

Do walkers stay on footpaths? An observational study of Cwm Idwal in the Snowdonia National Park

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In England and Wales the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) has for the first time introduced a statutory right of open access to mountain (land situated above 600m), moor, heath, down or registered common land. There is considerable debate as to the effects this will have on visitor numbers and behaviour together with and potential threats that walkers straying from paths may exert on conservation interests. This paper considers the behaviour of visitors in relation to whether they choose to exert their 'right to roam' at Cwm Idwal, a popular mountain area located within the Snowdonia National Park in north Wales where access to open countryside is de facto (through custom). The study used an observational technique to establish the distribution and group size of visitors over a pre-defined observation area. The results showed that visitors predominantly stayed on paths with only 9.5 % of groups of size twelve or less and 16.1 % of individual users deviating from linear access routes. In addition, a statistically significant relationship was shown to exist between group size and propensity to deviate away from linear access routes.