

Participation Statistics

This sheet combines several sources of information to answer some of the more common statistical questions. Please note that the BMC does not guarantee the accuracy of this data and that it is intended only for student, not commercial research. The second section provides an update on government and market research.

Information sources

The primary sources referred to in this sheet are noted below. These provide the most current results of interest and are compared to previous studies. See reference list for further details. Some statistics (eg. BMC membership figures) have been updated correct to 2003 (these are indicated in the text), but no more research has been conducted since this document was originally produced. The BMC is planning to re-survey it's membership in the winter of 2003/2004.

- *BMC membership questionnaire*

In October 1996 the BMC sent out a questionnaire to all its individual members (10,000) at that time and achieved a 22% response rate with 2190 questionnaires completed and returned.

- *"Who are the Climbers?" by Dan Morgan.*

Results of a survey from between July 91 and Jan 92, published in March 96. A questionnaire was answered by 901 climbers.

- *"Evaluation of Some Possible Impacts Resulting from Four Commercial Climbing Walls on Outdoor Rock Climbing in the Peak District" by Adge Last.*

This study surveyed 1205 climbers at four climbing walls (Foundry, Nottingham, Rope Race, The Edge) between February and March 95.

How many climbers are there in the UK?

To date there has been no systematic attempt to measure the climbing population. Mintel (1993) suggested that climbing was the fastest growing sport in England and Wales with 700,000 participants in 1993, an increase of 40% since 1989. However, the general feeling is that this figure is greatly inflated. As a comparison this Mintel survey also found that 4.3 million participated in rambling and hiking (2.6m men: 1.8m women), and this figure is thought to be too low.

From BMC membership and climbing wall attendance statistics, a more reasonable figure of 150,000 active climbers in the UK can be attained. One of the difficulties of conducting such research is the definition of a "climber". The Adventure Activity Licensing Regulations, Health and safety Commission 1996 state that climbing is;

"Movement over difficult terrain which requires the use of hands as well as feet and where safety requires either the use of equipment or the skills and techniques of a rock climber"

Another difficulty is assessing whether a given climber is "active" or if their participation in the sport is lapsed, or was simply a one off.

There are still more problems with arriving at an exact figure. Climbing is an informal sport, with participants under no obligation to register, inform, or otherwise give any indication of their interest in the activity. The clubs network is a useful method of establishing numbers of local climbers, but many climbers are members of more than one club, and over 20% of climbers are not involved with any club (Dan Morgan).

Despite this, the increase in popularity of the sport, and indeed outdoor activity as a whole is obvious by various secondary observations;

- Increase in number of retail outlets
- Pressure for parking spaces at climbing venues
- BMC membership figures (year-on-year increases in BMC membership)
- Increased media coverage
- Increased fashion interest in outdoor clothing

Who are the climbers?

“White males aged around 30 who have been climbing for more than 10 years and lead competently up to VS were introduced to climbing by friends or parents and climb at weekends and holidays. As well as visiting the climbing wall occasionally in 1990, their average household income was over 18k reflected their occupation as a professional manager” - Dan Morgan.

This observation from 1992 may already be dated, as shown by the following results;

Gender ratios

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Adge Last</i>	<i>Dan Morgan</i>	<i>Scottish Sports Council</i>	<i>BMC members survey</i>
%Female	27	20	21	12

Age range

<i>Age band</i>	<i>Adge Last (%)</i>	<i>Scottish SC (%)</i>	<i>Dan Morgan (%)</i>
under 11	2	-	-
11-15	8	3	-
16-19	6	35	11 (under 20)
20-29	43	45	38
30-39	24	12	30
40-49	12	4	15
50+	5	0	6

Further BMC membership statistics:

<i>Age Range</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>
18 and under	1	73	27
19-30	37	84	16
31-45	44	89	11
46-55	12	91	9

56-65	4	96	4
over 65	.7	93	7

Participation in mountain activities (%)

Summer Mountain Walking	97
Winter Mountain Walking	92
Rock Climbing	90
Indoor Climbing	74
Alpine climbing/expeds	58
Winter Climbing	56
Ski Mountaineering	21

82% rock climb at HVS and below. 66% participate in winter mountaineering up to grade III.

Magazines read by BMC members (%)

Summit	88
High	77
Climber	42
OTE	28
Trail	20
TGO	18

BMC Membership 2003

The BMC has over 350 affiliated clubs, accounting for over 28500 members. In 2002, for the first time, the number of individual members exceeded the number of club members, and currently stands at over 33000, making a total BMC membership of over 61500.

Climbing Walls

Walls are an increasingly important part of climbing in the UK, this is wholly unsurprising when you consider the typical UK weather. 82% of climbers now use walls, 45% on a weekly basis during the winter months

There has been a substantial growth in walls:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of BMC listed walls in UK</i>
1988	40
1995	122
1996	169
<i>2003</i>	<i>254</i>

The first climbing wall built by climbers, not architects, was, (and still is) at Leeds University PE dept. in the 1960s, training on this wall gave rise to higher standards in the Yorkshire area.

The busiest wall in 1986 was Brunel University with 12,000 user visits that year. In December 1991 the first of the new breed of modern walls, the Foundry opened in Sheffield and changed everything. Many walls now enjoy 30,000

user visits/year, and the Foundry has reported figures of 60,000. However, these days big walls are no longer unusual, and user visits have declined accordingly. Nobody now drives from Oxford or Newcastle to visit a Sheffield wall.

The sustained use of walls gives some further information, including the fact that 15% of wall users have never climbed at a crag, although this figure varies between walls. 32% climb more at crags than walls, and 53% more at walls than crags. However these last figures relate to total hours climbing, and most climbers will accumulate many hours indoors each winter.

Preferred style of climbing

<i>Preferred Style</i>	<i>Walls (%)</i>	<i>Crags (%)</i>
Top roping	36	29
Leading	30	43
Bouldering	17	5
Soloing	0	3
Other	1	-
No preference	10	14
Seconding	6	12

Where first climbs took place

<i>Location</i>	<i>%</i>
indoors	22
Other (caving etc.)	2
outdoor crag	76

When introduced to climbing

<i>When (ref. to 1996)</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than 1 year	20
1-3 years	20
More than 3 years	60

Accidents and Risks

It is beyond the scope of this sheet to discuss accident and risk statistics in detail, but a selection is presented below:

RoSPA suggest that the risk of death from rock climbing while on rock face in the UK is 4000 per 100 million hours:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of deaths</i>
1986	11

1987	11
1988	13
1989	14
1990	8
1991	12
2001	

The Scottish Sports Council suggests that in England and Wales, Injury rates per 1000 participation days involving adults over 15 are;

- Alpine Skiing - 2.6
- Mountaineering and climbing - 56.2

Also, note that 21% of casualties are students - you have been warned!

Mountain Rescue

For anyone requiring information and statistics on Mountain Rescue, the Mountain and Cave Rescue Handbook, (see references) is essential reading. For general interest, the two busiest civilian rescue teams in the UK are Lochaber and Glencoe, and some figures for the whole of Scotland are presented below (note that these figures are for ALL mountain incidents, not just those resulting from rock climbing):

<i>Year</i>	<i>Casualties</i>	<i>Fatalities</i>	<i>Total Incidents</i>	<i>Participation</i>
1964	45	13	45	185,000
1965	49	14	58	
1966	51	15	51	
1967	59	11	85	
1968	48	6	59	
1969	47	11	77	
1970	70	22	80	290,000
1971	35	20	60	
1972	66	18	66	
1973	68	9	68	
1974	41	9	60	
1975	61	10	85	
1976	74	16	89	
1977	78	14	104	
1978	97	17	120	
1979	81	16	111	
1980	92	21	109	673,500
1981	93	21	108	
1982	113	25	117	
1983	124	28	150	
1984	104	22	157	
1985	105	18	158	
1986	153	28	210	
1987	149	27	237	
1988	165	25	219	
1989	157	28	202	
1990	167	31	252	1.1m
<i>2001</i>	<i>238</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>335</i>	<i>7.06m</i>

References

"Mountain safety in the UK" - Seminar Report, 1994, The Scottish Sports Council.

"The Scottish Mountain Rescue Study 1964-1993", 1994, A report for the Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland, by C.M.Anderson. ISBN 185060 2700

"Mountain Rescue Incidents - 1996 Analysis" - Northern Constabulary, Lochaber Command Area.

"A Report examining the requirements of climbers with regards to the design of climbing walls" - University of Sheffield Leisure Management Unit, MA course in Sport and Recreation, 1997.

"Rock Climbing Survey Part 1 - Who are the climbers?" 1996, Dan Morgan.

"Accidents at climbing walls" - David Limb, for a paper to the British Orthopaedic Association. 63 climbing walls were questioned on participation and accidents. A comprehensive summary of the paper is available from the BMC.

Mountain and Cave Rescue Handbook published by The MRC of England and Wales. Priced £4.50 available from the MRC or the BMC.

Contacts

Ian Hurst - Information Officer
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8 Brookside Grove
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Tel: 01298 23349

Adventure Activities
Licensing Authority (AALA)
17 Lambourne Crescent
Cardiff Business Park
Llanishen, Cardiff CF14 5GF
Tel: 029 2075 5715
www.aala.org

Royal Society for the Prevention
of Accidents (ROSPA)
Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road
Edgbaston, Birmingham B5 7ST
Tel: 0121 248 2000
www.rosipa.com

Mintel International Group
18-19 Long Lane
London EC1A 9PL
Tel: 020 7606 4533
www.mintel.com

Go-Outdoors (The Outdoor
Industries Association)
Morritt House, 58 Station Approach
South Ruislip, Ruislip HA4 6SA
Tel: 020 8842 1111

Notes:

Members may acquire copies of relevant studies from the BMC, subject to a small charge for copying please contact for details.

If you are the author of a study that could be of interest, copies are always gratefully received.

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Participation Statistics update 2000

Market research results

Analysis agrees that climbing/walking/mountaineering based sports differ from most other UK activities, i.e. they are participation not spectator sports.

The following figures are drawn from analysis of government sports participation statistics and from research into the outdoor sports market.

General participation

Agreement exists that a substantial percentage of the population goes walking. However it is thought that only a fairly small percentage of this overall figure are serious hillwalkers, fewer still can be cited as climbers or mountaineers.

In 1993 Mintel estimated a figure of 700 000 were climbing in the UK, an increase of 40% since 1989. However, the general feeling is that this figure was greatly inflated. As a comparison the 1993 Mintel survey also found that 4.3 million participated in rambling and hiking (2.6m men: 1.8m women), and this figure was thought to be too low. From BMC membership and climbing wall attendance statistics at the time, a more reasonable figure of 150 000 active climbers in the UK could be estimated.

More recent government research would suggest participation is increasing. A 1996/97 general household survey estimated that 2.5% of the population had been climbing/mountaineering (inc. climbing walls) in the previous 12 months. If the population is estimated at 60 million this gives a figure of 1.5 million. This figure will probably reflect everyone who has participated casually and would not reflect numbers of regular climbers/mountaineers. The general survey also assessed those participating 4 weeks prior to interview and found a figure of 0.7% of the population were climbing. 0.7% of 60 million would mean 420 000 active climbers and a more realistic figure. The general household survey is based upon a survey of approximately 16 000 people aged 16 years and over. Data is collected nationally from random selected postcodes, this may ignore the fact that pockets of climbers can be concentrated in specific areas, thus the final figure could be estimated slightly higher than the above.

The survey defined walking as being over 2 miles and for pleasure. The results indicate that 44.5% of the population went walking 4 weeks prior to the interview. In terms of hill walking and relevance to outdoor participation these figures are not representative. More reliable data for walking/hiking is provided by a Mintel report from 1996, which estimated that 10 million people went for occasional long walks and 5 million were regular hikers

<i>1996 Outdoor market (adults)</i>	<i>million</i>	<i>%</i>
Occasional long walks	10.0	22

Regular long walks	5.0	11
Organised hikers, some climbing	3.0	7
Mountaineering/climbing	0.5	1

Source: Mintel leisure intelligence, Sporting activities in the great outdoors, August 1996.

On the face of it these figures tend to indicate a slight decrease in the numbers of participants who are frequently involved in the activities of their choice. In 1993 700 000 were reported as climbing, in 1996 this figure is placed at 500 000. Obviously these figure must be viewed with caution, given the fact that there has been a steady growth in BMC membership, increased media coverage, improved and more widespread transport/access and more spending power it is safe to assume an increase in participation throughout this period. The Mintel figures may represent a more reliable series of data compared to the 1993 survey. Therefore whilst participation, according to Mintel appears to have declined, all other indications are that it has rose. The data is probably therefore a more reliable, accurate portrayal and would explain the lower figure.

Social status, gender, motivation & market forecasts

Analysis of the social status of participants shows a tendency for participants to either be young adults in higher education or middle aged, empty nesters who occasionally walk, hike or climb. These figure are borne out by the general household survey, which found that regular climbers were more likely to be found in the 16-30 bracket. The GHS also indicated that most participants would come from a professional (2.2% of population) or student group (1.6%). The survey also questioned gender participation citing 3.7% of men (total population) had been climbing in the previous 12 months whereas 1.5% of women had participated. Reasons for participation vary from relaxation to the competitive nature of the sport. However the majority of participants seem to be involved for reasons such as location, relaxation, general fitness and the social nature of the activity.

A further indication into increased participation and spending is provided by Keynote who estimated the outdoor markets worth as follows:

Forecast (£million) 1996-2000

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
2000	2200	2500	2800	3000

Source: Keynote UK sports market, 1996

References

Government Household Survey - Participation in sport in Great Britain 1996
 Order from Sport England 0990 210255
 Keynote (1996) UK sports market forecasts
 Mintel Leisure Intelligence (1996) Sporting activities in the great outdoors

Participation Statistics update 2003

General participation

The Mintel report "Sporting Activities in the Great Outdoors" (Jan 2002) estimated that 48% of the UK population participate at least once a year in an outdoor sport, and that 25% of these participate regularly (once a month or more). Using the most up to date figure for the UK's population - 58,800,000 (Census 2001) - this gives a figure of 28,224,000 occasional participants and 7,056,000 regulars.

Their activities are broken down as follows:

Activity	%	Participants	
		Occasional	Regular
Hiking & Rambling	86	24,272,640	6,068,160
Mountaineering / Scrambling	27	7,620,480	1,905,120
Overseas Trekking	26	7,338,240	1,834,560
Rock Climbing	18	5,080,320	1,270,080
Snow & Ice climbing	13	3,669,120	917,280

Source: Outdoor Industries Association (Go-Outdoors)

This shows a significant increase over the previous figures of 150,000 (1993) and 420,000 (1997) for rock climbing, but the overall trend in the last year is one of (relatively) steady, linear growth...

