

SNOWSPORT PARTICIPATION RATES

I have been giving further thought to the participation rates shown in the map on p 62 of the Funding Bid. I was very sceptical about Inner London having the highest participation rate in snowsports, considering that there are now no snowsport centres in Inner London and only one (Bromley) within Greater London. The Inner London level contrasts with the low participation rates in the Outer London Boroughs. I had thought at first that it might reflect some quirk of the way the Active People Survey statistics were collected; these statistics show a very low level of participation for snowsports compared with other surveys.

I now wonder if this is just a question of wealth; may be only the very wealthy can afford to live in central London and participation in skiing is still dominated by the wealthy. This map presumably reflects all participants (not just SSE members) most of whom we know are only involved for one or two weeks holiday each year. Members of clubs in membership of SSE (who are often skiing locally throughout the year) only form a very small percentage of the total snowsport population (probably only about 2%).

It is also noticeable that some of our larger and better centres, e.g. Norfolk, Pendle, Rossendale, Sheffield, are situated in low participation areas. This would suggest that a good centre can be viable, at least on a voluntary basis, even where participation levels are low.

I think therefore that we need maps, or perhaps better tables, showing participation rates above and below average for each Local Authority area both for SSE members and all participants. I think these distributions are going to turn out to be quite different. My earlier survey of performers and coaches showed that most lived very close (less than 30 minutes drive time) to the centres where they trained. I have already drawn attention to the fact that this is not reflected in the map on p 61 of the Funding Bid because the scale of the map is inappropriate. This survey also showed that opinion was very much divided on whether indoor snow was worth the extra cost. A general dissatisfaction was shown about the size, quality, management and cost of many existing facilities but aspirations were often unrealistic. The consensus seemed to be that a main slope of at least 100 metres and a separate nursery slope were essential.

Another possibility is that participation depends significantly on family tradition. I do not know if any work has been done on this for any sports. I think that elite skiers come from a skiing families living where the children can not only learn at an early age but also live close (within 30 minutes drive time) to a place where they can train regularly during the week and compete further afield at weekends. This may be at an artificial slope or a ski resort (Scotland or expatriates living near resorts abroad).

It may be that there are skiing families in the London area going back several generations to the days when skiing was an exclusive sport. Lunn Tours and the Public Schools Alpine Sport Club (both exclusively upper class) which thrived at the beginning of the 20th Century, were based in London. Even before Sir Arnold Lunn, Nansen had inspired many Englishmen to ski and he was based in London for many years. The Ski Club of Great Britain was founded and based on premises in London in the early part of the 20th Century. The pre-World War II tour operators appealing to a slightly wider market (still mainly students), Lunn Polly and Erna Lowe and, just after the War, Inghams were also London based. Major Ingham founded the British Section of the Austrian Alpine Club after the War which in its early years was based in Inghams' premises in London. In these early years travel to the Alps was entirely by train from Victoria. It should be noted also that in the immediate post War years the British Ski Team was almost exclusively Army Officers.

Thus London was very much the centre of British skiing until the Scottish resorts were built in the 1960s and the larger artificial slopes were built in the 1970s. Up until then, there were few skiers in the rest of the country and the only 'local' skiing was touring in the Highlands, Lake District and Peak District – not for the faint-hearted. The second-generation skiers from Scotland would not reach National level until the end of the 20th Century and the 2nd generation skiers from the artificial slopes at the start of the 21st Century. These beginnings together with the rapid development of the package-tour industry have also generated a wave of recreational skiers from around the Country. It is noticeable that the tour operators have put on many more regional flights in recent years whereas package tours were almost exclusively from Gatwick in the earlier years. It thus appears that snowsport participants now come from all parts of the country but there is still higher level of participation (at least on ski holidays) in Inner London.

Conclusions

1. That the current provision of local snowsport facilities for snowsports in this country is totally inadequate for current levels of participation.
2. The current distribution of snowsport participants is very uneven and should not be used as a guide for priorities in future facilities development in this country.
3. Priorities should be based on need as shown by size of population within 30 minutes drive-time from a projected snowsport centre and the current distance from any good existing facilities.
4. The need might be for new centres where none exist at present or upgrading of an existing facility if the location is right but the size is inappropriate for the location or if it is badly designed.
5. Occasionally it may be that a facility will need to be relocated, if expansion to an appropriate size for the general location on the existing site.
6. There may be a need for a different type of management (especially where the commercial financial viability is in doubt) at some centres if sport development is to be more highly focused than profit.
7. There is still clearly a need for more artificial ski slopes of appropriate quality and size for the particular location than is ever likely to be provided by indoor snow centre.

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