



There are three million anglers in Britain. These two are engrossed over the kind of secluded stretch of water that is becoming harder and harder to find and enjoy.

Photo: Syndication International

Room to relax

Within a generation leisure time may loom as large in our lives as work does now. Michael Dower, director of the Dartington Amenity Research Trust, says that planning must start now if the space and facilities needed to enjoy leisure are going to be available.

SUPPOSE YOU had a five-hour working day, a four-day week-end, a three-month annual holiday. How would you use your leisure?

Within a generation, the time we have to ourselves may loom as large in our lives as work does now. Already—with almost universal week-ends off and paid holidays, long retirements and increasing numbers at school and university—everyman's leisure is probably greater than at any time

since the Industrial Revolution.

No longer do the aristocrats have a monopoly of leisure. It is there for all to take and use if they wish. But do they wish? Most people apparently do—but others seem to prefer more money to more free time. One-third of male workers work over time, an average of nine hours per week; another one in ten have some second job. In a recent survey, half the people questioned said that they

would like more leisure; but one in seven would prefer to earn more money by overtime work, and a small proportion, particularly among retired people, would be happy to have less leisure! One sees no universal thirst for perpetual holidays.

What leisure can we expect for the future? Will our children, like the longshoremen in New York, work a 25-hour week? Can we expect a three-day week-end? Will we, like almost all Swedes and many French people already do, enjoy a four-week annual holiday—or even, like the senior workers of Kaiser Steel in California, have a special paid holiday of 13 weeks every 5 years? The present emphasis among trade unions is for a shorter working week, not longer holidays. But my guess is that we shall move rapidly to a clear two-day week-end for almost everybody, then to three weeks of paid holiday, and only after that to a shorter working day. But shift-working in factories, and holidays staggered to relieve pressure on roads and beaches, may turn many working days into working nights, week-days into week-ends, May and June or even February into holiday months.

And if we have such leisure, how shall we use it? Will time hang heavily on our hands or will life gain a new dimension of pleasure? British people have been among the most inventive in the world in the use of leisure. We are credited with inventing about 200 of the 250 or so games and sports of international significance—tennis, golf, cricket, football, darts, mountaineering, roller skating among them.

But, above all, the British watch rather than play. Bear-baiting, cock-fighting, dog-fights, public executions and prize-fighting have gone. But great crowds gather still to watch football, horse and greyhound racing. Even the followers of some 'active' pastimes are really quite passive—many of the three million fishermen, the 10 million amateur photographers, the happy crowds who spend £40 million on Bingo each year.

Newest and most popular of all these passive pastimes is T.V. Of the 14 million sets, three-quarters are now watched on average for over an hour each evening, with profound effect on people's use of leisure. Watching T.V. has helped to cut down cinema attendances, dog-track crowds, football gates, and horse-race crowds.

But T.V. has also encouraged interest in many sports shown on the programmes—swimming, which over five million people enjoy each year; dancing, which attracts five million people each week; golf, with nearly a million players. Interest in these and other activities has been boosted by other factors too—the rise in levels of income and education; changes in technical equipment; the rapid growth of car ownership.

Income and education levels have a marked effect on the amount of leisure people have and the way they use it. A recent survey showed up the contrast between people who had been to University and people who had not. The better educated group had longer annual holidays; clearer week-ends; and higher incomes. They spent less of their leisure time in passive pursuits, did more do-it-yourself work, watched T.V. less, read more books; were much more active in sailing, golf, walking and mountaineering. As more and more people move into the higher income groups, it seems likely that demand for space for these active pastimes will continue to rise sharply.

Consider also the effect of changes in technical equipment. They have contributed to the fivefold increase in the number of people sailing, a doubling in those who glide, a sixfold increase in archery clubs, over the last ten years. Ski-ing has been encouraged by the artificial ski-slope and the snow-making gun; water-ski-ing by the all-weather suit; golf by the automatic golf-range; sailing by the fibre-glass hull and nylon sail.

Above all, the car has changed our use of leisure. More than half the families in Britain now own cars; for them, leisure is not limited to places they can reach on foot, by train, bus or tram. They have an untiring horse, a mobile room, with space for children, dogs, carry-cots, camping kit, picnic table, lilo, hamper and all—a home away from home. People with cars see their relatives twice as often as those without, get into the country far more often, can travel readily for 40 miles or more to sail or water-ski, can tow a boat or tote a canoe.

The holiday, too, is transformed by the car. In 1951, only a quarter of holiday-makers went by car; now more than two-thirds do so. The holiday in a traditional resort, approached by train, is giving way to one spread widely along the coasts and across the countryside. Like snails—only much faster—people carry their houses with them. Over one-third of British families have tents and camping equipment: 2½ million people take camping holidays each year. The coasts of Wales and the South West hold thousands of holiday caravans, chalets and holiday flats. A growing number of people have the time, the money and the mobility to own second homes, following the pattern already well-established in Scandinavia and the United States. Cottages in Scotland, barns in North Wales, mills in the South West, are being bought up by city people and converted into holiday homes.

Will there be space for all this activity? The Duke of Edinburgh has said, 'we are on the threshold of the age of leisure, and there are stark and immediate problems facing us . . . we have to concentrate on providing facilities of the right sort and in the right place, and properly organised'.

The truth is that neither our towns nor our countryside are effectively designed for the leisure of our present population—never mind the extra 15 or so million people we may have by the end of the century. Consider the home, where three-quarters of our leisure is spent. 10 million people live in flats or street houses which are too small, too cramped, too old-fashioned, too lacking in gardens, garages and outdoor space to give any flexibility for family hobbies or home activities.

Much of our post-war housing is scarcely more fitted to leisure than the slums it replaced. True, the architects have visions of more spacious housing, with less flats, more gardens, even (as in the new Thamesmead estate in London) boat harbours among the houses. But, unless the sights of many a local authority are raised, we will not get houses really designed to keep pets, to play pop-records, to take the car to pieces or paint the boat.

Looking beyond the home, where are the pubs, the clubs, the meeting rooms? Where are the sports halls, the all-weather playing surfaces, the decent changing rooms, the swimming baths we need. Britain's very pioneering has given us a poor set of sports facilities. Most swimming pools are aged in design, cramped in facilities. Courts and fields for other sports have sprung up at random. Recent surveys by Regional Sports Councils have suggested that to meet present demands alone we need to build 100 new swimming pools and as many new sports halls; to create 100 new golf

courses; at least to double our water-sport facilities. To achieve this at reasonable speed may demand a doubling of our capital expenditure on leisure.

Meanwhile, our countryside is split among thousands of private owners; largely devoted to farming; beset, particularly around the cities, with barbed wire and 'keep out' notices. Land open to the public varies greatly in amount and usefulness, from great commons to measly laybys. Those who wish to glide, to ski, to sail, to water-ski, may have to travel miles, put up with severe crowding, or find no place at all. Compared with Finland, Holland, Switzerland, we are gravely lacking in inland water, and much of what we have is not effectively used for recreation. Our roads are narrow, our footpaths fragmented, our bridleways inadequate. Cycling has become so unpleasant on crowded roads that most of the 18½ million cycles sold in Britain since the war lie rusting in out-houses.

This lack of deliberate design for recreation produces impact on man—in terms of frustration, lack of opportunity, long and tedious journeys, congestion on week-end roads and holiday routes—and on the land. The latter impact is less recognised. It is no longer just a matter of what Cyril Joad called 'the townsman's invasion of the countryside', with the attendant litter, vandalism, trespass, annoyance to country people, forest fires and damage to farm crops and livestock. We are now into an era of strong impact on the land itself—the impact of



Many people manage to enjoy Bank Holidays despite the packed beaches.

Photo: Syndication International



The struggle to get to the coast can easily destroy the mood of relaxation before you even arrive.

Photo: Syndication International

hundreds of car-wheels or human feet, treading, compressing, compacting, destroying herbage, loosening soil, killing the roots of trees.

These problems are now familiar, from the slopes of Cairngorm to the sand dunes of North Devon, the turf of Box Hill to the glades of Epping Forest. They have been perhaps best expressed by Colin Buchanan in his study of the New Forest; and in his firm conclusion that not only traffic in towns, but also leisure in the countryside should be subject to the controls of environmental capacity.

In this context, we must plan—and we must manage—our land for leisure. Many schemes for country parks, picnic sites and other features are now coming up under the Countryside Act. Of these, the most dramatic features are the major regional and country parks, mostly based on worked-out mineral areas, such as the gravel pits of the Lea Valley. These major schemes will do much to concentrate pressures on spots designed and managed for the purpose. But the broad areas of farming and forestry cannot—and need not—stand aloof: there can be positive benefit between them and recreation activity.

The most obvious link to agriculture is, of course, in farm holidays, already an important source of income to many farmers and of holiday enjoyment to town families. Even in remote areas with small farms, a growth in farm holidays could be encouraged by extension or conversion of farm buildings or layout of caravan and camp sites—and also by creating attractions for riding, shooting, fishing, nature study, even for educational use of the farming process and of the countryside.

In forestry, too, we are seeing a swing towards recreation and amenity—not just as secondary

aspects but as equal, and in places dominant, factors in forest planting and management. We are likely to see the increasing use of forests as the setting and shelter for recreation, from camping to watching deer, picnicking to orienteering.

In all this planning, though, we must keep our eye on the problem of management. It is not enough to create facilities, with roads and car parks to serve them. They must be managed. This goes way beyond the obvious things like cutting grass or collecting litter. We may have to direct people away from fragile areas to tough ones, to prevent vandalism, to reduce fire risks, to check pollution, to control cars by simple physical barriers. Perhaps the most tricky, we must find ways to balance the use of land against its capacity.

The two most obvious ways to control use—by congestion, or by price—are rarely acceptable. Congestion wastes time, money and temper: price control acts against the less wealthy. We must find more positive methods—creation of a fair and accessible choice of places to go; sound design so that people need not constantly move about; sensible systems of circulation and traffic management; possibly, encouragement of staggered recreation-times; and, serving all of these, more and better information and education.

Could not our new local radio stations tell people when one park is full and encourage them to go to one which is not? Could we not have consumers' guides to the leisure facilities of each region, a sort of 'Leisure Which?' Could we not have centres in each rural area, like that recently opened in the Lake District or now being built in Epping Forest, to show our people the extraordinary variety of landscape, of wildlife and of historic features which we have in this island?