

## Introduction

In this piece of coursework I will be focusing on the effect of tourism in the French Alps, in particular the area in and around Notre -Dame de Bellecombe. I will be looking at the benefits and adverse effects of tourism, such as the profit made by tourism, house prices, the environmental damages, and the damage to the agricultural industry. In addition, I will be looking at the new structures that have had to be built to accommodate the new amount of tourists, such as dams, trains, chair lifts and new resorts.

The question I will be asking is there a place in the French Alps for huge amounts of tourists and will they ruin such a fragile environment.

The data was gathered on a Geography Field trip with Bristol Cathedral School on the first week of August 2003. The data was collected by the GCSE group by using a questionnaire, it was then set out by a member of staff.

The main areas I will be looking at in this coursework are Notre -Dame de Bellecombe, Chamonix, Les Saisies, Annecy, and Beaufort-sur-Doron (see map on next page for a general map to the area). In addition, a 'honeypot' Gorges du fier located near Annecy. In each of these places, I will see if tourism has been a benefit or had an adverse effect. In addition, I will see what the area has done to compensate the volume of tourists; for example new car parks, toilets and commercial areas. I will also see if there is a pattern to these new resorts like there is with a seaside resort. Below there is a map of the area we visited with the marked location of where we were based and the areas visited.

# The Effect of the Increase of Tourism on the French Town of Chamonix

Chamonix is the main town at the base of Mt. Blanc; therefore, it attracts many tourists all year. In the winter, there are various ski slopes for the vast amount of skiers and snow boarders. In summer, it attracts tourists because of the spectacular scenery and glaciers that become much more apparent because of the little surrounding snow. Chamonix has adjusted to meet the tourists needs, for example, at the mer de glace they have built cable cars and a tunnel under the glacier, with rooms inside the glacier.

This shows how the local area is not trying to subdue the number of tourists although the pollution from the N506 and Mt. Blanc tunnel. The pollution is especially damaging in the alpine mountains, as there is only greenery during a few months in summer. This means that carbon dioxide could gather in the valleys because of the lack of trees and would therefore create a smog affect.

In addition, the ski runs have a damaging effect on the slopes as the number of skiers, and snow boarders damage the ground beneath the slopes. This is especially damaging because in the Alps there is only a small window of growing time before the frost comes back. This means that the ground has little time to repair and so the effect builds up over the seasons. To combat this, the authorities have allowed a slope to run for a certain amount of time.

However, this means that there is building of more ski runs. This causes sight pollution, which is a problem for the area. This happens because new chair lifts are built to accommodate all the tourists and so these metal chair lifts appear all over the landscape. In addition, the constantly moving of the ski runs, means so does some of the bars and restaurants located by the slopes. This relocation of the buildings means more damage to the landscape therefore not escaping the original problem.

Chamonix has also attracted and encouraged vast amounts of tourists because of the demand for money. Before the tourists the valley was mainly agricultural however when the first explorers started to arrive the industry quickly changed to suite the more profitable business. Hotels have sprung up all down the Chamonix valley as well as a big shopping centre to accommodate all the tourists. As cars have become more widely available so the traffic increases and along with the heavy goods vehicles passing through the Chamonix valley will become spoilt. We can see the amount of traffic from my survey on the Route Blanche (N506):

Type of Vehicle	Tally	Total
Lorries		3
Vans		4
Coaches		1
Cars	 	55
Caravans		1
Motorbikes		2

This survey was conducted over 5 mins

In addition to all this traffic, we did a survey of people in the shopping centre to see how many people were passing us. The survey was conducted over 10 mins

Age Group	Male	Total	Female	Total
Child		6		4
Teenager		4		7
Young Adult		18		24
Middle Aged		14		17
Elderly		1		2

Total Males = 42  
Total Females = 54  
Final Total = 96

From this, we can see that the centre areas of Chamonix are very busy too. However, what are the benefits of having all these tourists apart from the cash flow.

The benefits of having lots of tourists visiting Chamonix are employment, to accommodate all the tourists hotels need staff which means that the local civilians can get jobs easily, this reduces the chance of beggars. This helps boost the town/city's appearance and therefore it becomes a more desirable place to visit. In addition, all the money helps pay for better public services, for example police services, schools, transport, and public places such as toilets, telephones.

Furthermore, the increase in tourists means that house prices in the local area rise because of the demand for holiday or second homes. This means that local people can sell their house off and make lots of money, or rent their house out while they are away, or in some case use spare rooms to make a guest house. This allows extra income for the families allowing them to have a better lifestyle.

However, if too many homes become second homes then in the off-peak seasons the city/town becomes like a ghost town as there are so little locals. This may not be such a problem in the Chamonix valley as tourists come for the beauty in the summer and skiing in the winter. This means that the tourist year never ends so the locals do not have to worry about jobs because it is not just a small season.

Nevertheless, there are major cons to the number of tourists. The large number of ski slopes causes slope damage, soil erosion, and it increases the surface run-off. The Alps is also losing vast amounts of trees (deforestation) because of the new ski slopes; this helps in the increase of the levels of carbon dioxide pollution. In addition, the increased surface run-off damages the local crops, flora, and fauna. Furthermore, the young adults coming to the area maybe become a crime problem with violence because of alcohol. However, the main source of any new crime is pickpockets or thief's breaking into cars. This costs money in insurance and police resources, although the cost is minimal compared with the profit.

Chamonix also has a big shopping area to entice tourists to spend more money. The results are more concrete, too many people and so the small town becomes overcrowded. The concrete also increases the surface run off from rain, which may cause flash floods.

Tourism has three environmental impacts on the French Alps, Physical Impact, Economic Impact and Social Impact. Some of these impacts are assets, however some are adverse. I will now look at and compare the other towns/cities that I visited and find out what their pro's and con's were.

# The Effect Of Tourism on The French Town of Annecy

Annecy is an idyllic setting, close to Switzerland and Italy with easy access by road, rail, and air. Local representatives have successfully developed this unique natural site over the last 40 years, making Annecy first-class business location. Annecy has a rough population of 50,000, which is 41,000 more than Chamonix. It is a typically French town in the French Alps. It attracts hundreds of tourists every year throughout both seasons. In winter, it attracts tourists who are prepared to drive to the resorts or are passing through to go to the resorts. However in summer Annecy becomes much more tourist related. The town has a large lake, which is used for recreational purposes. Pedalo's, restaurant boats, sailing, fishing and swimming are all available to tourists.

The town has an old part, which is another attraction with a traditional French market. Annecy has a large range of museums, châteaux, and castles, such as Annecy castle Museum and the Arenthon Castle. However, Annecy tourism has been changed to suite all types of tourists, there are sailing courses, paragliding, windsurfing, handgliding and skiing available to tourists. Therefore, in Annecy the tourist season is more varied than in Chamonix. In summer, there are sport activities and various walks. In winter, there is also skiing however Annecy is a very good place to be central to many ski slopes. In addition, there are castles and museums open all year round.

However, by the 1960's Annecy was so polluted that the lake had lost its blue colour. This was a combination of various problems, pollution was pumped into the lake, also the restaurant boats where pumping oil etc. into the lake. This had an extreme effect on the lake, as it is a very fragile environment. Due to careful environmental control and understanding, the lake was cleaned up. The lake has now regained it's blue colour and is now one of the most cleanest lakes in the world.

Other damages to the surrounding environment as in Chamonix is the over use of the ski slopes and the amount of traffic. In Addition, they both have railways linking each other up. However, Annecy has an airport nearby. This all helps make it easier for the vast amounts of tourists to gain access to Annecy. Nevertheless, the effects of all this pollution takes it toll on the fragile environment.

Like Chamonix, the same problem occurs with the pollution and the environment. Although, the pollution did effect the lake, it lost its blue colour because of the pollution. However, the authorities cleaned the lake before the situation became irreversible. Lac de Annecy, is now one of the cleanest lakes in the world.

The volume of traffic is also noticeable, as I conducted a survey over 15 minutes on a main road in Annecy.

Vehicle	Left	Right	Total
Cars	228	240	568
Vans	39	24	63
Motorbikes	24	18	42
Buses	9	3	12
Caravans	6	1	7
Lorries	3	3	6

Total 698

In addition, I conducted a survey on Pedestrians over a 15-minute period.

Category	Male	Female	Total
Children	12	12	24
Teenagers	48	33	81
Young Adults	42	34	76
Middle Aged	36	99	135
Elderly	54	39	93

Total 409



From these results, we can work out how long it would take the entire local population of Annecy to pass by. Using the rough figure of 50,000 people, we can work out that:

409 people in 15-minutes,  
409 times by 4 = 1 hour = 1636 people per hour,  
Then we: 50,000 divided by 1636 = 30.56,

This shows that it would take only 30 hours for all the population of Annecy to pass by. This is a very short time so I believe that there is a high percentage is tourists in Annecy to make up these numbers.

Annecy is different from Chamonix because it can rely on tourism in both seasons. The artificial beaches and the marinas help this. In addition, Annecy host markets to draw in both locals and interested tourists. There are less gift shops than in Chamonix because it has not been effected by tourism. This maybe because the locals do not want to change from their lifestyle. The stalls have meat, cheese, or olives for sale, which is all local produce.

The Effect  
Of Tourism on The  
French Town of  
Les Saisies

Les Saisies is a very new ski resort that has been built in the French Alps near to Beaufort. This resort is completely dependant on the tourists industry, more so than both Chamonix and Annecy. The reason for this is that Chamonix and Annecy are in the valleys and so if necessary resort back to their original industry of farming. However, Les Saisies is at the top of a mountain and so it would be near impossible to grow anything. In addition, Les Saisies has nearly no local residents. The reason for this is that the chalets are rented, or they are holiday homes. Therefore, the place is very much emptier in the summer than the winter. In an effort to stop Les Saisies becoming a ghost town in summer, various activities are available. Some of these are pony trekking, miniature golf, and various children based rides. There is also a small lake, which in summer, can be used for swimming, and in winter, ice-skating.

Nevertheless, Les Saisies has caused various environmental problems for the Alps. The fast building of new chalets and more and more ski runs have had a bad effect on the landscape. The new wave of concrete has created the problem of fast surface run-off, which could cause a flash flood in the valley below. In addition, the ski slopes are destroying and eroding the soil. This means in summer the grass struggles to grow and so the slope seems bare, and causes sight pollution on the natural landscape. I conducted a population and traffic survey both taken over a time of 15 minutes.

Vehicle	Left	Right	Total
Cars	84	36	120
Vans	6	6	12
Motorbikes	2	3	5
Buses	1	0	1
Caravans	0	0	0
Lorries	6	6	12

Total 270

Category	Male	Female	Total
Children	12	6	18
Teenagers	3	6	9
Young Adults	15	18	33
Middle Aged	36	30	66
Elderly	0	0	0

Total 126

Les Saisies has a different variety of shops compared to Chamonix and Annecy. They are more based on sports and designer clothing rather than cheese or meat produce. However these new shops, chalets and ski slopes create soil erosion and increase surface run-off.

In addition, Les Saisies does not have the natural lake such as Annecy. In an attempt a small lake and artificial beech has been built at the bottom of the hill. In addition, in summer small activity rides have also been set up. Some of these activities include pony riding, bouncy castles, and go-carts e.t.c. However, these do not pull in enough tourists because of the stiff competition of Annecy.

# The Effect Of Tourism on The French Town of Beaufort

Beaufort is a typical Alpine French village with still very strong agricultural roots and views. Beaufort is still making traditional cheeses from the cows grazing on the green mountains in summer. When we visiting the cheese plant, we were shown a documentary, about the local area. It told us about how it was a small quite agricultural area of the Alps. However, several dams appeared, to supply the increasing demand in power. This meant that several cattle grazing areas were flooded. This meant that the agricultural profit dipped and so Beaufort like the surrounding towns had to rely more and more on tourism. An example of this is the cheese plant itself as it depends on the tourists visiting to make a profit on its cheese. In addition, the plant has its own gift shop shows the move to tourism.

One of the major differences that tourism has brought to Beaufort is the new four dams. These were built to accommodate the new thirst for electricity. This meant that four pastures were flooded because of the new H.E.P. dams. Their building in this environment annoyed locals and environmentalists because of the physical and sight pollution introduced. In addition, by flooding the pastures meant that important grazing land was lost so over grazing was now a problem. In a fragile environment such as the French Alps, this means that the grass cannot grow back so quickly and so the mountainsides become bare. This effect may lead to landslides or avalanches and therefore lose of, which would severely damage the tourist industry.

When we visited Beaufort cheese factory, we were treated to a documentary about the effects to the agricultural industry. The film was about the damaging effects that tourism had brought to the area. This was surprising as the entire factory was built to allow tourists to learn, taste, and buy cheese made there. An example of this is they built a viewing platform in order that tourists could see the making of the cheese. In addition, the film was supposed to be about the local environment however, it was merely propaganda for the factory as it commented on the quality of the cows and their looking after. Furthermore, the factory and the film linked the cheese continuously. This was amazing how a company had such views against tourism but was making money off them. This shows how the locals have adapted to the tourist and have made it their prime industry.

In Beaufort, we did not take a traffic or pedestrian count as we only stopped briefly and therefore did not have time.

The Effect  
Of Tourism on The  
French Town of  
Notre-Dame de  
Bellecombe

Notre-Dame de Bellecombe was the small alpine village which we were based during our visit to the French Alps. It had a small population and most of the chalets were holiday homes rather than locals. During the summer, Notre-Dame de Bellecombe is very quiet and very sleepy. However, during the winter Notre-Dame de Bellecombe is a different place as there are various ski runs at the top of the village. In addition, there was an outdoor sports shop next to our hotel, which sold skiing equipment. Furthermore, the tourist brochure shows Notre-Dame de Bellecombe in winter, which its prime tourist times.

Unlike Chamonix and Annecy, Notre-Dame de Bellecombe cannot attract as many tourists because the industry has not adapted to the summer industry. This maybe because the funding is not there or the locals are happy with the one season that there is. However, Notre-Dame de Bellecombe seemed to be one of the lesser towns effected by tourism. This maybe because of its location or because of the sights nearby which takes tourists away from the Notre-Dame de Bellecombe.



I conducted some traffic and pedestrian surveys In Notre -Dame de Bellecombe:

Vehicle	Left Side	Right Side
Cars	70	54
Vans	3	8
Lorries	1	2
Motorbikes	21	23
Caravans	0	1
Buses	1	2

Age Type	Male	Female
Children	12	3
Teenagers	6	3
Young Adults	24	12
Middle Aged	30	39
Elderly	3	3

The surveys were conducted over 15mins. The results show us that Notre - Dame de Bellecombe is a quiet town compared to Chamonix and Annecy, which is representative with its size. However, this is quite busy considering it is not a major town. The main reason for this is that it is a busy road because it links Chamonix with Les Saises and Beaufort.

# The Effect Of Tourism on The Gorges Du Fier

Gorges du fier is one of the principle rivers in Haute -Savoie, it is at the base of the mountain Mont-Charvin. It was formed by water over thousands of years slowly carving and eroding away the hard rock. The vast amount of water needed to do this came from the last ice age. When it melted there was a vast amount of water, which was forced against the rocks, and caused this erosion. Today we can see many potholes formed as well as a deep gorge. The Gorges du Fier have had a gangway put into it so visitors can walk inside the gorge to get a better view of the gorge.

The gorge is only ten minutes drive from Annecy. This means that the accessibility helps it become a 'Honeypot'. A 'Honeypot' is an area, which attracts many visitors. This honeypot is boosted because it is only ten minutes drive from Annecy despite being in the countryside. In addition, the gorge attracts teenagers to the area as the gorge offers a river to swim. The gorges have clearly been adapted

to accommodate the tourists as a café and gift shop, have been built along side. Furthermore, they have built a big car park and pathways to make it easier for visiting tourists.

# The Effect Of Tourism on The Mer De Glace

The Mer de Glace is a glacier and a honeypot attraction on Mount Blanc. It attracts thousands of tourists every year. Once you have reached the Mer de Glace top you descend on cable cars, then onto concrete stairs. They have built these to accommodate the vast amounts of tourists.

At the Mer de Glace, we decided to conduct our surveys as a group. This was a good place as there we many different nationalities gathered to look at the view. The parking at the foot of the mountain next to the train station was shows how many tourists were going up the railway. (Photo is located under Chamonix heading). The main way of transporting the tourists up to the glacier is by railway. Below is a picture of the queues waiting just to get a ticket for the train.

In addition, to make more money out of the tourists visiting, they have had to build several entrances into the Mer de Glace because it is moving slowly down the mountain. Furthermore, inside they had carved the glacier out to make it into separate rooms. However, inside was a great Bernard, which tourists could have their photo taken with, for a price. Unfortunately, I was unable to get a photo, as it was too dark inside for my camera. However, below is a photo of the entrance to the glacier.

## **Conclusion**

I believe that my project has been accurate to the task that was set. However, I do think that there have been some aspects to my project, that have been limited, and would change if I returned. The main limiting aspect was the survey, I think that it was too small on scale. I think that I would perhaps conduct the survey in more areas and ask more people in each area. Although, this was less possible because of the short amount of time that we had in the different towns. Furthermore, more conclusive traffic and pedestrian survey could have been conducted. A way of achieving this would be for a longer period, over different times of the day. In addition conducting the surveys at rush hour may show the true amounts of traffic in the French Alps.

If I was to change the title it would be "With the current rate of the effects of tourism on the French Alps be too damaging". However, to answer this question I would have to collect more environmental data to see how the effects are increasing.

I think that aspects of my project could be used as facts towards a general survey on the French Alps. However, the survey I conducted I do not believe is of a high standard so I would not recommend it as a conclusive or statistically valid survey. The reason for this is that there was a natural attraction to ask English speaking tourists such as Americans or English tourists. In addition, at the same time as our visit there was an English school visiting. This may have boosted the tourists from England giving a false impression. Furthermore, our traffic surveys were not very vast or well documented. Maybe car types could have been recorded or simply a better recording of the number of cars.

My results have shown me that the traffic and pedestrian levels in the French Alps is very high, considering that the towns are so small. From this data, I can see that too much pollution is being given off into the mountains, which will have damaging effects. This may cause big problems in the future.

## **Evaluation**

The effect of tourism on Chamonix, Les Saisies, Beaufort, Annecy in the French Alps is damaging. However, I still cannot answer if it is too damaging or if it is out of control. Nevertheless, the effects of the ski slopes, chalets, and other concrete structures has to be harmful to the environment.

I believe that the French Alps has suffered from the effects of tourism. We can see this in more than several occasions, such as Annecy's lake, ski slopes, trails, Mer de Glace, and Beaufort's agricultural industry. However, despite these effects the Alps remain beautiful and on the surface are still a place of beauty. I do think that there is a problem but it is not as big as it is shown to be. We can see this with Beaufort as it adapted to make money from tourism. Although, this maybe the case, actions may have to be taken to make sure the Alps do not become ruined. If they did, I do not think that could ever be salvaged like Annecy's lake. I believe this has been realised by some authorities, however, the main problem with the effects is that cannot be decided by one country alone as the Alps are split up into several countries. This maybe the reason why tourism in the long term may ruin the Alps.

The study that I have done maybe useful as a guide to other students investigating a similar subject. It could be used for traffic surveys, as I believe I have been accurate and precise with the details. This may help give a better picture of pollution given off into the Alps.



