included in SPANS in 2017/18

<sup>9</sup> Questions on party composition were not included in SPANS in 2017/18

Figure 10: Party composition on visits to the outdoors 2013/14

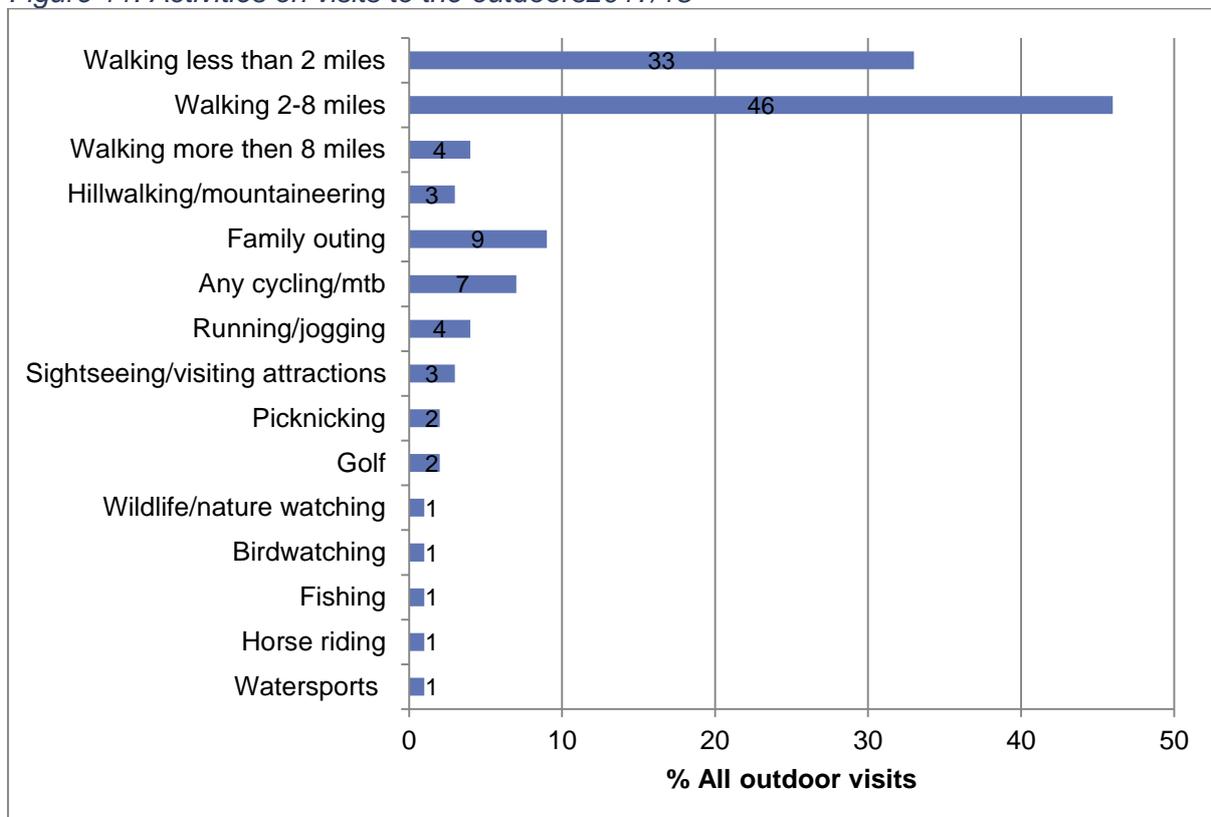


Base: 2,294 respondents  
 Source: SPANS 2013/14 Question REC14

### 13. What do people do on outdoor visits?

Most visits to the outdoors involve a walk (84%), typically a short walk of up to 2 miles (33% of visits) or a walk of between 2 and 8 miles (46% of visits). Nine per cent of visits are described as family outings and 7% include cycling or mountain biking.

Figure 11: Activities on visits to the outdoors 2017/18



Base: 4,113 respondents  
 Source: SPANS 2017/18 Question REC4  
 Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 as some visits involved more than one type of activity

#### 14. What proportion of outdoor visitors experience access problems or witness irresponsible behaviour?

When prompted, a minority of visitors say they have experienced access problems or witnessed irresponsible behaviour on their outdoor visits (31%). Litter, vandalism or graffiti are mentioned most frequently (encountered on 18% of visits).

*Table 4: Problems encountered/experienced on most recent outdoor visit 2017/18*

	% outdoor visits on which problem encountered
Any problem experienced	31
No problem experienced	69
<i>Type of problem experienced</i>	
Litter, vandalism, graffiti	18
Well used or promoted path in poorer condition than expected (e.g. wet, muddy, overgrown)	4
Well used or promoted path was difficult to use (e.g. uneven surface or gradient that caused me problems)	4
Other people behaving inconsiderately or irresponsibly (e.g. cyclists failing to consider the needs of walkers)	4
A dog annoying me or my party	3
Well used or promoted path had insufficient resting/sitting places for my needs	2
A sign that made me feel unwelcome or /unsure about what route to take (e.g. 'Private', 'No entry', 'Keep out').	2
A man-made obstruction intended to prevent me from taking my planned route (e.g. locked gate on a well-used path or track, barbed wire across a stile)	2
A gate or stile which I had difficulty opening or crossing	2
I experienced another type of problem	4

Base: 1,337

Source: SPANS 2017/18 Question REC18

Further information about SPANS and other surveys commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage is available on the [SNH website](#).

