

# ARE THOSE WHO CAMP RICHER FOR IT?

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF THE CAMPING EXPERIENCE



# OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS



## The Camping and Caravanning Club

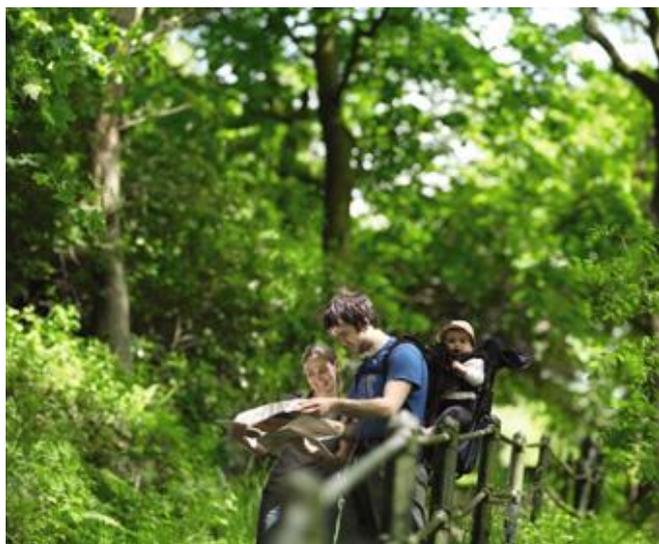
The Camping and Caravanning Club (C&CC) is the world's oldest and largest club for all forms of camping, and today has more than 500,000 members and provides a wealth of campsites and different ways to camp in the UK and abroad. The observation that camping offered greater riches for mind, body and soul was first introduced over 100 years ago by the Club's founder, Thomas Hiram Holding. He wrote: "Personally, I like the camp so much better than the hotel which I could afford – that, apart from the economy of camping, it is a real luxury in its freedom, and with one or two campers incontestably jollier". The Club is a not-for-profit organisation.



## Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)

Liverpool John Moores University has maintained an international reputation as a quality provider of Outdoor Education programmes in Higher Education since the 1960s and has trained thousands of Outdoor Educators and Outdoor Leaders over the years. Its staff offer specialist research and knowledge across key areas in Outdoor Education including, Outdoor Leadership, Expeditions, Adventure Therapy, Environmental Education, Physical Geography, and Geomorphology, and have published widely in these areas. They all contribute to national and international initiatives developing research and practice in Outdoor Education.

The LJMU team involved in this research study was led by Dr Kaye Richards with support from Professor Tim Stott and Dr Jenny Peel.



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We have divided the results of our research findings into four key areas where we have found substantial evidence to prove the benefits of camping to the nation.

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# FOREWORD

By Matthew Eastlake, Marketing & Communications Director, The Camping and Caravanning Club

In today's materially obsessed world, it seems strange to see the word 'Rich' associated with camping. After all, I hear you say, isn't camping just a cheap holiday option in tough economic times?

At The Camping and Caravanning Club, we believe that being rich isn't only about money. Just ask anyone who goes camping, caravanning, motorhoming or trailertenting for the 'money can't buy' experiences they have on every trip. How it's a priceless chance to get closer to nature and get back in touch with who you really are. How working together to pitch the tent or set up the caravan, cook the food and share the chores brings families closer together in a way that everyday life can't and how there's a genuine, old-fashioned sense of community in camping that maybe we're losing through new forms of 'social networking'. We think it's a truer kind of wealth. Because it's not about the riches you own; it's about the emotional richness in our lives.

And we have a theory that camping and caravanning is not just good for our mental and physical health because we're spending time out of doors within nature – although as many other studies have shown, this does have a significant benefit on our wellbeing – our belief is that the benefits of camping go much deeper than this.

That camping has benefits for us on many levels – our mental and physical health, family togetherness, community cohesion, child development and not least, how happy we feel, is the subject of this study which we hope you will find compelling and stimulating.

On behalf of The Camping and Caravanning Club, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these findings further and look at how we might be able to contribute to the national narrative on happiness and the GWB (General Well Being) of the nation.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M Eastlake', written in a cursive style.

## Methodology

The findings outlined in our study are based on a review of research into the psychological and social benefits of camping undertaken by leading academics in the field of Outdoor Education at Liverpool John Moores University. The team led by Dr Kaye Richards looked at over 60 studies that have been published around the world since the 1960s. They were specifically focused to see whether research supported the view that camping was beneficial to mental and physical health, family togetherness, community cohesion, child development and behaviour and happiness.

We also commissioned a quantitative research study to ascertain whether those who camp feel differently about their quality of life, family relationships, sociability and general health and wellbeing compared to those who have never camped.

An online questionnaire was sent to 1,000 adult campers over the age of 18 via The Camping and Caravanning Club's member database and 1,000 adult non-campers over the age of 18 via a UK-wide online panel.

We also sent an online questionnaire to a UK-wide online panel of 500 children aged 7-11 who camp and 500 children aged 7-11 who have never camped.

The quantitative fieldwork took place between 11th - 25th February 2011, and was conducted by Research Now.

**NOTE: Throughout this study we refer to 'campers', but we use this as a generic term for anyone who regularly camps in a tent, caravan, motorhome or trailer tent.**

# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of the Research

The pursuit of happiness is central to the Government's political vision. Way back in 2006, David Cameron said: "Improving our society's sense of wellbeing is, I believe, the central political challenge of our times". He added: "It's time we admitted that there's more to life than money." So, at a time when national statisticians have been charged with measuring the nation's success not just in terms of its gross domestic product (GDP), but also its general wellbeing (GWB), we thought it was time that The Camping and Caravanning Club looked to find compelling evidence to prove that camping has a valuable and important role to play in improving the nation's quality of life.

In the spirit of our founder, we have always championed the benefits of camping and caravanning and we believe the half a million members of our Club would support our beliefs; but we think it's time that those who have the power and responsibility to influence key societal policy on health and wellbeing, family togetherness, child development and community cohesion should read the evidence that we have collated, and in doing so, put camping onto a higher national agenda.

## Our Theory

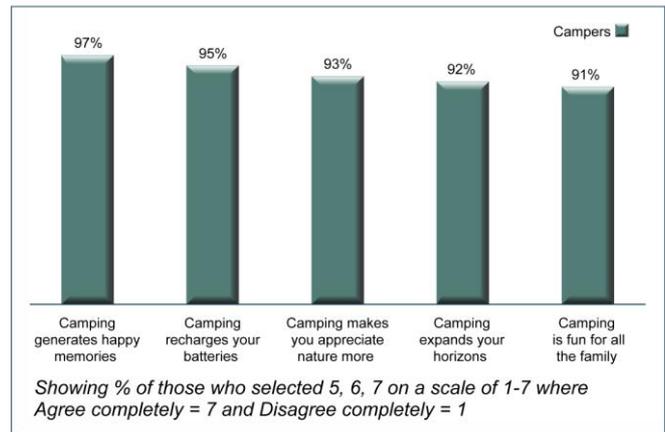
There is a growing body of evidence that first-hand outdoor and nature-based adventure experiences are linked to improved psychological wellbeing and personal development – particularly for our children. In his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, American author, Richard Louv, expressed great concern regarding the damage to our mental and physical health if, as a society, we continue to alienate ourselves from nature. It's not surprising then that we are seeing more and more campaigns by both public and private sector organisations urging us to get off the sofa and get outdoors – and we fully support these initiatives.

**But we have a theory that camping is not just good for our mental and physical health because we're spending time out of doors within nature – although this is a significant benefit for our wellbeing – our belief is that the benefits of camping can go much deeper than if we just go for a walk, a bike ride or a day trip.** A finding that was borne out within our research (Graph 1):



## GRAPH 1: THE BENEFITS OF CAMPING ACCORDING TO CAMPERS

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about camping?



We see that there is over 90% agreement amongst those who camp that camping is beneficial on a number of important psychological and social levels. Psychologically, the importance of restoration and the generation of happy memories are both seen to be particularly strong with almost universal agreement. Whilst on a social level, expanding one's horizons and that it is a fun activity for all the family are compelling.

The studies we have looked at suggest that something more transformational happens when we camp. Camping allows us to get away from the routines and the relative comforts and things we depend upon in our daily lives. And even though camping and caravanning today is a much more comfortable experience thanks to fantastic equipment and facilities – the simple fact that we have taken ourselves out of our normal environment and into a different one, surrounded by nature, means we act, think and even communicate differently with each other.

## The Evidence

The evidence that we have gathered for this study has shown that a number of psychological and social benefits can be derived from the camping experience. These include:

- Promoting family cohesion, satisfaction, togetherness and fulfilment
- Encouraging rest, relaxation and restoration
- Improving social interaction
- Facilitating children's learning and has a positive effect on behaviour
- Making us feel better – mentally and physically
- Creating memories, traditions and special places that stay with you for life
- Really making us happier!

We will discuss the evidence that supports each of these claims in the pages of this study.

# CAMPERS REALLY ARE HAPPIER!

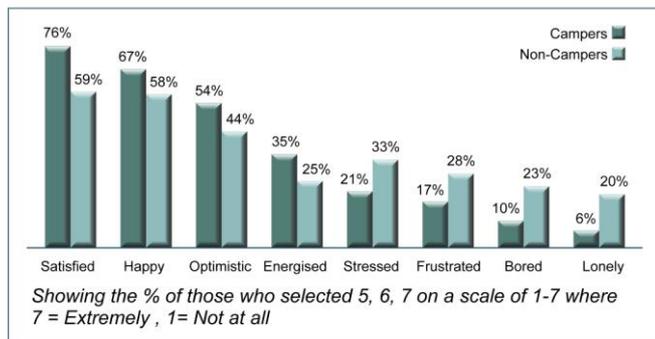
**76% of campers are satisfied with their quality of life compared to 59% of non-campers.**

We were struck by just how significantly different the responses were to various questions concerning general quality of life between those who camp and those who have never camped. Over three-quarters of campers said that on an average day they are satisfied with their quality of life, compared to 59% of non-campers (Graph 2).

**93% of campers said camping can make you feel happier. And nearly half of all non-campers agreed!**

The difference wasn't just notable on the area of overall life satisfaction, but also in other aspects of wellbeing too (Graph 2). Campers were happier, more optimistic and felt more energised than non-campers, whilst those who hadn't camped felt more stressed, frustrated, bored and lonely.

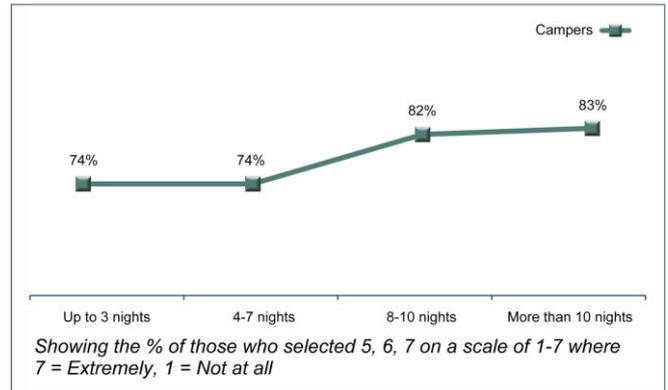
**GRAPH 2: HOW DO YOU FEEL ON AN AVERAGE DAY?**



It was also interesting to note from our research data that the longer the average camping trip, the higher the satisfaction with quality of life (Graph 3). The satisfaction figure for those who camped for more than 10 nights rose to 83% from 74% for those who camped for up to three nights.

**GRAPH 3: THE LONGER YOU CAMP THE MORE SATISFIED WITH LIFE YOU ARE**

**How long is your average camping trip? / How satisfied are you with your quality of life?**



This supports our theory of the transformational effects that can be achieved by displacing oneself into a different, more natural environment. These people seem to have a greater life balance than those who don't currently 'escape' into nature for any length of time.

## MEMBER'S STORY

*On campsites I sometimes look around at what our fellow campers are doing. People talk together, play games with their children and sit down to eat together. They enjoy peaceful solitude or make new friends. Couples walk holding hands and generations holiday together. When you think of all the trouble in the world, this is wonderful to see. And when you think that this goes on on campsites all over the country, indeed all over the world, it's heart-warming and truly amazing!*

Adele Kain



# CAMPING BRINGS FAMILIES CLOSER TOGETHER

## 8 in 10 campers feel that camping brings you closer together as a family

In a world that is more uncertain and where some of the foundations of society have been rocked, people are finding even greater comfort and stability in having their families and friends around them.

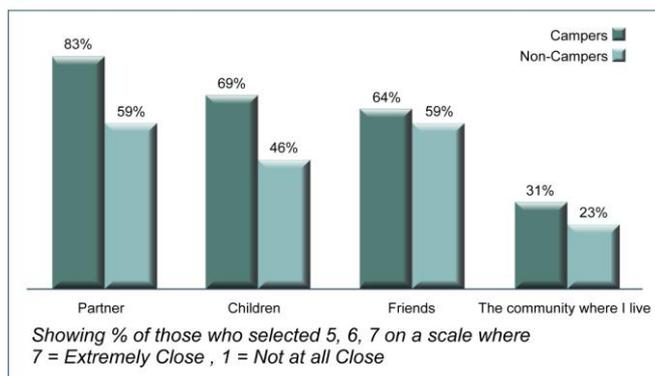
In our research, **half of all adults said that they felt most happy when they were spending time with family and friends. Whilst 96% of kids said that they were most happy when playing with their friends.**

We recognise, however, that spending quality time with our family and friends is not always easy, especially as we lead such busy and fragmented lives nowadays. Child psychologists talk about how many of today's parents are often 'physically present but emotionally absent'. Because we're constantly peering at our phones or computers, checking our texts, emails, Facebook, Twitter etc., and rather than making life easier, new technology means that we're often never more than a click away from our jobs.

Our research has shown that those families who find the time to camp together really do share a much closer family bond than those who have never camped (Graph 4).

### GRAPH 4: CLOSENESS TO FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY

On an average day, how close do you feel to the following people?



## Studies show families who camp get along better

In a 1965 study, the American sociologist, W.R. Burch, was the first to discuss family togetherness as a social meaning of camping. He built on previous studies which showed that escape was a key theme. Specifically, fathers wanted to escape from the stresses and strains of paid work and mothers wanted to escape daily household chores. But it was Garst, Williams and Roggenbuck in their 2010 study for the American Camp Association that really highlighted the role that camping plays in family functioning. They found that family members said that they got along better after a multi-day camping trip and attributed this to the fact that they spent more actual time together, were active together and listened to one another.

This study, together with our own research, shows that getting away from it all in a tent or caravan is not only addressing a family's need for escape from the day-to-day distractions of everyday life, but it also stimulates greater family adaptability. Tasks that would normally be considered boring or 'not my job' become more exciting and interesting when you camp. Families find that they take on different roles and realise that their partner or kids have skills that maybe they didn't even know they had!

### MEMBER'S STORY

*We are relatively new to camping as a family. My husband has mobility difficulties which had made sitting around a campfire and camping an impossibility. That's until we found a superb specially adapted camping chair for him a couple of years ago...and since then we have had several fun-filled weekends. Camping has enabled us to sit and chat with friends over numerous cups of tea, drink cocoa under the stars and wake to a dawn chorus. Our children have spent time with Dad, whittling sticks and learning to use a penknife properly, learning how to cook in the open air AND we have had great fun pitching a tent together, a real treat when Dad's mobility is limited. Being able to go camping as a family is something I never thought we'd be able to do, but it brings us great joy and hilarity and enhances our lives as a family because it's something we can all do together.*

Su Chapman



### MEMBER'S STORY

*I left my ex-husband after domestic violence over many confidence-destroying years. With less money to spend and three children to entertain on holiday on my own, I hired a motorhome. I had never driven anything bigger than a family hatchback! We had a wonderful time. One child was in charge of securing everything before we drove, one in charge of hooking up at the sites and the youngest was in charge of entertainment – he chose Status Quo for the entire holiday as this was what he called 'road movie music'. The children and I got our confidence back through the responsibilities and freedoms of that first camping holiday and now we camp for sheer pleasure.*

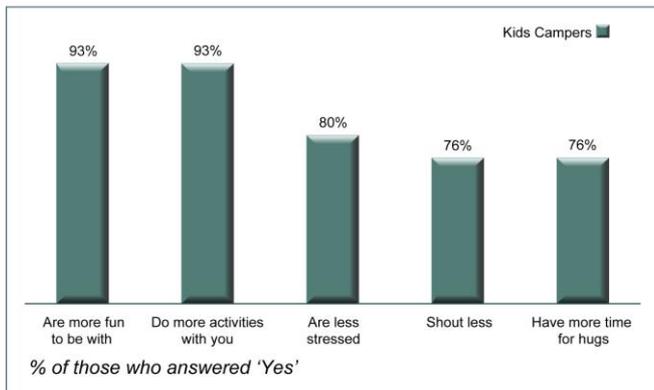
Anonymous



It was also interesting to note that children who camped noted a difference in their parents behaviour when they camped – there was almost universal agreement with the statement that their parents were not only more fun to be with, but that they also appeared less stressed and shouted less (Graph 10).

### GRAPH 10: KIDS SAY PARENTS ARE MORE FUN & LESS STRESSED WHEN CAMPING

When camping do you feel your parents ...?



### Not just physical closeness, but emotional closeness

#### 97% of campers say camping generates happy memories

One of the other compelling reasons why families who camp feel closer to each other is that they have been found to talk more and listen more to one another – they spend more actual time together sharing experiences and activities. And, when they are inside their tent or caravan, it's not just physical closeness that brings them together but a much greater sense of emotional closeness.

This emotional closeness results in memories made for life and traditions that pass from generation to generation. Garst et al (ibid). found that the sharing and passing on of family memories and traditions provided a key meaning for camping trips. A fact borne out in our research; where the statement 'camping generates happy memories' was ubiquitous amongst campers with 97% agreement (Graph 1).



### MEMBER'S STORY

*I remember when I was about three and we went to Kessingland in the summer with a tent. I remember lying in bed at night, snuggled up. My brother was in his bed and we were listening to our Mum and Dad talking quietly and their voices were soft through the canvas of the tent. We felt really loved. It was a special moment and I have never forgotten it.*

Anna Kain



# CAMPING PITCHES ON PRESCRIPTION

## JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED!

### 85% of adult campers think camping can make you healthier and nearly half think it should be prescribed on the NHS!

Today, stress and mental ill-health are becoming more common and the associated public health costs are growing. The World Health Organisation estimates that depression and depression-related illnesses will become the greatest source of ill-health by 2020, and UK sources suggest that mental health problems cost the economy up to £105 billion a year in England alone.

The idea that spending time within nature is 'good for our physical health and mental wellbeing' is not a new one and there is a growing acceptance that connecting with the natural outdoor environment has a key role in the health of the nation (Hansen-Ketchum et al., 2011, in press). As pressure on Government budgets becomes greater, then maybe more focus will be spent on encouraging people to spend time within nature. It's certainly something those who camp would support with half of them saying that camping should be prescribed on the NHS!

### 'Tent Therapy' has proven results

In the United States, 'therapeutic camping' has a long tradition going back to the early 1900s and the emergence of 'tent therapy'.

An example of the emergence of tent therapy was discovered in 1901 amongst psychiatric patients with tuberculosis. These patients had to camp in the hospital grounds to ensure non-contact with other psychiatric patients in the hospital, but the unexpected benefits were that their physical condition and mental attitudes improved far faster for those patients camping. Today, many outdoor therapy based interventions work with a range of clinical conditions and client groups. For her PhD, Dr Kaye Richards of LJMU, who we have worked with on this study, developed the first adventure therapy intervention for women with eating disorders in the UK, where she worked with psychotherapists in developing innovative adventure therapy practices.

### 95% of campers say that camping 'recharges your batteries'.

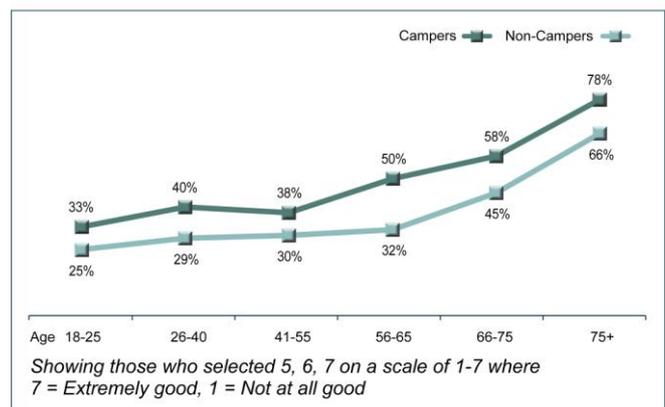
Garst et al. in their 2010 study of American campers found that 'restoration' was the meaning most associated with camping. Camping represented an opportunity for physical, mental and emotional recovery and for many of those he interviewed, it was a way to bring balance back into their lives. Our research supported this fact with 95% of campers saying that camping 'recharges their batteries' (Graph 1).

### Campers feel fitter, healthier and more active for their age

In our research study amongst campers and non-campers, we found significant differences between those who camped and those who had never camped in relation to their health and wellbeing. Campers were more likely to regard themselves as having higher than average fitness for their age (Graph 5) compared with non-campers and were also more likely to see themselves as being active (Graph 6) and healthy (Graph 7) compared with non-campers.

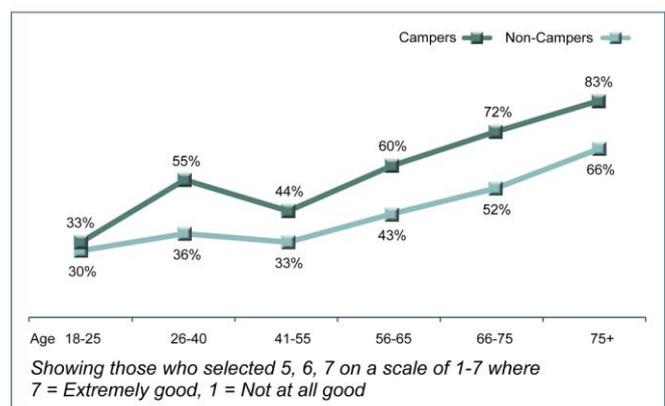
#### GRAPH 5: CAMPERS FEEL FITTER FOR THEIR AGE THAN NON-CAMPERS

How fit do you feel for your age?



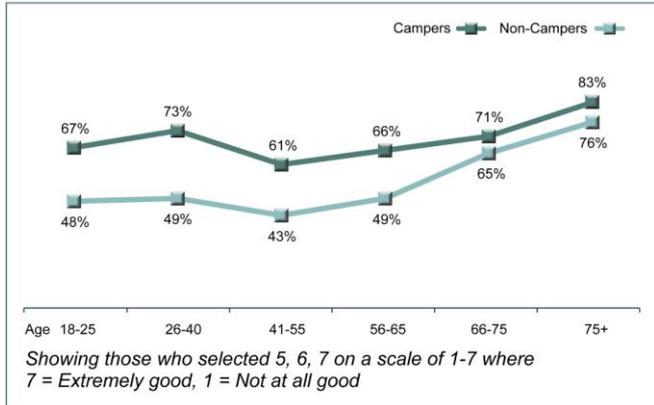
#### GRAPH 6: CAMPERS FEEL MORE ACTIVE FOR THEIR AGE THAN NON-CAMPERS

How active do you feel for your age?



**GRAPH 7: CAMPERS FEEL HEALTHIER FOR THEIR AGE THAN NON-CAMPERS**

How would you describe your level of health for your age?



What is interesting in these graphs on fitness, activity and health is that, with the exception of 'active' where campers and non-campers in the 18-25 bracket show little difference, across all other age groups campers feel far more positive about their health and fitness than non-campers.

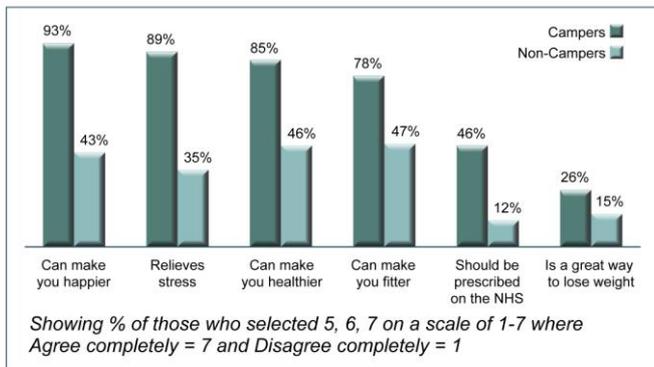
**Half of campers think camping is so good it should be prescribed on the NHS**

What's more, we found that campers are more likely to feel that camping can have positive benefits for health and wellbeing on a number of different levels and even though they haven't camped there was acknowledgement amongst non-campers that it could have positive benefits (Graph 8). Almost half of non-campers agreed that it can make you healthier, can recharge your batteries and can make you happier.

Non-campers perhaps still need some persuasion that camping can help you lose weight, with just 15% agreeing compared to over a quarter of campers – who have no doubt seen the benefits for themselves!

**GRAPH 8: THE MANY HEALTH GIVING BENEFITS OF CAMPING**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about camping?



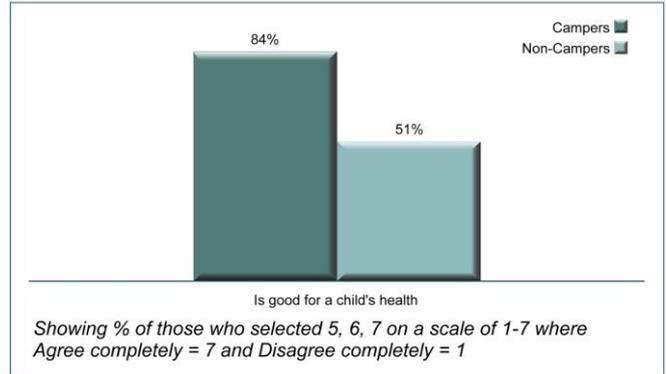
**1 in 3 children who have never camped think it would make them healthier**

In some ways, what was even more encouraging in the statistics was that 1 in 3 children who had never camped thought that camping would make them healthier. And the benefits of camping for a child's health were acknowledged by both campers and non-campers with 84% of adult

campers agreeing with this statement and just over half of adult non-campers also supporting this view (Graph 9).

**GRAPH 9: ADULT CAMPERS WHO AGREE CAMPING IS GOOD FOR A CHILD'S HEALTH**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about camping?



**MEMBER'S STORY**

*Twelve months after becoming single again in my 40s I bought Thelma, a VW Autosleeper. It was the kick I needed. Yes, I had enjoyed travelling abroad but always came back feeling like I'd missed something. With Thelma I could be in the heart of the English countryside in no time at all. Within months my health improved as I began to get my work/life balance in order and my business improved too. My outlook on life and living is so much more positive now.*

**Alison Edwards**



# CAMPSITE AS CLASSROOM

## WHERE IT'S FUN TO LEARN

### 91% of kids say spending time exploring the outdoors with their Mum or Dad would make them feel happy

A recent report by Natural England found that children spend 60% less time out and about than their parents did at the same age – and even less time in the outdoors. There is much evidence to link this to growing childhood obesity levels and a growing disconnection with nature. And yet, our research has shown that a staggering 91% of children say that spending time exploring the outdoors with their Mum or Dad would make them happy.

There are a number of studies that have looked at the impact of outdoor experiences, particularly camping on children and there is much evidence to show that outdoor experiences can not only improve a child's behaviour, but it can also make them more attentive and interested in the world around them – as well as encouraging greater levels of physical activity, stimulating social interaction and developing an affinity with nature (Ridgers & Sayers, 2010).

A study by Ritter & Mocks (1979) of the longer-term impact of camping on children showed that improved classroom behaviour was sustained by children who merely engaged in day camping. Several later studies looking at the psychological development and wellbeing of children with more serious emotional and behavioural problems say that there is evidence that they benefit from engagement in camping. The improvements recorded include positive behavioural changes, improved self-ratings of popularity and self-esteem, as well as improvements in their academic skills.

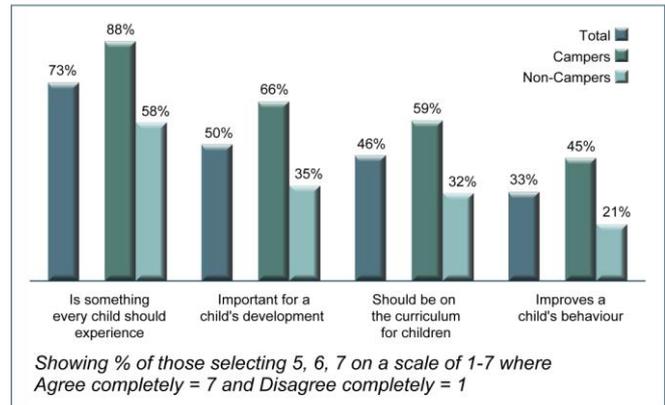
### 46% of campers think camping improves a child's behaviour

In our research amongst campers and non-campers it was interesting to note that nearly half of campers agreed that camping improves a child's behaviour, but this was not the only compelling statistic. Those who have experienced camping believed that camping was good for children on a number of levels and in fact there was significant support that it should be added to the school curriculum (Graph 11).

### 73% of all adults say camping is something every child should experience

**GRAPH 11: THE BENEFITS OF CAMPING FOR KIDS**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about camping?



## A place to learn new skills

### 77% of campers saying camping introduces you to new skills

Garst's et al. (2010) study found that one of the most important meanings for camping families with children was being able to teach their kids new skills and an appreciation for nature. Teaching children how to improvise, play and 'make-do' was an important part of developing their children's perspective on life – and educating them to the fact that they don't need all of the trappings of home in order to have fun.

Our research supported this, with over three-quarters of adult campers agreeing that camping introduces you to new skills; maybe surprisingly this was also acknowledged by 60% of non-campers.

## Kids are hungry to see and do new things

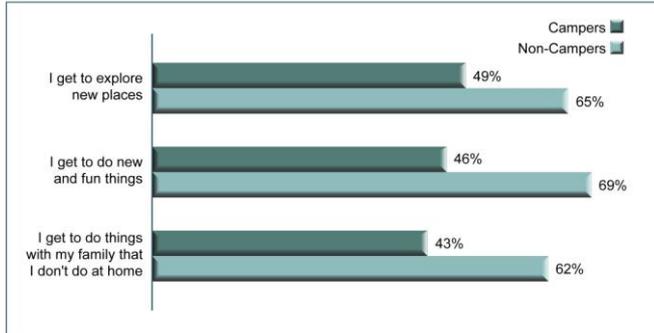
### 79% of kids who have never camped say they would like to go camping

The concept of exploring new places and doing new and fun things were also at the top of the list of the children we surveyed. Whether they were campers or not, the same three things came up top in their list of things they love about camping/things they think they'd love about camping (Graph 12). Getting to explore new places, learn new and fun things and do things with their family they wouldn't do at home, were at the top of the list for both campers and non-campers. Even within our children's lives we see there is a desire to escape from their daily routines in order to feel happier.

It also contradicts many assumptions that children today are happy to be housebound with their TVs and computer games and finds that they are really open to new adventures and experiences outside.

**GRAPH 12: WHY KIDS THINK CAMPING'S COOL**

**Campers: Why does camping make you happy?  
Non-campers: Why would you like to go camping?**

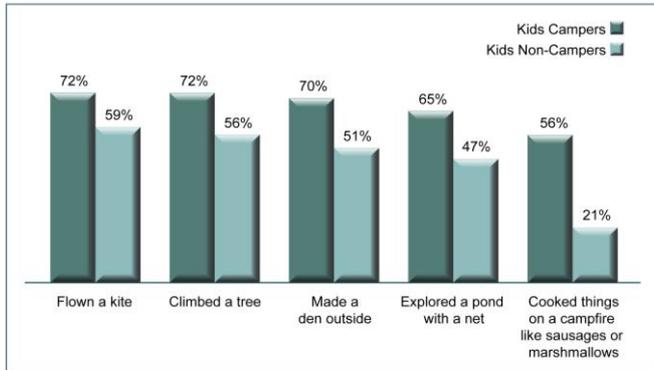


Maybe not surprisingly, 'I get to do the washing up' only made 2% of our kids campers happy – whilst over a quarter loved the fact that they were able to get muddy and dirty and not get into trouble!

It was also interesting to note in our survey results that kids who had camped were significantly more likely to have experienced some of the simple outdoor activities associated with spending time out of doors and within the natural environment (Graph 13).

**GRAPH 13: OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY KIDS WHO CAMP/DON'T CAMP**

**Have you done any of the following things?**



**59% of campers think that camping should be on the school curriculum**

The heartening story that emerges within these findings is that on all levels, camping can have a significant impact on children's behaviour, wellbeing, social development and education and it is something they want to do. If the evidence is so compelling, then we believe there has to be a case for camping to be seriously considered as an important part of the school curriculum.

**MEMBER'S STORY**

*Camping is a big part of mine and my children's lives. We go to a different campsite every other weekend from April to September. It gives my kids a chance to see a different part of the country and to do many different things – walks, activities and meet lots of new people. We love the outdoor life as it allows us to spend lots of quality time together.*

Louise Chase

**MEMBER'S STORY**

*What I love about camping is when I sleep in the sleeping bag it makes me feel all excited especially when it is my first night. I also love visiting other places in the area where we stay. We have barbecues when we wouldn't normally at home – even for breakfast. It's funny when I need the toilet in the night because I have to get my wellies on and go outside and walk to the toilet block whereas at home I would just have to walk across the landing. I like going wherever I want at the campsite and playing out, meeting new people and staying up late.*

Caitlin Jewell, Age 8



# CAMPERS DO REAL SOCIAL NETWORKING

## 73% of campers say camping is a great way to make new friends

Early studies from around the 1960s and 70s of the benefits of camping found that it was the social interaction that was more appealing to campers than the idea of restoration or family togetherness. Whilst the latter benefits have become much more resonant in recent years, there is no doubt that the camaraderie of the campsite is still a major reason why people love to camp – and may have an even greater role to play in a society that seems to have lost touch with its real community spirit.

Some social commentators are saying that the impact of online social networking is that we have gained breadth at the cost of depth. We have more attachments to more people, but thinner, less meaningful relationships with them. Increasingly, we are seeing that people want to 'get together' in an authentic, face-to-face way that has nothing to do with Facebook!

The social interaction of the campsite is not about the immediate group of people that you are with, but is related more to friends and people in other camping groups. A recent study by the University of Otago, New Zealand, found that mixing with other families was an important aspect of the camping experience and whilst people may come from many different backgrounds, when they come together on a campsite, any social barriers melt away.

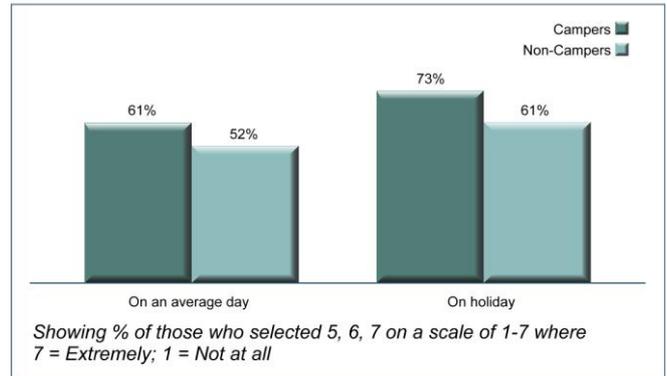
Campers talk about lifelong relationships that have been made through camping trips, many even have met their future partner on a camping trip and then gone on to bring up their children with the camping bug.

## Campers are more sociable

Our research results shows that our adult campers view themselves as far more sociable than non-campers (Graph 14) and are more likely to agree that camping is fun for all the family and a great way to make friends (Graph 15). When we consider that our findings showed that spending time with friends and family was what made people happy in their lives, then it seems as though camping really can play an important role in bringing people together in a more socially inclusive and community spirited way.

**GRAPH 14: CAMPERS FEEL MORE SOCIABLE**

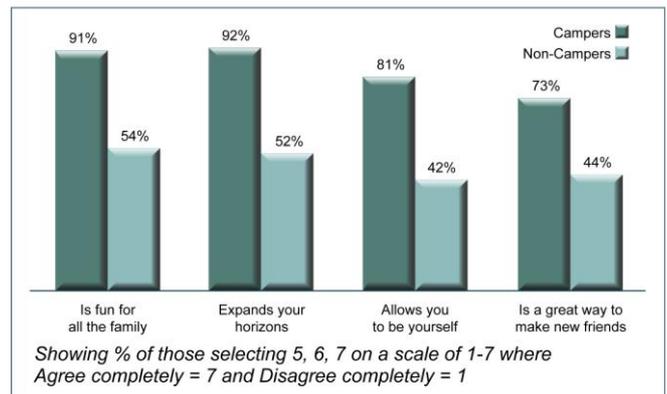
How sociable are you on an average day?  
How sociable are you on holiday?



But perhaps one of the most socially interesting findings of the study is agreement amongst campers that camping 'allows you to be yourself'. Given the pressures of everyday life and the demands on individuals to be many different people in many different roles, it's really encouraging to see that camping can play a role in helping people to really find themselves.

**GRAPH 15: THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF CAMPING**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about camping?



## So who goes camping?

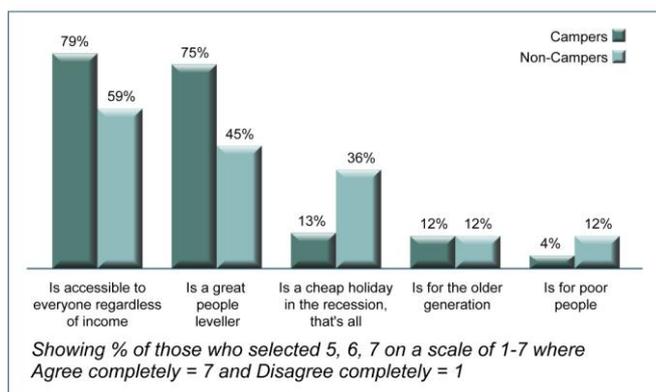
There is perhaps a perception that today's campers are either retirees in caravans and motorhomes or serious outdoor enthusiasts who camp as an integral part of their experience in nature. In recent years, the media has promoted it as a great holiday for families during recessionary times and in doing so increased its appeal, and its social acceptability.

It was interesting to note that there are still some perceptions and barriers to break down that were highlighted by our research. A third of non-campers viewed camping as 'a cheap holiday in the recession, that's all'; and despite the media focus on glamping, 12% of non-campers say camping is 'for poor people' (Graph 16).

On the other hand, those who camp advocate that camping is a great people leveller, allows you to be yourself and is accessible to everyone regardless of income.

### GRAPH 16: ATTITUDES TOWARDS CAMPING

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about camping?



Whilst we are encouraged by the numbers of people who are recognising the benefits that camping brings to their life, not least the way it has the ability to connect and bond people together, it is only through advocating the benefits and educating people through studies such as this that we will change perceptions of camping amongst those who have not yet experienced the richness it can bring to our lives on many levels.

### MEMBER'S STORY

*My husband and I used to own a touring caravan, but due to ill health had to part with it for a static instead. But three years ago we decided to try it again and on our first trip we met a lovely couple. We now holiday together and keep in touch just as a family does. We have made more friends and have so many offers of help since we returned to camping, we have never looked back.*

C.A. Thornton

### MEMBER'S STORY

*I admit that I was a very reluctant first time caravanner, envisaging a lot of chores and too much communal living. But two years ago, in our sixties, my husband and I decided to give it a try! Despite some early hitches, worst of all my husband being taken ill whilst we were on site, the plus side has been the amazing help and support we have received during our various 'trials' from site staff and caravanners, all of whom were complete strangers to us. In common with many people of our generation, we had believed that the old community spirit had disappeared, but no, it is alive and well on Club sites all over the country.*

Pat Gwynnette



# THE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

## CAMPING: SO WHAT? – THE ACADEMICS' VIEWPOINT

### RICHARDS, STOTT & PEEL – MARCH 2011

What if you hear the policy makers saying 'camping for all young people' and 'camping on the NHS' because camping is really is good for you'? You might reply by saying, not yet another quick fix health solution, with little or no merit as to how camping can actually improve the ills of our society. Well we might need to think again because, although camping is not something new, research evidence suggests that camping does in fact offer a range of psychological and social benefits for many of those that camp. It shows that camping provides opportunities for psychological growth and behavioural change – for example, young people with behavioural difficulties seem to respond well to camping and it seems to be a helpful therapeutic ingredient for interventions across a range of illnesses. Research also suggests that camping strengthens relationships between adults and children, and can help alleviate and reduce anxieties associated with a range of clinical conditions. Camping enables individuals to adopt new behaviours and develop relationships, and to experience themselves in a more natural environment to that experienced in everyday life.

The research undertaken for this study by The Camping and Caravanning Club offers a particularly helpful insight into how both adults and children view camping. It seems that children value the opportunity for the camping experience, in particular with parents, and that campers compared with non-campers seem to display differences in their wellbeing. Many of those who camp say they have closer relationships with family, friends and their community than those who don't camp. They also say that camping plays a significant role in 'allowing you to be yourself' – an important psychological dimension given the demands and pressures of everyday life. The survey also indicates that many people think that all children should have the opportunity to go camping. This is a position advocated by outdoor learning initiatives, which continue to use camping as a key ingredient to benefit from the unique enrichment and enhancement opportunities it clearly offers. We would agree that something transformational happens when we camp that doesn't happen when we just go for a walk, a bike ride or a day out – a greater immersion in nature which we get by being there at dusk (to see or experience the sun setting) and at dawn (to perhaps hear the dawn chorus and see the sun rise) is something that differentiates camping from what others are saying about the benefits of doing other activities in nature.

So, if camping can make people feel happier, more fulfilled and able to function more effectively in their everyday lives, this clearly warrants greater investment, research and engagement to help understand the real value of camping for our society, and particularly for our children. Advocating 'access to camping for all' may be more relevant than ever before. It should be an important consideration in the current climate where we understand mental health, family cohesion and connection with nature to be key influences on an individual's wellbeing and quality of life.



**Dr Kaye Richards (CPsychol)** is a Senior Lecturer in Outdoor Education at Liverpool John Moores University and a Chartered Psychologist of the British Psychological Society. Her background includes teaching, lecturing, and researching in Outdoor Education, Adventure Therapy and Counselling and Psychotherapy – and she has published in all of these areas. She was the launching editor of the academic Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, continues to contribute to national and international developments in Adventure Therapy and enjoys waking up to clear frosty mornings when camping in the mountains.



**Professor Tim Stott (FRGS, C.Geog. FHEA)** is Professor of Physical Geography & Outdoor Education at Liverpool John Moores University. A large part of his teaching and research is undertaken in the outdoors. His specialism is in fieldwork and expeditions which are often undertaken while camping for extended periods and this has taken him to areas such as Iceland, Svalbard, and Greenland. His family holidays with his wife and three children usually involve camping.



**Dr Jenny Peel MBACP (Accred)** is a psychotherapist, supervisor, trainer and researcher in private practice, with a background in providing professional training for psychotherapists and research into the use of outdoor adventure in psychotherapy. She was formerly a Principal Lecturer and chair of the Research Committee in the Faculty of Education at Liverpool John Moores University. She is a member of the British Red Cross Psychosocial Support team helping with psychological support for people caught up in major incidents overseas. She also runs one of the oldest mountain valley campsites in Snowdonia.

# THE CLUB'S COMMITMENT

The Camping and Caravanning Club hopes that this study will open a dialogue on the importance of camping to the nation's psychological and mental wellbeing – and that it will be viewed as a worthy contributor not just to the GDP of the nation (The Camping and Caravanning Club's members are estimated to deliver £40 million each year to the UK economy) but also to the GWB.

The phrase 'Happy Campers' is not just some flippant reference associated with a 1960s comedy film, but really does have strong rooted evidence for having true meaning in today's world.

Beyond raising the issue at social and policy maker level, The Camping and Caravanning Club wants to engage with the nation through an initiative this summer, titled 'The Big Pitch'. We will be encouraging those who have never camped to give it a go on **Saturday June 4th** and will be calling upon campers, caravanners, motorhomers and trailertenters to advocate the benefits to their non-camping friends and family.

What's more, we will be taking a measure of the nation's happiness pre- and post-event to see if camping really can improve the nation's GWB. Further details of The Big Pitch can be found at [campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/thebigpitch](http://campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/thebigpitch)

In addition, the Club will continue to further its understanding of the benefits of camping on the wellbeing of the nation and is committed to furthering research in this area. In the meantime, it will continue to:

- Expand its current network of 17,500 UK pitches to ensure that there is sufficient volume and variety of places for people wishing to camp to stay.
- Build relationships with government planning departments in order that new campsites can be developed.
- Expand its 'accommodation' offer, building on the camping pods and barns it has introduced to ensure that there are many different ways that people can stay and have access to the great outdoors.
- Invest in its campsite facilities. In the last 12 months the Club has invested £4.5million as part of a five year investment programme with a total cost of £29 million to ensure that those who camp have access to the very best facilities.
- Offer help, support and valuable services to both our existing members and those looking to try camping, caravanning, motorhoming or trailertenting. Whether that is through our range of products and services or through initiatives such as our New to Camping guide.
- Advocate the benefits of camping and ensure that it is on the national agenda through our continued support of National Camping & Caravanning Week (30th May – 5<sup>th</sup> June 2011), sponsorship of the National Outdoor Show and research studies such as this.

## Further Information:

To download a PDF copy of this report go to [realrichness.co.uk](http://realrichness.co.uk)

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