

Case study

The experiences of long distance walking: A case study of the West Highland Way in Scotland

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Abstract

This study sets out to understand the dynamics of the experience of long distance walking, a topic that has not been explored to a great extent. Previous work in outdoor recreation has indicated that an experience is dynamic, being both multi-phasic and emergent. Holidays are accepted to be the multiple expressions of only a few motives. Focussing on one activity, long distance walking, attention is shifted to differences in, and influences on, the eventual experience. This includes a period of anticipation. With reference to the West Highland Way in Scotland, the latter is assessed through an a priori, self-completion questionnaire. The individual, day-by-day experience of walking the route is captured using a relatively new research method of a real-time, in situ diary questionnaire. Overall, it has been suggested that an on-site experience involves an exit phase, where the participants prepare to leave the holiday situation. Rather than decreasing in intensity, however, the enjoyment of the long distance walking experience finishes on an upward trend.

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1. Introduction

There has been considerable increase in the demand for experiencing nature. Along with ‘the production of natural areas for tourist consumption’ (Hall & Page, 2001, p. 273), this has turned ‘the countryside into a key part in the recreation and tourism scene’ (Tribe, Font, Griffiths, Vickery, & Yale, 2000, p. 3). Furthermore, walking has been identified as the most popular recreational activity (Kay & Moxham, 1996; Mintel, 1998). However, as Kay and Moxham (1996, p. 174) argue, ‘recreational walking is so diverse and dynamic ... (that) this diversity is one of the great virtues of walking: it offers much to many, but it is difficult to comprehend and still more difficult to manage’. Despite such difficulties, it is identified that walking is greatly influenced by the social, environmental and managerial factors, and varies over time and space (Kay & Moxham, 1996; Stewart & Cole, 1999).

One sub-set of the diversity mentioned by Kay and Moxham is long distance walking, which can be seen as a

way of seeking relaxation and escapism, two elements generic to most holiday-taking. The character of long distance walking is, however, significantly different to the traditional sun, sand and sea holidays that often fulfil these motivations for tourists. Nevertheless, it is part of the wider tourism industry, which is in the business of producing a variety of experiences. In this context, this study presents the initial findings of an on-going research project,¹ examining how long distance paths facilitate a multi-day journey to be undertaken by walkers. As part of this, it is suggested that walking ‘is not so much an end in itself but rather a means to complex ends, to comprehensive experiences’ (Kay & Moxham, 1996, p. 176).

Within this study the activity of long distance walking is addressed through the experiences of walkers by way of a two-stage quantitative survey method. This will be carried out with specific reference to the West Highland Way in Scotland. Previous research on this route has been limited to broad investigations on behalf of the managing authorities. Prior to a survey carried out in 2006

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(Swallow, 2006), information at his level had been quite dated (Forgewood Market Research, 1995). Such studies are also often restricted to rather isolated investigations into the general characteristics of path users and the empirical recording of factors relating to management strategies. A review of the literature reveals that little or no detailed academic research has been undertaken on long distance walking.

This paper aims to shed further light on the developing theories of ‘dynamic’ tourist experiences which have only relatively recently been explored in the tourism and recreation literature. Using a case study approach to long distance walking, two empirical methodologies are employed. First, the walking experience is assessed through a number of variables that make up the motivational element; and second the actual on-site experience is determined. Finally, it is considered to what extent the experience of walking the West Highland Way can be regarded as emergent.

2. Recreational walking as a tourist experience

Ryan (2002) identifies how the tourism industry sells experiences and how it is the intensity of such experiences and not their purpose, that is the criteria of the tourist. Experiences set in the natural environment are currently especially popular. With increasing leisure time and mobility, and through the designation of national parks and wilderness areas, the natural environment is made accessible to large numbers of people. The notion that in this way a wilderness or outdoor recreation experience can be ‘supplied’ seems at odds with the implied freedom of wilderness (Hall & Page, 2001; Kliskey & Kearsley, 1993; Newsome, Moore, & Dowling, 2002; Pigram & Jenkins, 1999). Experiences of a resource setting are, however, varied, and dependent on the individual and their circumstances. Although the optimum settings for each individual will not be present everywhere, there is scope within each location for the provision of a variety of recreation opportunities. Matching the resource to the potential demand for recreation is one of the primary concerns for natural environment managers (Kuo, 2002; Lynn & Brown, 2003; Pigram & Jenkins, 1999). In this way ‘the environment ... forms a frame within which individuals have the power to create their own experiences’ (McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998, p. 417).

The ‘primary goals of a leisure trip or vacation are likely to be experiential’ (Botterill & Crompton, 1996, p. 57), which will be different for each individual. The choice of recreation site will greatly influence the likelihood of a satisfying experience, as the environmental attributes and managerial decisions taken will act to mediate the on-site experience (Stewart & Cole, 1999). The first step to evaluating the resource–visitor relationship is to explore what the visitor is motivated by and what their expectations are. Experiences are sought in relation to feelings of motivation, and an expectation that these will be fulfilled at

the chosen holiday destination. A long accepted theory that motives are few in number (Ryan, 2002) is being replaced by taking into account the diversity of possible combinations between personal and situational variables (Gnoth, 1997). This move away from a uni-dimensional view of motivational theory recognises the role that is played by a person’s accumulated knowledge going into a recreation setting (McCabe, 2000). Especially, with this conceptual change, it is misleading, therefore, to talk of a single ‘tourist experience’, as both the setting of the experiences and the motives behind them are heterogeneous in nature (see: Ryan, 2002; Shaw & Williams, 2004).

In a study of walking experiences in Australia, Chhetri, Arrowsmith, and Jackson (2004, p. 34) argue that ‘there is no single theory that defines the meaning and extent of tourist experiences’. An experience is a complex concept with many dimensions (Hull, Michael, Walker, & Roggenbuck, 1996), influenced by situational and personal variables (Stewart & Cole, 1999), and composed of many characteristics (Lee, Dattilo, & Howard, 1994). Recognising these differences, Stewart and Cole (1999) highlight how there is great variation in individuals’ motivations, expectations, preferences and experiences, and finally their evaluation of a situation. A recreation experience is, therefore, by no means static or homogeneous in nature.

2.1. Researching experiences

Hull et al. (1996) indicate that despite its significance in the wider sphere of life, research into the leisure experience has received little attention compared to leisure satisfaction, expectation, quality and benefits. Identifying where an experience starts and finishes is a central research variable (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966; Gnoth, 1997; Goossens, 2000; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Ryan, 2002). Variation in approach to this theme has given rise to problems of comparability and replication. Moreover, there is a need to bring together theories from the three closely related fields of study: tourism, recreation and leisure. It is suggested that the often tenuous distinction between the three should not be the focus of attention, but rather that emphasis be ‘placed on the activities and their participants’, as much of the time activities ‘engaged in during leisure, recreation and tourism are identical’ (Butler, Hall, & Jenkins, 1998, p. 4).

The most important aspect of an experience that must be realised is that it is not static. In this context, Hull, Stewart, and Yi (1992, p. 250) indicate that people do not necessarily look to gain singular experiential outcomes, ‘but rather set out to consume an extended sequence of relaxing feelings dotted with peaks of excitement’. ‘Leisure experiences are believed to be dynamic and to emerge through an interaction process’ engaged in by the participant on both an emotional and cognitive level (Lee & Shafer, 2002, p. 290). Such an evaluation clearly favours the ‘emergent experience model’ put forward by Paterson, Watson, Williams, and Roggenbuck (1998). Examining

this more closely, [Borrie and Roggenbuck \(2001\)](#) hypothesise that the on-site experience consists of three distinct phases: entry, immersion, and exit.

These phases can be represented diagrammatically as a bell-shaped curve that expresses the intensity of the experience across time ([Fig. 1](#)). Though this is conceived in relation to a wilderness experience, it can be argued that many tourism experiences could embrace such phases. These would be recognised in the way the tourist relaxes into their holiday, adapts to a different, holiday lifestyle, and then slowly returns back to their daily routine. An individual thus enters into a relationship with their surroundings; consequently, it can be argued that ‘emotional involvement is a significant component of leisure experiences’ ([Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001, p. 221](#)). Furthermore, [Stewart \(1998\)](#) identifies how leisure experiences are emergent and part of personal stories with temporal and spatial qualities, and individuals in a transaction with their environment.

Experience can be conceptualised from two broad perspectives, identified by [Paterson et al. \(1998\)](#) as the ‘motivational’ and the ‘emergent experience’ models. Reflecting the dynamic, multi-phasic and emergent character of an experience ([Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001](#); [Hull et al., 1996](#); [McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998](#); [Stewart & Cole, 1999](#)), the latter model concentrates more on an experience as it happens, whereas the former takes a linear view of it, encompassing the before, during and after phases.

Despite the recognition of these characteristics, little research has been undertaken to explore the complexity of experiences and consequently it is not yet widely understood ([Lee et al., 1994](#); [Stewart, 1998](#)). Development in this field of research is recent and ongoing, with some of the most innovative and comprehensive studies having been conducted within wilderness settings ([Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001](#)). Moreover, [Spencer, Kim, Nelson, and Holec \(1999, p. 175\)](#) suggest that ‘information on the characteristics and behaviour of tourists who use trails appears to be especially lacking’. Long distance walking is an example of what [Quan and Wang \(2004\)](#) term a ‘peak’

experience. Although they call for combined research, it can be argued that by focusing on this as opposed to and separate from ‘consumer’ or ‘daily’ experiences, some progress can be made toward understanding the use of trails by tourists.

3. Long distance routes

In defining the characteristics of national trails in England and Wales, the [Countryside Commission \(1989, p. 11\)](#) state that they, ‘by virtue of their character and quality, are national, reflecting the grandest, wildest and most beautiful landscapes the nation has to offer and also the most characteristic’. The process for establishing a long distance route, which is distinct from national trails and specific to Scotland, is set out in the [Countryside \(Scotland\) Act, 1967](#). In policy terms, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is responsible for leading the preparation of the proposal for an official long distance route for consideration by the Secretary of State for Scotland ([SNH, 1997, 2003](#)). Throughout this process, the broad aim for SNH is taken into account, especially the need to:

create an accessible and welcoming countryside where access is arranged so that it does not place an unreasonable burden on those who live and work in the countryside, and where improved access does not impair the qualities of the natural heritage ([SNH, 1997, p. 8](#)).

A long distance route transforms recreational walking into a multiple-day holiday, where the destination is the linear corridor of the path. [Hugo \(1999\)](#) argues that trails should be more than merely links between places, but rather enable the creation of holistic, integrated person-environment system. Walking is greatly influenced by the social, environmental and managerial factors, and varies over time and space. The planning and management of these factors will, therefore, affect how the experience evolves ([Hugo, 1999](#); [Kay & Moxham, 1996](#); [Stewart & Cole, 1999](#)). [Coble, Selin, and Erickson \(2003, p. 7\)](#) identify a number of benefits to participants in their study associated with hiking and backpacking, including ‘exercise, stress relief, personal time, experiencing nature, ‘loving life’ and ‘having fun’’. In this way, ‘the total recreational experience of ‘walking’ is placed in ‘wider temporal, social and geographical contexts than the simple practice of pedestrian activity’ ([Kay & Moxham, 1996, p. 177](#)).

3.1. The characteristics of the West Highland Way

The West Highland Way was the first long distance route to be established in Scotland back in 1980 and evidence suggests it is one of the most popular routes in the UK ([SNH, 1997](#)). It runs for 152 km (95 miles) from ‘the outskirts of Scotland’s largest city to the foot of its highest mountain along the shores of its largest loch and across its

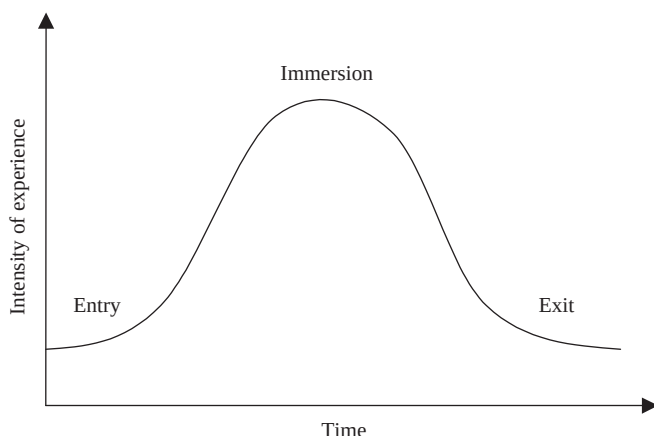


Fig. 1. Three stages of the in situ experience.

grandest moor' (Aitken & Smith, 2002, p. xxxi). As well as natural beauty, there is also close association with Scotland's history where the Way passes through lands of historical significance, and for much of its length makes use of old drovers and military roads (Marsh, 2003). An estimated 17,000 people complete the Way each year (Marsh, 2003), and it is further estimated that over 50,000 people use the Way each year as 'day walkers' or 'part-Way' walkers (Aitken & Smith, 2002).

Various perspectives on the West Highland Way suggest how the route provides an experience, but these fail to explain the detailed characteristics of such an experience (Table 1). The examples quoted refer either to the external variables as determining factors or identify the mode of travel. As a result, it appears that the walker travels through the landscape rather than being immersed in it. In contrast to these general approaches, this study aims to provide a more detailed understanding of the long distance walking experience, by attempting to capture the experience as it evolves on-site.

A three-phase visitor survey was conducted on the Way during 2006 of which only initial results of phase one are so far available (Swallow, 2006). Before that, the last visitor survey to be undertaken on was in 1994 (Forgewood Market Research, 1995). Both of these were conducted as part of the management of the route. While the more recent survey records walker characteristics and then their reasons for going and aspects of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the walk, the former goes on to focus on aspects of the physical maintenance and upkeep of the route. These different but very much related approaches are not combined to maximise the input from a walkers' perspective. Additionally, there has been no attempt to understand the motivations and expectations of walkers or indeed to take into account other factors that affect the experience. Whereas, the previous studies consider the entire user population of the route, the research reported in this paper will provide an updated insight into the characteristics and experiences of long distance walkers, exactly those people for who such multi-day walks were established.

4. Survey and sampling methods

A quantitative approach based on two surveys is taken as part of this study into the assessment of long distance

walking. First, a self-completion questionnaire survey was implemented to capture a priori measures. In this scenario, most efficient use of researcher's time is made, thus maximising the sample size over a short fieldwork period. Furthermore, the presence of the researcher means that it is easier to identify the population and secure the cooperation of individuals (May & Williams, 2001), which also has a potentially significant affect on response rates. The second method was an in situ diary questionnaire survey, aimed at capturing changes in experience as progress is made along the route. This is a form of self-completion questionnaire, but one that has not been employed to a great extent (Bryman, 2001).

The latter is an example of what Stewart and Hull (1992) refer to as a measure of Real Time Satisfaction (RTS) as opposed to the often popular Post Hoc Satisfaction (PHS). It is suggested that the variables used by an individual to evaluate experience: expectations, motives, satisfaction for example, are dynamic, and thus best captured within the parameters of the experience itself. The theory behind its use is to capture the phenomenon being studied over a time and space continuum. This counteracts the snapshot perspective inherent in a one-off questionnaire survey (Thornton, Williams, & Shaw, 1997). It is suggested that the main benefit of in situ methods is that they 'improve one's ability to provide insight, and perhaps disentangle, the complex interactions of time, setting, and person' (Stewart & Hull, 1996, p. 5).

As with any method however, it is not without its limitations. Stewart and Hull (1992, 1996) identify three criticisms that must be taken into account when analysing and presenting the data. Firstly, a self-reporting survey may alter the nature of the experience and, therefore, the perception of the situation. Secondly, previous exposure to the research tool may lead to the individual becoming overly self-aware and, therefore, the response patterns may be a result of this rather than a measure of unaffected reactions. Thirdly, this method requires careful compliance from respondents without the presence of the researcher to fall back on. The lack of fulfilment of the set requirements has the possibility of affecting the quality of the data, which such a methodology sets out to collect. A final point is the need to recognise that in situ data collection methods often constitute a relatively small sample and as such places limitations on its generalisability. This issue is not unique

Table 1
References to 'experience' in the literature about the West Highland Way

"The West Highland Way is a wonderful out-of-doors experience and can be a satisfying personal achievement for those who undertake the adventure" <<http://www.west-highland-way.co.uk/>>.

"It offers a wide range of people the opportunity to experience the different qualities of Scotland's natural environment along different sections of the route" (Land Use Consultants, 2003, p. 18–19).

"The experience of walking the Way remains as it always has been, a classic backpacking excursion through some of the finest scenery in Scotland" (Aitken & Smith, 2002, p. xxxiii).

"Long distance routes are carefully managed and maintained to a high standard so as to provide the best possible walking experience" (SNH, 2003).

to this method, and results can therefore be reported with confidence within the context of the research framework.

It is, furthermore, difficult to capture relational change in the static form of a diary questionnaire. This refers to how the experience of the respondent is related and evaluated according to what has gone before. As they progress on the walk, there are increasing amounts of reference points, though the scale of measurement remains constant throughout. Despite these limitations, the quality and accuracy of people recalling the experience will almost certainly be superior compared to surveys long after the event (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Borrie, Roggenbuck, & Hull, 1998). Finally however, ‘any single method can not fully capture a phenomenon’ (Stewart & Hull, 1996, p. 14), and thus the combination of approaches used here are justified. The design properties of the two research tools and their complementarity are summarised in Table 2.

The target population of West Highland Way walkers is such that it is not possible to determine numbers and participants ahead of the research period. For this reason a non-probability strategy of convenience sampling was implemented. Survey work carried out on the Way has identified that the vast majority of whole Way walkers follow the route from South to North and started out on their walk before midday (Forgewood Market Research, 1995; Swallow, 2006). Furthermore, the busiest time of year on the route is, unsurprisingly, the summer months, with 63% of walkers had starting in June, July or August

(Forgewood Market Research, 1995). To capture walkers in these majority segments, the survey was implemented for 4 h up to midday at the start of the Way in Milngavie, Glasgow. Over a 10-day period in mid-July 2003, 407 walkers were approached. As motivation and experience are subjective in nature, people in groups were all asked to participate. To qualify for participation, each had to confirm that they were intending to walk the whole Way. However, it must be understood that not all walkers may have finished the Way due to factors unknown. This possibility, however, has no bearing on the information that they were able to supply before the event. From this sample, 361 (88.67%) useable questionnaires were collected.

A sub-sample of 25 respondents were invited to take part in the diary questionnaire survey. The questionnaires from both surveys were numbered to enable cross-referencing. Due to the intrusive nature of this methodology, a voluntary approach was taken when selecting participants. It was important to find people with an interest or enthusiasm for taking part, as each non-returned diary questionnaire meant the loss of a significant amount of data. It must be acknowledged that this process inevitably involved a certain amount of subjectivity from the researcher. Similar to the study conducted by Stewart and Cole (1999), the participants were asked to take a set of questionnaires with them and complete one at the end of each day’s walk. Each selected person was asked to

Table 2
Focus of types of data collected per walker survey

<i>Self-completion questionnaire</i>	
Previous experience	Gauge the walkers’ self perceived level of experience in the activity Measured on a 7-point semantic differential
Expectations	Determine the motives underlying the choice to go on a long distance walk Measured on a 5-point Likert Scale
Motivation	Variables adapted from Beard and Ragheb’s (1983) Leisure Motivation Scale to determine their relative importance to long distance walking Measured on a 5-point Likert scale
Decision Making	Variables adapted from Countryside Agency (2000) survey to determine reasons for choosing the West Highland Way Measured on a 5-point Likert Scale
Walker characteristics	Demographics
<i>Diary questionnaire</i>	
Feelings	The variable of perceived crowding (Stewart & Cole, 1999) and other internal mood variables (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987) Measured on a 7-point Semantic Differential Scale
Experiences	Variables reflect those of the expectation category in the self-completion questionnaire to enable comparison Measured on a 5-point Likert Scale
Focus of attention	Variables adopted from scale developed by McIntyre and Roggenbuck (1998) Measured on a 5-point Likert Scale
Encountered difficulties	Variables adopted from 1994 West Highland Way survey Forgewood Market Research (1995) Recorded as a multiple response question
Enjoyment levels	The main dependent variable, also used by Forgewood Market Research (1995) Measured on a 5-point Likert Scale

complete the survey individually. To avoid problems with language and understanding, only walkers from the UK were approached for this part of the study. A total of 15 useable diary surveys (60%) were returned, each comprising a ‘separate sample with multiple reports’ (Stewart & Cole, 1999, p. 275). In addition to the a priori data set, this encompasses 100 individual walking days.

A follow-up questionnaire was conducted with participants of the diary survey to determine their compliance with the required task, which extends the methodology of Stewart and Cole (1999). It was delivered to the postal or e-mail address collected at the time of distribution. A copy of the questionnaire was sent to each of the 15 valid diary survey respondents, from which there was a response rate of 46.67%. Such additional information can offer insight as to the reliability of the data obtained, especially with regards to a relatively unused method in outdoor recreation research.

5. Long distance Walkers’ motivations

An experience originates both from the individual’s current situation and through the memory of previous situations. There are many variables that can be employed to determine the degree of past experience an individual has built up in an activity and/or at a location. As part of this ‘Experience Use History’, which refers to the amount of information available to a person about a given recreational setting (Hammitt, Knauf, & Noe, 1989; Jenkins, 1999; McFarlane et al., 1998; Schreyer & Beaulieu, 1986; Schreyer, Lime, & Williams, 1984; Watson & Niccolucci, 1992) and recreation specialisation with regard to a specific activity (Kuentzel & McDonald, 1992; Kyle et al., 2004; Virden & Schreyer, 1988; Watson & Niccolucci, 1992) are two approaches that have been used to try and situate an individuals’ level of experience.

It was necessary to absorb the variability that comes with levels of past experience, and, therefore, make the measurement of the questionnaire responses more meaningful. To achieve this, the respondents were grouped into the three generic experiential categories: ‘beginner’, ‘intermediate’, and ‘advanced’ (‘experienced’ being a more appropriate term in this study). This segmentation is based on the responses given to three 7-point semantic differential scales asking about perceived standard of walker (Table 3). It must be recognised that each group will contain a range of walkers, and, therefore, is not homogeneous. Table 4 outlines the characteristics of the

diary respondents and their perceived experience status. No standardised measure has been adopted to define level of experience, which also remains an ongoing challenge in the wider experience literature. It is purely a reflection of the respondents’ perceived ability and involvement in the activity.

By orientating the variables in Table 3 from ‘high standards’ (= 7) to ‘low standards’ (= 1), individuals are then categorised into each of the three groups depending on their overall score (minimum = 3; maximum = 21), where the lower and upper six indices comprised beginner and experienced, respectively. In this way, the majority of respondents (67.1%; $n = 202$) belong to the intermediate group (the remaining middle indices). With the majority of respondents falling into the intermediate category, this can be related to their held expectations in deciding to walk the West Highland Way (Table 5). Most walkers indicate that they either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the stated variables. The only variable to receive a slightly more muted response is the need to ‘feel in control’, which is centred on the ‘neutral’ option. This suggests that it is recognised that the West Highland Way is a predetermined route, and, therefore, relinquishes, to a certain extent, the responsibility of route creation and navigation. A total of 230 (63.9%) respondents in the main survey had not completed a long distance path in the 5 years leading up to the survey. Though this is not a direct measure of their overall walking experience, it can be tentatively concluded that the managed and readily marketed nature of the route contribute to making it feel more accessible, also to the less-experienced long distance walker.

In addition to measures of expectations, before setting out, respondents were asked to indicate their strength of feeling towards a number of variables relating to: factors of importance to long distance walking and reasons for deciding to walk the West Highland Way (Table 6). It is suggested that each set encompasses a quality that influences motivation from a slightly different angle, and, therefore, addresses the multi-motivational character of holidaymaking. In focusing on long distance walking as a tourism activity, this research evaluates in reverse the still existing theory of there being few motives with multiple expressions (Ryan, 2002). To support this assertion it must be shown that respondents within the sample were motivated to walk the Way for similar reasons.

Rather than evaluating each variable in turn, an index score was created for each individual based on the responses given within the three sets of variables. The variables are all positive statements and are measured on a scale where ‘strongly agree’ = 5 and ‘strongly disagree’ = 1. Having established that the data is uni-dimensional, the Kruskal–Wallis test was used to determine whether for each of the indices the differences recorded between the respondents are an expected dimension of the population or if they occurred by chance. Table 7 shows that the null hypothesis must be accepted for each index. There is, therefore, no significant difference between

Table 3
Question on the perceived identity of walkers

Please circle a number to indicate how you identify yourself as a walker:

Occasional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Frequent
Serious	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Casual
Experienced	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Inexperienced

Table 4
Diary respondent characteristics

ID	Gender	Age group	Perceived walker identity	Number of days on the Way	Have you walked a long distance path in the last 5 years?	Size of walking group	Mean level of enjoyment
1	Female	45–54	Experienced	7	Yes	1	4.71
2	Male	25–34	Intermediate	5	Yes	1	3.2
4	Female	35–44	Intermediate	6	Yes	2	3
8	Female	16–24	Intermediate	8	No	2	3.75
10	Female	25–34	Intermediate	6	Yes	2	3.5
13	Male	55–64	Beginner	8	No	1	Data missing
14	Female	45–54	Intermediate	7	No	2	3.86
15	Female	45–54	Intermediate	7	No	2	3.86
16	Female	45–54	Data missing	6	Yes	4	4.67
17	Female	25–34	Intermediate	5	No	2	3.2
18	Male	45–54	Data missing	7	No	2	4.43
19	Female	25–34	Beginner	5	No	2	3.2
20	Male	16–24	Beginner	8	No	2	4.25
22	Male	55–64	Experienced	7	Yes	1	4.28
23	Male	35–44	Experienced	8	Yes	2	4.87

Table 5
Expectations held in deciding to walk the West Highland Way

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Relax mentally	120	183	43	5	1	352	4.18	0.717
Get away	152	173	25	3	0	353	4.34	0.647
Challenge myself	129	131	68	20	1	349	4.05	0.905
Feel close to nature	95	148	85	9	7	344	3.91	0.898
Feel in control	35	85	148	61	12	341	3.2	0.97
Sense of accomplishment	143	140	56	8	2	349	4.19	0.825

Table 6
Variables used to determine the motivations for walking the West Highland Way

Expectations	Factors of importance	Decision-making	Diary questionnaire experience variables
Relax mentally	Discover/explore new place	Scenery/landscape	I enjoyed meeting fellow walkers (if any)
Get away	Meet likeminded people	Good walking	I was feeling a closeness with nature
Challenge myself	Spend quality time with friends/family	Well marked route	I was able to relax
To feel close to nature	Seek esteem from others	Standard of path	I enjoyed the scenery
To feel in control	Challenge myself	Recommendation	Experience of solitude
Sense of accomplishment	Mentally relax	Challenge/experience	Experience of freedom
	Get away from daily routine	Keen walker of long distance trails	I had time to think
	Enjoy nature	Discover new places	
	To feel stimulated	Total length of the Way	
	To feel a sense of 'freedom'		

Table 7
Statistical summary of motivational indices

	N	H-statistic	p-value	Mean	Min	Max
Expectation index	6	326.00	0.490	23.81	14	30
Importance index	10	333.00	0.490	38.96	26	50
Decision-making index	9	326.00	0.490	34.91	25	45

1 = strongly disagree; –5 = strongly disagree. Significance level: 0.05.

respondents with regard to the variables within each index. This strongly suggests that by choosing to walk the West Highland Way, respondents have been motivated by and are expecting outcomes along similar dimensions.

6. The long distance walking experience

It has been found that respondents display no significant difference with regards to factors that influence their motivation. It can, however, be suggested that the experience that follows these impulses will differ greatly for each individual as they make their own way along the same corridor route. This would extend the theory of few motives giving rise to multiple expressions, but in this case within one particular setting. The in situ experience of long distance walking is hereby evaluated by way of a small sub-sample of walkers. These diary questionnaire respondents were presented with a list of variables comparable to those asked in the a priori self-completion questionnaire (Table 5). Each day they were asked to assess, on a 5-point Likert Scale, their strength of feeling about these variables with regards to the day's walk.

An index was created for each respondent to combine the diary variables for each of their experiences into a daily score ('strongly agree' = 5 and 'strongly disagree' = 1). The Kruskal–Wallis test showed that there is significant difference in how the diary questionnaire respondents experienced the West Highland Way ($H = 55.934$, $p < 0.05$). There is, therefore, a contrast between a priori evaluations of what is expected from the walk and the actual experience. This lends some additional support to how alternative methodological approaches can offer a different perspective on the subject being studied.

6.1. An emergent experience?

The use of the diary questionnaires makes it possible to evaluate the potential for an emergent pattern to on-site walking experiences. According to [Borrie and Roggenbuck \(2001\)](#), participants in outdoor recreation are expected to go through an exit phase, in which they readjust back into their daily lives. It is suggested here that this might coincide with a drop in the intensity of the experience as outlined in [Fig. 1](#). Whether such an emergent pattern is present can be determined through measurement of any number of different variables, such as mood and focus of attention factors ([Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001](#); [McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998](#)). In the present study, intensity of experience was evaluated through a daily record of the level of enjoyment ($n = 14$).

Enjoyment levels were captured for diary questionnaire respondents using a 5-point Likert scale for each day of their walk. The sample respondents, however, took between 5 and 8 days to walk the whole Way. To represent the trend across the walk, it is necessary to align the varying numbers of days to create a standardised measure. An average is calculated across all respondents in relation to their first day, middle day, last day and two average scores for the days in between. [Fig. 2](#) illustrates how the level of enjoyment across all valid responses fluctuates relatively little. The pattern that does emerge does not reflect the hypothesised pattern of the in situ emergent experience ([Fig. 1](#)), as the levels of enjoyment rise to a climactic high.

Measuring how relaxed respondents were during a black-water rafting trip, [McIntyre and Roggenbuck \(1998\)](#) similarly reported the attainment of maximum in terms of relaxation at the final survey point of their study. This

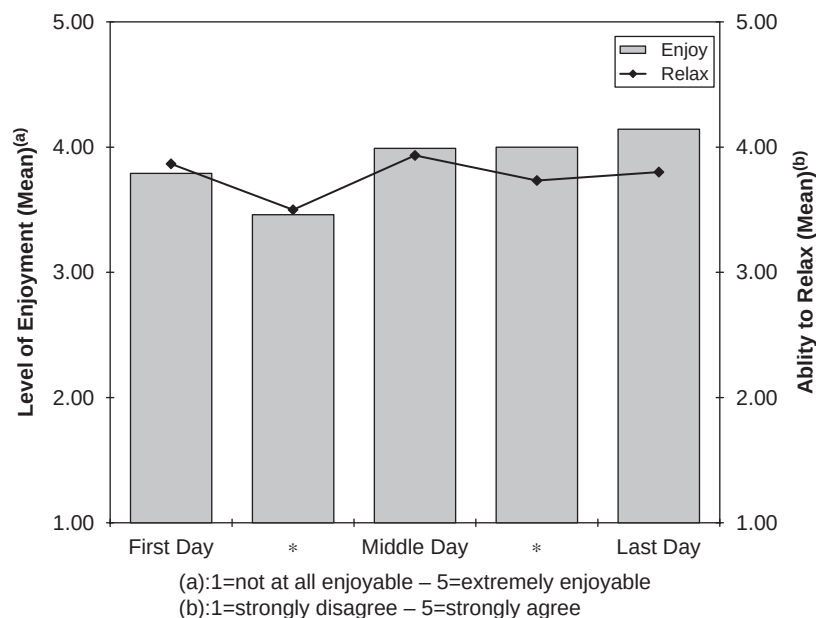


Fig. 2. Level of enjoyment plotted in relation to the ability to relax.

pattern is not replicated as part of this case study (Fig. 2). Both findings are, however, of interest to further our understanding of in situ experiential patterns, and although undoubtedly related, offer insight through different approaches and cannot, therefore, be directly compared. First, the survey period used by McIntyre and Roggenbuck spans just one day rather than the multiple day long distance walk. Second, the implementation of the survey tool was restricted to predetermined parts of the rafting experience, reflecting the methodology of the Experience Sampling Method, whereas the current study obtains a broader picture of the walking experience through a daily, self-implemented post-walk survey. In addition to relaxation, McIntyre and Roggenbuck measured a number of variables which each followed an individual pattern. This does reflect that different research settings and frameworks are likely to see variations in results.

When viewing the average level of enjoyment according to the three categories of perceived experience ($n = 12$), a few notable observations can be made (Fig. 3). Although all remain above neutral (3), experienced walkers rate their level of enjoyment consistently higher, and do not fluctuate much. Walkers classified as intermediates broadly reflect the hypothesised pattern of in situ emergent experiences. Beginners, on the other hand, are most variable in their enjoyment, and they are also the group who finish the walk

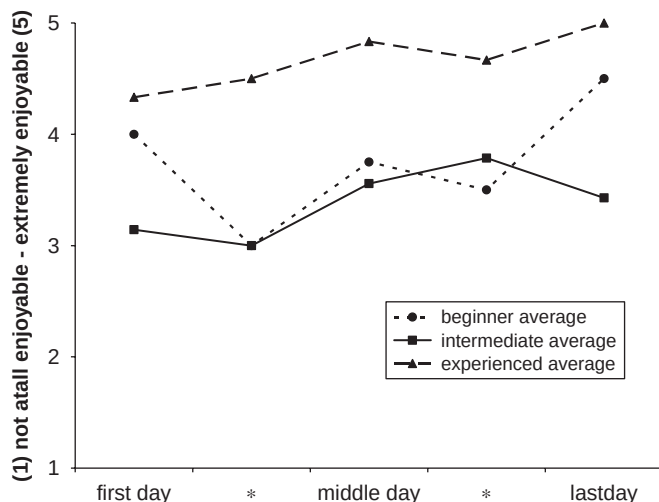


Fig. 3. Normalised level of enjoyment according to level of experience.

on the greatest upward trend. There is room for future research into the role of the feeling of achievement in the evolution of the long distance walking experience. Additionally to determine whether these findings are present more widely, this needs to be explored with the use of larger samples and possibly across different recreational activities.

6.2. Compliance with diary questionnaire

The analysis of the emergent experience is made possible with the use of the diary questionnaire, a relatively new method of approach in this setting. For this reason, it is prudent to look into the ability of respondents to comply with the requirements, which will also be informative as to the reliability of the presented findings. Of the 15 diary questionnaire participants, 7 chose to take part in the follow-up survey.

Table 8 shows the distribution of reported responses collected with the use of a postal/e-mail follow-up questionnaire. Within the framework of the diary questionnaire, it is necessary to take into account the proportionately low response rate, and the affect this has on the interpretation of the results. The majority of respondents were able to complete a diary questionnaire at the end of each day, and did this on an individual basis. The process is reported by most to be straightforward, and not bothersome. The majority suggest that they did not feel their participation affected their feelings during the day. However, it is possible that this influence occurred on a subconscious level, especially after repeated exposure to the questionnaire a few days into the walk. The overall reported distribution indicates that the diary questionnaire is a reasonable method for in situ data collection, with minimal unwanted influence on the data. It must be emphasised that the findings are self-reported, and cannot, therefore, be corroborated.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to provide a greater understanding of the experience of long distance walking. Focusing on the in situ phase of the experience, a more direct insight has been gained into this popular recreational activity. The

Table 8
Reported compliance with requirements of diary questionnaire

	Frequencies				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I was able to complete a questionnaire at the end of each day of the walk	4	2	0	1	0
During the walk, the diary questionnaire was bothersome to complete	0	0	1	4	2
The daily questionnaires were quite easy to complete during the walk	2	4	1	0	0
Completing the diary questionnaire affected the feeling I had during the day	0	1	1	3	2
I completed the daily questionnaires individually	3	4	0	0	0

approach taken makes use of and develops an on-site data collection method that aims to record an individual's experience as quickly and unaffected as possible. As well as the use of an a priori dataset, this research has extended the work of others (most notably Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Hull et al., 1992; McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998; Stewart, 1992; Stewart & Cole, 1999). The value of such a multi-dimensional methodology lies in its ability to evaluate the relationship between motivation and the actual experience.

Despite the recognised complexities of situational and personal variables (Gnoth, 1997; McCabe, 2000), this research goes somewhat towards proving the notion of few motives leading towards multiple expressions (Ryan, 2002), though now with reference to just a single activity. The results show that whereas there is no significant difference for the overall sample population in their expectations of what the West Highland Way will provide, a significant difference is identified in the experience of it within the sub-sample of diary participants. In this way, the dynamic and emergent character of the experience is illustrated firstly through the difference between before and during evaluations of the long distance walk, and secondly by the way the experience evolves on-site.

The final aim focuses on determining the possible emergent and multi-phasic character of long distance walking. Enjoyment is taken as the primary measure of the long distance walking experience, and the intensity of it. Working with the hypothesis that the intensity of an experience rises to a point of immersion, and then tails off towards the end (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001), the experience of the West Highland Way does not reflect such an emergent pattern. Instead of it declining, this study finds that walkers generally experience the end of their walk as a climatic high. Long distance walking is thus an activity that does not seem to fit the pattern of the hypothesised emergent experience. However, slight variations according to the walkers' experience level are reported. This reflects the many variables that can represent a person's past experience and how this can influence their perception of a situation (Hammit et al., 1989; Schreyer et al., 1984). Future research, based on a larger overall sample, can examine more closely the difference in experience patterns between these representative sub-samples. Such work would also provide the opportunity to present more evidence of whether the three phases of an emergent experience are present within long distance walking as a recreational activity.

The strong relationship that walkers forge with their surroundings and the expected sense of achievement they attain from completing a multi-day, challenging walk, are variables that largely appear to determine the reported upward trend in experience. This research, however, is case study specific and limited to a priori and in situ measures of determining motivational and experiential factors. Research examining the three-way relationship of experience, management and the environment is ongoing and should provide even greater detail and understanding of the

walker-environment interactions. In turn it is hoped that such findings will aid future management of long distance routes.

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