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SPORTS TOURISM

A Case Study on ‘Sports Tourism in Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach – investigation of current provision, potential for the future and implications’

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Afan Forest Park



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Background

We were asked by our Course Coordinator Mrs Tina Williams to produce an appropriate case study that investigated Sports Tourism in the area that we live i.e. Neath Port Talbot. Following this, we would be required to present the idea to the Global Travel and Tourism Partnership (GTTP) in the form of a proposal with a view to winning a competition that would allow us to present our findings in a conference in Nice.

The area of Neath Port Talbot has been steadily gaining recognition for tourism. The two rural areas of Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach in particular, are developing a wide range of sporting activities that attract tourists. With this in mind we thought that these areas would be a perfect place to begin our investigations into Sports Tourism. We are studying tourism as part of the BTEC National Diploma in Travel and Tourism and the implications of tourism, both positive and negative, are an important aspect of our studies. We decided that we would like to develop the theme further and not only look at the current provision for Sports Tourism but that we would also like to find out how it is affecting local people and the environment.



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Our Proposal

‘Sports Tourism in Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach – investigation of current provision, potential for the future and implications’

We will undertake primary and secondary research into the current provisions for sports tourism in Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach. As well as establishing the current provision we will also carry out research to establish:

- The feelings of local people about the current provision
- The awareness of local people about the resources that are available to them to take part in sporting activities in their local area
- The thoughts of local people about what they would like to see become available in the future.

As both Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach now receive visits from other parts of the United Kingdom and overseas, we will also carry out research to establish how visitors perceive the area and the welcome they receive from local when taking part in sports tourism in the area.

The impact of sports tourism, both positive and negative will be considered and recommendations will be made highlighting gaps in provision and improvements that could be made to further enhance the area.

Wales and Neath Port Talbot

This case study is based upon the development of Sports Tourism in the Borough of Neath Port Talbot, and in particular in the rural areas of Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach. The study also focuses upon the impacts of such developments and the thoughts of local residents and visitors to the area.

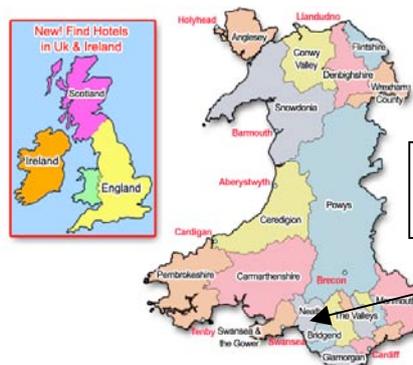
Location

Neath Port Talbot is located in Wales, South West Wales to be exact and Wales is located in the South West of the United Kingdom.

Location of Wales in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom



Source: www.greenwichmeantime.com/time-zone/europe/uk/map.htm
 Accessed 02 Nov 09



Location of Neath Port Talbot in relation to the rest of Wales

Source: <http://www.walesdirectory.co.uk/maps/index.htm>
 Accessed 02 Nov 09



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<p>Geography of Wales</p>	<p>The country is only 160 miles long and is just 60 miles across at its narrowest point</p>
<p>Population</p>	<p>Wales is home to just under three million people (a low number when you consider that the whole of the United Kingdom has over sixty one million residents)</p>
<p>Language</p>	<p>English is used on a day to day basis but the Welsh Language Board (Bwrdd yr Iaith Cymraeg) reported in 2003 that over thirty seven percent of children aged between 3 and 15 could speak the language. The 2001 census revealed that twenty one percent of the population can now speak Welsh.</p>
<p>Tourism in Wales</p>	<p>The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) Factsheet 'Overseas Tourism to Wales' reports that tourism from overseas visitors grew from 861,000 visitors in 2002 to 987,000 visitors in 2007. The expenditure from these visitors amounted to GBP 339 million. Wales received nearly nine million visits from UK residents in 2007 and the money received from these visits amounted to GBP 3 billion.</p>



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Having considered these facts and figures it is easy to establish why tourism is so important to Wales. So how important is tourism to the small Borough of Neath Port Talbot?

Neath Port Talbot

The last twenty years have seen significant changes to Neath Port Talbot and to the economy of the area. Traditionally the area was dependant upon manufacturing, for example, coal, metal, oil and petrochemicals. Corus (steel manufacturers) remain the biggest employers in the Borough; there are currently approximately 3,000 people directly employed in the Port Talbot steel works.

Tourism is however, becoming an important contributor to the local economy as the information below shows:

- **There are currently 1079 people directly employed in the tourism industry in Neath Port Talbot**
- **Over 1.7 million people visited the area in 2007**
- **Tourism contributed GBP 73.9 million to the local economy in 2007**

It is easy to see why the Neath Port Talbot Country Borough Council are eager to develop and invest in tourism and in particular Sports Tourism.

(See appendix 1 for details of employment in Afan Forest Park)



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Research Methodology

We have combined quantitative research which research based on the use of facts and figures and has been displayed in charts and qualitative research which is based upon the feelings that employees of the industry, locals and visitors have about the development of Sports Tourism.

The types of research used are:

- Questionnaire/Interviews
- Document analysis

(See appendix 2 for examples of questionnaires used at Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach)



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Current Provisions for Sports Tourism in Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach

Afan Forest Park	Aberafan Beach
Mountain Biking	Surfing
Cycling	Kayaking
Canoeing	Canoeing
Fishing	Wind surfing
Horse-riding	Kite surfing

Both areas are popular with walkers and although this is can not be classified as a sport it is certainly an activity that is encouraged to keep people fit.

As well as these activities both destinations are home to sporting challenges

Afan Forest Park

Kona Mash Up

This is an extreme Mountain Biking challenge that brings Cross Country, Trail Riders and Down hillers together, timed over several off-road sections all at the Kona Bike Park; Skyline Cycles in Wales. This event is scheduled to run at the Park in December 2009.

Exterra

The EXTERRA event is made up of a combination of open water swimming in outdoor lakes and mountain biking. The event attracts people from all over the world and involves ninety events across the world each year. Please see appendix (2) for further information regarding Xterra at Afan Forest Park.



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GB Rally (Wales)

The World Rally Championship (WRC) is regarded as being the world's most challenging motor sport competition. The format of the rally is always the same and this is made up of two days of reconnaissance, followed by a Shakedown and then three days of competition that runs over the weekend. The routes are made up of different stages and Afan Forest Park is a part of one of the Welsh stages. Fifteen countries in total host the rally.

Afan Forest Park is truly achieving a part of its aims of

'...having potential to build a critical mass of activity based facilities'

Afan Forest Park Tourism Growth Area Action Plan (2002)

The Aberafan Beach Surf Kayak Contest April 2009

This exciting contest was held at the beach this year (2009)



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Findings of Secondary Research Afan Forest Park

The Development of Afan Forest Park

Afan Forest Park was designated as a Special Interest Tourism Growth Area (SITGA) in April 2002.

The Vision at this point was:

‘To recognise Afan Forest Park’s potential as an outdoor ‘wilderness’ where communities and business combine to make the destination one of the most exhilarating and enjoyable visitor experiences in Wales’

Source: Afan Forest Park TGA Action Plan (April 2002)

This vision combined the needs of the local community and businesses with the intention of meeting the needs of visitors to the area, presumably with the intention of benefiting all concerned.

A full review of the 2002 Action Plan was undertaken in 2008 and this review produced some interesting and promising findings. The tables below and overleaf clearly show the increased usage of the area between 2003 and 2007.



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WALKING VISITORS TO AFAN FOREST PARK (thousands)

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
7,672	12,004	9,010	11,612	12,948

Source: Afan Forest Park Visitor Survey (2007)

These figures clearly show that the designation of Tourism Growth Area led to increases in walking numbers to the Park. There is no reliable data on walking visitors to the park prior to 2003, however, these figures look promising.

VISITORS TO VISITOR CENTRE (thousands)

2004	2005	2006	2007
25,273	119,081	112,526	112,452

As with walking figures there are no figures available prior to 2004. The numbers were at their highest in 2005. The visitor centre has recently been refurbished and has a gift shop, café, conference facilities, a shower block and toilets and the mining museum. The Visitor Centre is seen as the ‘hub’ of Afan Forest Park

MOUNTAIN BIKE NUMBERS (thousands)

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
9,920	24,320	42,872	52,331	60,960	59,857

The significant increase in mountain bike visitors between 2002 and 2003 has been attributed to the Forest Parks status as a Special Interest Tourism



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Growth Area being granted in 2002 and the resulting investment into the development of the trails, visitor amenities and to improvement to directional signage to the area.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council continue to assess the area and further surveys have been carried out. The 2009 Afan Forest Park Visitor Survey that was recently carried out by Beaufort research has shown that nearly two thirds i.e. sixty two percent of visitors to the Park visit to cycle or bike.



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Comparison – 2007 findings/2009 findings

Findings of Afan Forest Park Visitor Survey 2007	Findings Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Study (produced by Beaufort Research 2009)
<p>87 percent of respondents interviewed did not consider visiting anywhere else that day</p>	
<p>Two thirds of respondents interviewed on the day were repeat visitors</p>	<p>Repeat business has risen to four out of five visitors</p>
<p>Awareness of the Afan Forest Park website increased from forty four percent in 2006 to fifty one percent in 2007</p>	
<p>Accommodation provision has increased in both volume and quality since 2002. In 2002 there were as few as twelve graded bed spaces in the area</p>	<p>In 2008 Afan Forest Park has 151 VisitWales graded bed spaces. (82 serviced and 69 non-serviced)</p>
	<p>Visitor spend has increased from GBP 47.00 per group to GBP 58.00 per group</p>



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As you can clearly see there have been very positive changes made between the two surveys. Of particular interest is the growth in accommodation provision. In the early days of the Park being designated the lack of accommodation spaces was highlighted as being a concern and mountain bikers were disappointed at being unable to stay within the Forest Park. The above table shows that the provision of bed spaces increased from twelve graded spaces in 2002 to one hundred and fifty one in 2008.

One local man has built luxury log cabins in the Forest Park the Bryn Bettws Cottages so this is a positive impact for local people.

Another major step forward on the accommodation front is the refurbishment of the Pelenna Centre into a youth hostel that offers a restaurant and forty beds. This was opened in response to the need for extra beds and this demand was from mountain bikers.

(See appendix 4 for press release relating to the opening of the Youth Hostel)

Other Private Sector Investment since 2002

The growth of sports tourism to the area has brought with it private sector investment and this is positive for the local area and economy.

The following companies have been established:



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- **Skyline cycles** – A bike hire company. Skyline Cycles hire bikes, sell bikes and accessories and also promote sporting events such as the Kona Mash Up which is a competitive mountain bike event.
- **Cimla Equestrian Centre** who offer lessons, treks and full trekking holidays
- The Drop Off Café (more info)
- Various other restaurant and café facilities (more info)

Afan Valley Bike Hire have developed a mountain bike instructors course (MIAS) accredited by Reading University and a partnership exists between these and Bryn Betws Log Cabins who rent out the teaching room to Afan Valley Bike Hire.

Other information

Afan Forest Park has collected a number of awards including:

2006	The Swansea Bay Tourism Award
	‘The Extra Mile Award’
	‘Sustainability in Tourism Award’
2004	National Tourism Awards
Short listed	‘The Best Day Out’
Short listed	‘Community Initiative’

Community Involvement

An important aspect of this case-study was to consider what locals think about the development of Afan Forest Park and this was clearly an



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important consideration to the partners when the proposals to develop the area were first put in place.

- **August 2004** saw a five-day community campaign with the sole purpose being to involve the community and to update the local community on what had been achieved and to inform and liaise on future plans
- **An Artist in Residence** was installed at the park as a result of the Internal Working Group **The Artist in Residence** has worked with and engaged with local people and has produced some creative projects including the new logo for Afan Forest Park, the interior mosaic of Afan Forest Park Visitor Centre (and graffiti mural at Croeserw

Other important links have been made with the local community. Forest Park Rangers and police school liaison officers have organised activity days for local schools

So the development of Afan Forest Park has without a doubt been successful and the change and regeneration of the valley is positive for both the local communities and for visitors to the area.

The next section of this case-study looks at another important rural area in the Borough of Neath Port Talbot Aberafan Beach.



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Aberafan Beach.

Aberafan Beach is approximately 15 miles down the valley from Afan Forest Park and the Country of Neath Port Talbot is lucky to have such superb natural attractions within easy distance of each other.

The beach has also seen bad times and in a similar way to the way that the valley was scarred by the coal mines and other industry the beach was also scarred by industries such as BP Chemicals and the Steel Works. Both on the coast and both caused pollution to the beach. In the 60's, 70's and 80's the beach was very dirty and polluted and it seemed at some points that the clean up would not ever come about. However, investment into the area as well as the closure of some of the industries has culminated in the beach being cleaned up and actually being awarded Blue Flag Status. Blue Flag status is the ultimate award and there are very strict tests carried out to establish whether or not a beach should receive the award. Water cleanliness, environmental education and information, environmental management and the safety of the beach as well as the services available are all criteria that are reviewed before the award of the Blue Flag is given. This is a prestigious award that is recognised throughout Europe.

For further information relating to the Blue Flag status please see the following link:

<http://www.blueflag.org.uk/default.asp> (accessed 10 Nov 09)

(See appendix 6 for BBC news article 'Blue Flag Goes to Unlikely Beach')



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Aberafan has achieved this and as a result Sports Tourism is becoming more and more popular. Surfing and kayaking competitions are now held at the beach.

In July 2008 a surfing competition was held on Aberafan beach and this was run in conjunction with the Sports Council for Wales 5 x 60 programme which is attempting to satisfy the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) target of ninety percent of secondary students taking part in sixty minutes of activity five times per week. For further information on the WAG 5 x 60 Scheme see appendix (5). Children from local schools were able to try surfing for the first time

Pupils took part in five surfing lessons and the top surfers were asked to take part in a competition. Below is a photograph of a pupil from a local comprehensive school who came fourth in the competition.



Ben Davies Cwrt Sart Comprehensive.

Simon Jayham from GSD surf school commented "Aberavon has so much potential for future surfing champions, due to the size of the local catchment area within walking distance and of course the excellent lifeguard club already based on the beach"

Source: http://www.npt.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=2482&pr_id=3033 (accessed 10 Nov 09)



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We surveyed people using Aberafan Beach to find out what they thought about facilities at the beach, one of the main causes for concern is the lack of facilities at the beach:

- 82% stated they wanted to see a bowling alley or ice-rink
- 41% stated they wanted to see more places to eat

However on a positive note

- 82 % were aware of the beaches blue flag status and the same figure said they see tourism as being positive.

The people who stated that they felt tourism was negative gave reasons such as extra rubbish and vandalism as being a cause for concern

The feeling of people interviewed, both locals and visitors was that the beach is currently developing and the development is positive. Surfers who have used the beach made the following comments:

- **Dan, Mumbles (South West Wales)**

‘Aberavon is a great place to surf! ‘

- **Matt , Gower (South West Wales)**

‘I surfed Aberafan five month back. It was 6 – 10 feet. The first thing I noticed was the high standard of surfing there’

- **Nigel, Aberavon.**

Into surf kayaking now – easier on the arms



Surfing at Aberafan Beach

(See appendix 5 for a case study on Aberafan Beach and its refurbishment)

Conclusion

Having carefully considered the changes that have come about at Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach over the past seven years it is apparent that tourism is becoming more and more important to the area. The area is ideal for Sports and for Activity tourism as the diverse landscape and proximity of mountains to the coast offer a wide range of opportunities.

A variety of businesses have been attracted to the area to meet the needs of the new visitors these include:

- Accommodation providers in the form of B&Bs, hotels, log cabins. Of particular note are the new Bryn Bettws Log Cabins in the Afan Valley and the designation of the old Pelenna building as a youth hostel following its refurbishment

The Bryn Bettws Log Cabins



<http://www.brynbettwslogcabins.co.uk/>

- Hospitality provision in the form of bars, restaurants and cafes, both at Aberafan and in the Forest Park. The following pictures clearly show the high standard of hospitality provision as well as the natural beauty of the area in which they are established.

Café Remos Aberafan Beach



The view over Aberafan Beach from Café Remos



<http://www.port-talbot.net/beach1.htm>

The Drop Off Café in Afan Forest Park and Mountain Bike Centre



<http://www.npt.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=4408>

The café and mountain bike centre have been developed to meet the needs of the mountain bike visitors and walkers to the park. The centre is ideally situated at the start of two of the trails 'Whites Level' and 'Skyline'. There is the added bonus of shower facilities and a jet wash for the mountain bikes. This is also where Skyline's Cycles can be found. These facilities were built to help ensure that the area continues to grow in the area of activity and sports tourism.

Below is photograph of some of the scenery that visitors and locals enjoy at the Park.





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As well as accommodation and hospitality provision the area is currently attracting some major sporting competitions and activities including:

- GB Rally Wales
- XTERRA
- Kona Mash Up
- Kayaking and Surfing Competitions

(See appendix 8 for Xterra leaflet)

Businesses have developed to meet the needs of Sports Tourists including:

- Skyline Cycles
- Cimla Equestrian Centre

The initial aim of this case study was to look at ‘Sports Tourism in Afan Forest Park and Aberafan Beach – investigating current provision, potential for the future and implications’. The results of research into visitor numbers and activities available in the areas clearly show a growth in such tourism and the trend is upwards. Qualitative research undertaken by asking questions of visitor and locals is also positive. When looking back at the original vision when Afan Forest Park was designated as a Special Interest Tourism Growth Area and its potential to ‘build a critical mass of activity based facilities...’ we can conclude that the research confirms that this has been achieved and the activities and sports are continuing to grow. Afan Forest Parks close proximity to another naturally beautiful area of coastline is an added bonus.



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The recent opening of a cycle route that means that visitors can cycle from the beach up to the Forest Park means that roads can be avoided making the route safe and accessible for cyclists of all abilities.

The implications of the development of Sports Tourism have been considered and include:

- **Increased traffic and problems with parking** – this has been addressed at the Forest Park by increasing overflow car parks. The area tends to get busy at weekends and during competitions and special events. Some locals find this to be ‘annoying’ however, on the whole they believe that the benefits outweigh the negatives.

There is ample parking available at Aberafan Beach.

- **Litter and Vandalism**

These are issues that are often associated with an increase in tourism to an area. Forest Rangers police the Park and there are plenty of litter bins. Visitors who use the Park tend to respect the environment. There have been issues with locals damaging the Park, however, the Rangers and local police and Fire Brigade work closely with the community, including local schools to educate local children about the damage to the environment.



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- **Dilution of Culture**

An increase in visitors to an area can dilute the national culture. The culture of Wales is celebrated in particular at the Forest Park. The National Miners Museum tells the story of mining in the valley. The gift shop sells locally made gifts, many with a Welsh theme, for example, miners lamps, Welsh love-spoons, books about the area and so on. Welsh is spoken in the valley and this is an added attraction.

Damage to natural habitat

Both Aberafan Beach and Afan Forest Park have benefited from the growth of Sports Tourism and both areas have been transformed for the better. The Blue Flag status of the beach means that the water is now clean, making it a healthier environment for fish. Seals can be found in the area and there have also been sighting of porpoise. The Forest Park has a local Badger group who look after the welfare of the Badger Community and there is also a Bat Group. These groups work with the Forest Rangers to ensure that natural habitats are not damaged.



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Recommendations

Having looked at some of the history and the development of these two areas it is apparent that a great deal of work has gone into their developments and there are many partner involved.

We believe that the Park and the Beach can continue to flourish and grow and make the following recommendations for improvement.

- **The Forest Park** could promote 'health tourism' by hosting weekend retreats for yoga, T'ai Chi, meditation and so on. The log cabins with their beautiful outlook would be a perfect spot and the larger Youth Hostel would also offer extra bed spaces. These types of retreats could be introduced during 'down times' to help ensure that the bed spaces are always filled.
- The Youth Hostel could be promoted to Schools and Colleges and a package of activities and team building events could be offered. This would be useful for students studying the natural environment, tourism, to sports studies students and so on.
- Passive activities such as painting or writing could be encouraged further. The natural beauty of the area would surely encourage the creative mind.
- Corporate team building events could be hosted at the Park



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- Farmers could be encouraged to diversify and offer camping facilities as there is a lack of such facilities in the area.
- **Aberafan Beach** could build upon its Sporting Events further and encourage more beach Sports
- Introduce a skating rink or SnowDome to compliment the Aquadome
- Visitors and locals are requesting more cafes and restaurants.



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Meetings

Dick Wagstaff – Head Ranger Afan Forest Park (2009)

Correspondence

Karleigh Davies Neath Port Talbot Tourism Coordinator (2009)

Emma Jane Wilcox Neath Port Talbot Tourism Development Officer (2009)



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We would like to thank the Sponsors of the

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without their support this conference would not be
able to take place.

Thank you

Amy Anderson and Stephanie James

and

Neath Port Talbot College





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