

## The Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation

[Mr James Gray *in the Chair*]

**David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the economic value of outdoor recreation.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I know that your interest in outdoor recreation extends to polar regions, and that if you were not in the Chair, you might be speaking in the debate. Thank you very much for all that you have done to support this cause in previous years.

I draw hon. Members' attention to the register of all-party groups and my position as a co-chair of the all-party group on mountaineering, along with the hon. Member—my friend—for Bassetlaw (John Mann), and as secretary of the all-party group on national parks.

This is an important debate. I am delighted to have secured it and very grateful to see so many hon. Members supporting this cause. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is also grateful for that. It is great to see her in her place. I am grateful for all the support that she provides as well, and we look forward to her response to the debate. The last time we discussed outdoor recreation in the House was in September last year. No doubt there will have been progress on which we can be updated since that time. We look forward to hearing the Minister's views on that. I know that her Parliamentary Private Secretary, our hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Heather Wheeler), would also love to speak in the debate, given her interest in clay pigeon shooting. We all have these great interests that enrich our lives.

It is important to recognise that this is a key moment because the Government are currently reviewing submissions to the sport strategy consultation, which concluded on 2 October. The Minister will no doubt be navigating through many responses to it. She will be acutely aware also that the spending review is under way, so no doubt every penny spent within her responsibilities will be reviewed by the Treasury. If that does not help hon. Members to see the need for a long walk, I do not think anything will, but I am not sure that a long walk is best for the Minister right now—she will know what I mean—so I hope that this debate will help instead. That is not to say that the Minister needs any convincing of the physical benefits of outdoor recreation: she is probably the sportiest Sports Minister ever, given the work that she has done with local sports teams—football teams—and playing football herself. Not the least of her achievements was going up an Ecuadorian volcano with the hon. Members for Bassetlaw and for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland).

Today, I want to highlight to Parliament and in Parliament the economic value of outdoor recreation. It is absolutely key. It is vital for improving physical health, mental wellbeing and of course—

**Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Does he agree that, like other such clubs, Redditch Road and Path Cycling Club, one of the oldest in the country, provides great benefits for all sorts of people, but especially the youth of Redditch, such as through the Slipstreamers group?

**David Rutley:** Absolutely. Cyclists have been making great strides—*[Laughter.]* I am mixing my metaphors. They have been making great forward progress anyway in making the case for cycling. I think that this debate is helping to extend that to mountain biking, walking and all other pursuits, but yes, local groups are key.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing a debate on such an important issue. It is wonderful to see such a turnout and it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. My own constituency of Torfaen has wonderful opportunities for outdoor pursuits, including a world heritage site and a wonderful industrial landscape to walk around. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is even more important today that we emphasise the value of outdoor recreation, given the temptations that there are in indoor recreation, such as Xboxes and so on? We must continue to emphasise the value of outdoor recreation.

**David Rutley:** Absolutely. I cannot stress enough how important that is. One issue that I will mention is the importance of engaging young people in this agenda. It is all too apparent that too many young people spend too much time indoors and are not as physically active as they should be, so that was a very good point well made.

We need to highlight the economic benefits of outdoor recreation, not least in our rural economies. That is key in driving domestic leisure and tourism. It is key not just in attracting tourists from within the UK, but in attracting international tourists to Britain. We need to do that beyond the usual magnet of London.

**Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he agree that the Government could usefully consider reducing VAT on tourism? That has been allowed for since 2008 in the ECOFIN agreement, and many other countries have reduced the VAT to 5%, with very beneficial effects on the hospitality sector in general.

**David Rutley:** That is a very interesting point. I will not stray too far into that territory, because it is probably best left to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—it is well above my pay grade—but the hon. Gentleman has made his point and I am sure that others will pay due attention to it.

We now have some very important assets in place. I am thinking of, for example, the creation of the English coastal path. That will be critical to bring people to some of our coastal towns and villages that need increased visits. This week, we heard from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs the announcement of the extension of two of England's most celebrated national parks: the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District. That is very important. It is also important for them, so that they can compete better with my own beloved Peak District for national attention. It is certainly a very positive move. Indeed, our great outdoors is now, rightly, a key attraction in the Government's GREAT campaign. I hope that recreation in our great outdoors will be helped to flourish for the sake of our national health, wellbeing and wealth.

Let us consider participation. According to evidence cited by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, those who play sport are healthier, happier and more likely to be successful in academic study and professional life. Meanwhile, ukactive has highlighted how, in some parts of the UK, more than 40% of the adult population are classed as inactive. Some 12.5 million people in Britain are failing to raise their heart rate for more than half an hour a week over a 28-day period. I am sure that colleagues will agree that that is a real concern.

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this very important debate. There is a lot of focus on spectator sports in this country, so I am glad he is mentioning participation and talking about outdoor recreation. I am thinking particularly of the benefits of cycling. He mentioned the potential for increased longevity through different types of exercise. I understand that regular cyclists can live up to five years longer on average. In my constituency, we have Cyclesolihull and one of the most successful and long established cycling clubs in the country. It has

produced many national champions and even Tour de France riders. Will my hon. Friend recognise the central role of cycling in outdoor recreation and health?

**David Rutley:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Of course I support what he says. Cycling is key; it is central to the whole debate. In Macclesfield we have the Macclesfield Wheelers, and of course Team GB use the area of Cheshire and Dame Sarah Storey lives in the Macclesfield constituency. My hon. Friend is right: cycling is also key to the debate.

Although many would be reluctant to put on a pair of football or rugby boots, some 20 million people said that they would like to participate in outdoor recreation of some kind when they contributed to Sport England's commissioned research "Getting Active Outdoors". Some will need a nudge and others will need to be empowered or enabled to achieve their aspiration, but it will be worth it, because if we can inspire people and get more people off the sofa and active in one or more kinds of outdoor recreation, we can harvest considerable economic benefits in terms of health spending saved and productive value added.

**Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP):** I join in the congratulations to the hon. Gentleman on the debate. It is similar to a debate that I had in this Chamber last year about childhood obesity. He is coming to the nub of the issue now. Many people would like to become more active, but some of them feel they are the exception rather than the rule. What we really need to do is to get the younger generation, as a group of people, to understand that they are not exceptional or unusual; this is a lifestyle that they need to adopt, for the greater good not just of themselves but of their peers.

**David Rutley:** That is an incredibly strong point. We should look at the work that the Scouts do, for example—it is great to see Scouts and Guides doing so well—because what we want to do, as the hon. Gentleman has said, is encourage people into a healthier, more active lifestyle, which can carry on throughout the whole of their lives.

When I was preparing for the debate, the charity Sense got in touch with me with its excellent paper "The Case for Play", which includes a review and describes the need to emphasise the importance of facilitating what it calls joyful recreation opportunities for children with often complex needs. That is a lifestyle choice that we have to encourage.

**Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con):** With Christmas coming, I am sure that a lot of youngsters will be demanding that their parents buy them the latest Xbox, or goodness knows what, which plugs into the back of a TV. That would be great exercise for their thumbs, but that is about it. Perhaps instead they should get a Fitbit or trainers and be encouraged to get out and do outdoor activities, to ensure that they are fit not just for one or two years but for the long term. We are living longer, so we want to make sure that people will be healthy when they reach 50, 60 and 70.

**David Rutley:** My great friend is a wonderful example of what a healthy lifestyle can do for a person, and I think that young people in Ribble Valley and far beyond should look at his Fitbit and his healthy lifestyle.

In each of our areas, bodies like Sport Cheshire help to bring together local interests such as businesses and local authorities. Recently, Sport Cheshire changed its name to Active Cheshire to reinforce what we have all been talking about—the importance of encouraging active lifestyles. That change of name signals a change in attitude and approach that we should encourage.

Let me move on to some of the health benefits, having mentioned some of the challenges. A study published in *The Lancet* in 2012 highlighted how inactivity is responsible for 17% of premature deaths in the UK every year and shortens a person's lifespan by three to five years. Other hon. Members have commented on similar studies. The Government-sponsored paper "Moving More, Living More" states that the cost associated with inactivity in the UK is some £20 billion a year.

**Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I am sure he will recall that when we were out in the peak district a few weeks ago, we had a number of discussions about this. It struck me that although efforts are being made around Whitehall, we need to make sure that Departments work better together—particularly the Department of Health, the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—so that we can encourage people, for health reasons and for enjoyment, to get out and take part in outdoor activities.

**David Rutley:** The hon. Gentleman makes a strong point. I will come on to the fact that I think we need a more cross-departmental approach. That is heading our way, but there is clearly more that has to be done. Just before I move off health, it is worth mentioning some constructive initiatives—I am sure that similar things are happening in each of our constituencies—such as "Walking for Health", an initiative by the Ramblers and Macmillan. Such initiatives show that real health and mental health benefits come from that very low-cost outdoor recreation.

I am not simply talking about saving money on the health budget. Outdoor recreation makes money as well, and we have to give that proper focus. A workforce that is physically healthy and mentally well is more productive than one that is not, and the outdoor economy has real direct and indirect benefits. In the UK, world-leading British manufacturers of outdoor gear, such as Berghaus, Barbour and Brompton, are helping people to be active in areas from the highest mountain to the flattest cityscapes. In Macclesfield, we have the UK corporate offices of Mammut and Mountain Equipment.

The tourism sector, which has been referred to, benefits hugely from outdoor recreation. In fact, a great report produced recently by the Sport and Recreation Alliance, "Reconomics", which I commend to the House, shows that the visitor spend associated with outdoor recreation is an annual £21 billion. That is a huge contributor to the visitor economy and rural diversification. We are always keen to encourage more visitors to the country and to our constituencies. We are fortunate in Macclesfield to have the "walkers are welcome" initiative in Disley and Bollington, which both make a big contribution.

We have come a long way in the past three years, as many of us have worked to make the case for outdoor recreation. A year or so ago, we came forward with six key proposals for Government action, and a broad coalition of support was brought together. I know that the word "coalition" is not necessarily the most popular these days, but we have achieved that in the outdoor space. The British Mountaineering Council, which has given huge amounts of support, the Outdoor Industry Association, the Ramblers, Living Streets, the Youth Hostels Association—YHA—the Campaign for National Parks and the National Trust have all come together in recognition of the importance of the sector.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con):** One of the things that we should support is the money side. My hon. Friend has put it quite clearly: we have to get people to take part. My constituency covers Exmoor, and one of the biggest problems that we find with getting people to enjoy Exmoor and the Quantocks is that we have not got the money in the system to enable us to invest in bikes, canoes, yachts or whatever it may be. Perhaps I could add to my hon.

Friend's thoughts the need to ask the Government to come up with some sort of funding that we can ring-fence for areas like his, which are some of the most beautiful parts of Britain.

**David Rutley:** My hon. Friend represents a really beautiful part of the world, and I understand the point that he makes. It is important to make sure that funding is allocated, and the local enterprise partnerships have an important role to play in that dimension. There is also more that we can do to try to encourage more tourism outside London to the areas that many of us represent.

There has been a lot of progress. I know that the Minister, before her well-deserved promotion, played an important part in making progress on this agenda. If she does not mind, I have four small asks. Will she assure colleagues that outdoor recreation will receive the utmost consideration by her Department as she examines the contributions to the sports strategy? Will she pledge that outdoor recreation will be fully integrated in the final strategy, so that it is seen not as an add-on but as an integral part? This might require the Prime Minister's approval, but could she change her job title to the Minister for Sport, Tourism and the Outdoors? It has a good ring to it, and we would love to see that.

Finally, as the hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) has said, the approach that we take to implement the strategy must be cross-departmental, and it is critical that we see such progress being made. I am sure that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will reinforce this point, but Northern Ireland, one of the devolved nations, has an outdoor recreation plan, which came into place in 2013, in which 117 organisations were involved.

DCMS does an important job in cross-departmental tourism initiatives to make sure that mechanisms are in place. I simply ask the Minister to ensure that she works closely with the other excellent Ministers who have a keen interest in, and enthusiasm for, the matter, such as the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), and the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart). The Department of Health has a keen interest in improving public health. In DEFRA, there is Natural England, the Forestry Commission, National Parks UK and others that want to drive the agenda forward. I hope that DCLG will be able to encourage more local authorities to provide funding not only in Exmoor but across all our natural areas that would benefit from such expenditure and investment.

We should not forget that the Infrastructure Act 2015 legally bound the Department for Transport to make walking and cycling integral parts of our infrastructure strategy. Many of the pieces are coming into place to make this happen. The conversation and narrative about the northern powerhouse show that there may be more we can do in a devolved setting as well. Sheffield has been promoting itself as "the outdoor city" and recently hosted the European outdoor summit, which was a huge success, with the support of the Outdoor Industry Association. There is much that many of us could learn from the work that Sheffield is doing in that space.

I am conscious that many Members want to speak in this important debate so let me conclude by saying that I agree with the Minister and her Department, but we now need a fundamental shift in social attitudes to being active so that it is more usual to take part and be physically active than to not participate. We need to interpret sport in the widest sense of outdoor active participation and recreation. It will help to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing, and productivity gains, and, as Reconomics shows, will add a huge amount to our rural economies.

Much has happened in the past year since our previous debate. The summit is in sight, and with the right consideration, co-operation and championing, there is an opportunity for us to make the final

push to reach that summit and put outdoor recreation in its rightful place at the pinnacle of the Department's new strategy for sport. Now is the time to seize the moment to get more people active and outdoors in the clean, fresh air that most of us here enjoy, and to

**John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing the debate and on the way that he put across the case, which he did so effectively that I will attempt not to repeat anything he said. He put his case in very clear terms. His work, particularly in the previous Parliament and into this one, has been instrumental in moving the agenda on, and I am certain that will continue over the remainder of this Parliament. It is partly a tribute to his lead that so many Members from across the House are here. It is quite a remarkable turnout, and one that ought to resonate. I hope that the Minister will tell colleagues in other Departments what a significant turnout we have had from across the House.

On the health costs, a survey was commissioned by a rather excellent charity called StreetGames, which I know very well. It commissioned the Centre for Economics and Business Research to assess the potential cost of physical inactivity among the current generation of 11 to 25-year-olds. The economic conclusion was that

“when reductions in healthcare costs and the increase in quality-adjusted life years were considered, the levels of physical inactivity among the demographic concerned will cost the state £53.3 billion over their lifetimes in today's prices.”

There are many more surveys including statistics, but the statistics correlate—£53.3 billion.

The World Health Organisation states that physical inactivity is

“the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality”

and that physical inactivity is the main cause of nearly a quarter of breast and colon cancer cases, more than a quarter of type 2 diabetes cases and about a third of the coronary heart disease burden. Health Impact of Physical Inactivity estimates that physical inactivity of those aged 40 to 79 in England leads to 37,000 premature deaths every single year. Those are startling figures.

**Julian Knight:** The hon. Gentleman is making many important points. I particularly take his point about longevity. Another issue is whether someone who stays active stays in work longer and pays taxes for longer. In the long run, that makes a massive difference not only to their individual wellbeing, but to the whole country and economy.

**John Mann:** The hon. Gentleman, who is new to the House, makes an excellent point and reinforces the cost to industry, families and individuals and the burden on taxpayers—money that could be better spent elsewhere. Investment in sport and the great outdoors is an investment for society.

**Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con):** The hon. Gentleman mentions sport. Does he agree that we need to support increasing outdoor recreation as part of sport and also as part of people's daily routine, particularly through commuting—walking and cycling—to maximise the benefits to physical and mental health?

**John Mann:** I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman. Part of the case that we have been making in recent years—the Minister is very familiar with it—is that everything that relates to the great outdoors fits within the definitions of sport. Indeed, if one takes the British Mountaineering Council, one sees that there are no spectators; there are only participants, of every age. Sometimes there are

people of extraordinary ages—not extraordinary ages for doing something, but people in their 80s and 90s are achieving feats that may be more difficult for some of us here today. It is a lifetime activity, providing mental and physical health benefits, and reduced burdens on the NHS.

Evidence from the University of Reading shows that if people buy a newspaper, they will live longer. Why will they live longer? Because some of the people who buy newspapers on a daily basis walk to buy them and walk home. By doing that, if people buy *The Sun*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Mail* or even *The Daily Telegraph*, they will live longer. I do hope the journalists are listening: that ought to be their banner headlines, because it is true. A bit of activity on a daily basis assists, which is the beauty of the great outdoors.

Getting outdoors is also about broadening people's horizons. A third of the young people I surveyed in schools in my constituency go on holiday abroad every year. A third go to the seaside—Skegness, Mablethorpe and so on—and a third go nowhere. It is not just about the health benefits of physical activity, but about how people live and their opportunities in life.

I have some asks of the Minister. We have city regions—the hon. Member for Macclesfield mentioned the city of Sheffield, which soon could be the Sheffield city region. Who knows? Bassetlaw may be part of it. Powers and budgets for sport ought to be devolved to those city regions because that would make a significant impact in moving things on. There should be a proper debate across Government about all year 6 pupils, who are in their final year of primary school, having a residential week in the great outdoors. The Youth Hostels Association—I chair the all-party parliamentary group on youth hostelling—would provide the most perfect accommodation and benefits for those young people, showing them what is possible. It ought to be part of the offer to our young people. I encourage all Members present to participate in the events of the all-party parliamentary group on mountaineering, to get more physically active themselves, and to get into those debates. I appeal to the Minister to ensure, cross-departmentally, that outdoor recreation is at the heart of things. It is an investment for the future. She will save other Departments huge amounts of money.

**Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con):** It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) for securing an important and, for me, timely debate. It is important, just sporadically, to practise what we preach. Last weekend, I could be found on the mean streets of Portsmouth with my hon. Friends the Members for Fareham (Suella Fernandes) and for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), running the Great South Run. I think all of us, perhaps, are beyond 40, so we are in the age group that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) mentioned as being most at risk of inactivity.

I vividly remember standing in Mottisfont abbey, a magnificent National Trust property in the heart of Hampshire, some 10 years ago, when I was a local authority lead member for leisure, and listening to the head of our local health authority talking about the health benefits of the great outdoors in our part of the county. She said that she wished she could bottle it and provide those benefits to patients who appeared at doctors' surgeries across Hampshire suffering from depression or stress. We all know that exercise is one of the best remedies for those suffering from a mental health condition. Of course, we cannot bottle it, but I pay tribute to the National Trust, which is the owner of not only great stately homes but massive tracts of countryside such as can be found in the New Forest, a very small corner of which is in my constituency.

Other national parks have been mentioned, so it is important that the New Forest is also discussed in this debate. The New Forest is a fantastic location for all sorts of outdoor activities. Of course, it is one of our most crowded national parks, with seven visitors per square kilometre—I gather that it is

the most densely visited national park in the country. The New Forest attracts 13.5 million people each year, and they do not predominantly come for formal recreational activity; they come for informal activities such as dog walking or kite flying. Families are visiting with their children and having picnics.

The New Forest also has some of the slightly competing elements of outdoor recreation: horse riders, trail riders and cyclists. I cannot pretend that those relationships are always easy and happy, but it is an enormous space. We have to ensure that there are opportunities for different recreational activities to happen not necessarily alongside each other, but within the same realm.

Other hon. Members have mentioned their APPG interests. As chairman of the all-party group for the horse, I might be expected to focus several of my remarks on equestrianism. The British Equestrian Trade Association highlights that the economic value to this country of the equestrian industry is some £4.3 billion a year, which is a massive sum. My hon. Friend the Minister has recently made her inaugural visit to the Horse of the Year Show, for which I commend her. I hope she enjoyed it but, much more than that, I hope we will see her at more equestrian events across the country to witness at first hand some of the brilliant sportsmen and women—of course, men and women compete on an absolutely level playing field. We have the reigning Olympic gold medallists in show jumping and dressage; our eventers only secured a silver—I use the word “only” advisedly.

It is not just about competition: some 96% of people who ride do so simply for pleasure. I declare another interest because I am one of those people, although I manage to ride barely once a month nowadays. The freedom and opportunity to enjoy riding, particularly off road, is an important part of people’s wellbeing.

**Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP):** I am pleased that the British Equestrian Trade Association is being pushed. I hope the hon. Lady will also push disabled riding and donkey sanctuaries—that might not be quite her world of riding. I was in the cavalry a long time ago, so I know that horses are important. We should highlight the fact that riding teaches children the discipline of looking after animals and challenging their fears.

**Caroline Nokes:** The hon. Gentleman is right that looking after and taking responsibility for an animal is crucial in teaching our young people skills that are not readily available in the classroom.

I thank my constituent Rob Powell, who contacted me this morning to point out the economic benefit of trail riding on motorbikes, not horses. I thought to myself, “How on earth could this be part of promoting physical wellbeing?” He educated me by explaining that motorcyclists who ride off road have lower blood pressure, lower levels of cholesterol and are less likely to suffer from heart disease if they ride their motorbike twice a week off the tarmacked road.

It is important that we find spaces that are available and accessible for different types of activity. We are lucky in Hampshire to have the country’s second highest number of green lanes available to the public, behind only Wiltshire, but it is the Government’s role to ensure that we have good networks available to ramblers, cyclists, horse riders, motorcyclists and all types of outdoor activity.

**Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con):** As president of the East Lancashire ramblers association, I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising that point. Will she join me in congratulating the Ramblers on its “big pathwatch” initiative, which is keeping an eye on the 140,000 miles of rights of way, including bridleways—this is not just for ramblers—across England and Wales?



**Caroline Nokes:** I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. Like him, I have received emails from constituents highlighting the effectiveness of the “big pathwatch” campaign.

As might be expected, given my interests, I want to conclude by saying that we have to ensure that activity is accessible to all and is available to both genders. I hope that the Minister will commend the This Girl Can campaign, which has been reinforced across Hampshire. Our sports partnership in Hampshire and on the Isle of Wight has done a great deal to promote keeping young girls active once they leave school. The biggest drop-off in female physical activity occurs when they leave school and go to college, which is when most girls hang up their trainers and stop taking part in the team sports they took part in at school. It is imperative that we find pathways into sport for young girls. I commend the work of the This Girl Can campaign, which has made it less of a stigma to get hot, sweaty and physically active. We have to keep pushing that agenda.

**Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this debate. I think of him as a hillwalking friend, and I am pleased to be part of the all-party group. I can go one better than him, because I have shared a tent with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) at 10,000 feet. I also shared a mountain hut with him and the Minister at about 15,000 feet. We may not necessarily wish to repeat those experiences, but they were incredibly valuable none the less.

On Saturday I was on the top of Skiddaw above Keswick at 3,000 feet. I have been going there with a group of friends for 25 years—it was our silver jubilee Keswick. Some of those friendships have developed as a result of that love of hillwalking. Those trips are very special. We spend money when we are there. We have meals in the local fish and chip shop or the local curry house. We go to cafés and have the necessary many cups of tea and coffee. Hillwalkers are hungry people, and we even pop into one or two of the local pubs, which might surprise colleagues. On Sunday afternoon I was delighted to have a pint with Alan Hinkes OBE, the only Briton to have conquered all of the world’s tallest mountains. He is a big friend of the all-party group.

My friends and I spent significant amounts of money, which is important to many areas of all the nations of the United Kingdom. Such spending is important to my constituency, which borders North Yorkshire. We have beautiful countryside in Leeds North West. We have the medieval market town of Otley, which is on the edge of the Nidderdale area of outstanding natural beauty. I say gently to the hon. Member for Macclesfield that the Peak district is wonderful, and part of it is in Yorkshire. Indeed, Yorkshire has two complete national parks and part of a third. When the wonderful expansion of the Lake district and Yorkshire dales happens, Yorkshire will contain parts of four national parks and will be the only county with anywhere near so many. Hillwalking is hugely important to the Yorkshire economy.

I am proud of the work of the Carnegie Great Outdoors faculty of Leeds Beckett University in my constituency. The faculty led with great distinction and patience the expedition on which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, the Minister and I travelled. The expedition supported the excellent Royal British Legion’s Battle Back centre, a wonderful national facility that works to rehabilitate our servicemen and women who have been injured in conflict. We were all delighted to support that wonderful charity by going out in the conditions we did. It is hard to overestimate the social values, the sense of wellbeing and the social cohesion that people can get from such an experience. Our expedition was led with great distinction by the wonderful Dave Bunting MBE.

The debate is about the economic contribution of outdoor recreation, and Carnegie Great Outdoors, which offers days in the outdoors, makes a significant contribution to the Leeds and Yorkshire economy. There has been a huge growth in hillwalking and climbing, which is very welcome, but we

want to see even more. I was delighted when the BMC asked me to do a Sport England fellowship and to become its hillwalking sports fellowship ambassador. I am still working with the BMC on that, and I am pleased to walk with its members; indeed, we did a wonderful walk in the Yorkshire dales to Simon's Seat.

Again, that is an example of the economic contribution made by outdoor recreation, because we had to travel there and we spent money there. People have said, "Wasn't it wonderful?" and they want to go back. The walk was part of the two-week Otley walking festival, which brings people from all around the country. The figures show that 210,000 people aged 14 and upwards now go walking once a month, while 84,000 people go once a week, but we can do more. The more we can encourage people to get out, despite their busy schedules, the better, and we have heard about the economic and other benefits.

I have a few asks of the Minister. First, I think the best title for her would be "Sport and Recreation Minister", which would cover the outdoors and other forms of recreation, and I would ask for that title to be seriously considered. Secondly, will she convene a meeting between the DCMS and DEFRA, because those two Departments need to be absolutely locked together in bringing forward a strategy? Thirdly, I was pleased to support the cycling investment strategy and the Infrastructure Act 2015, but will the Minister accept that infrastructure should also extend to outdoor access and maintenance, which are important? Finally, will she liaise with Ofsted, which should include outdoor and adventurous activity when it looks at what schools are doing? I hope the Minister will take those things away.

**James Heapey (Wells) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this important debate. I should declare a new interest, because I was recently appointed the chair of the all-party group for the UK events industry. This is a hugely important debate. I say that not only in my capacity as the chair of the all-party group, but as the MP for Wells. I have the pleasure of having the Mendip hills, the Somerset coast and the Somerset levels in my constituency.

There is enormous economic benefit to be had from outdoor recreation, and there are enormous health and wellbeing benefits as well. As a former Army officer who organised plenty of adventurous training for his troops, I would add that there are also values that come from outdoor recreation, which we should note in this debate: confidence, independence and a respect for nature and the environment.

The tourism industry in Somerset is worth £1.3 billion per annum. Some £623 million of that is made from day-trippers. Some come for the food and drink, some for the shopping and some for the attractions. Many of those are outdoors, such as Cheddar gorge and Wookey Hole. Many people come for the hills, the coast, the waterways and the caves. That is a hugely important part of our economy, and it is important that the Government support it.

The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) said that nearly a quarter of a million people go hillwalking and climbing every month. That is worth £2.3 billion a year to the UK economy. I am therefore pleased to support the Walkers are Welcome campaign in Cheddar, and another that is getting under way in Burnham-on-Sea. Those will be really important initiatives as we seek locally not only to access some of the £2.3 billion walking and climbing economy, but to grow it by opening those activities up to new participants.

I make a plea to the Minister to push on with the investment in the south-west coast path. From the numbers I have seen, I understand that it might cost barely £500,000 a year to maintain, but that it

would generate £435 million of economic activity. Those are encouraging statistics, which I hope the Minister recognises.

There are more activities beyond climbing and walking, all of which are worthy of mention. There are active cycling and sporting activities communities in my constituency and across Somerset. There is mountain biking, caving, sailing, pony trekking, fishing, canoeing and all sorts of other things besides. All those activities are relatively inexpensive for the Government or local authorities to support. Invariably the equipment is owned by individuals, clubs or businesses, but the Government and local government can play a role in meeting the small cost of marking routes, helping to market those activities and providing support, for example through local authorities' various economic development and tourism departments, so that we recognise the outdoor recreation offering and promote it to the best of our abilities. If there is a way of incentivising businesses and clubs to commercialise further what they do, so that they can grow those industries, all the better.

When individuals or families come to Somerset to cycle, walk, climb or cave, that is great—that is two, three or four people who will buy a meal and perhaps stay overnight. However, the events industry is hugely important. When the Ten Tors is taking place on Dartmoor, every bed and breakfast and hotel is full; when the Three Peaks is going on, there is business across Wales, the Lake District and Scotland. Regularly, in my part of Somerset, there are amateur cycling sportives, which bring hundreds of cyclists from across the south-west to thrash themselves up Cheddar gorge—I know not why, but they do, and they spend money once they have finished. Such events matter enormously to communities and economies across the country, and I am keen to be an advocate for all they offer in my role as the chair of the all-party group.

It is important to mention the vital role played by search and rescue organisations, many of which are voluntary. In my constituency, the members of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Burnham area rescue boat, the coastguard, the cave rescue and the Mendip mountain search and rescue teams all make a commitment to keeping people safe without being paid, and they turn up at all hours of the day and night, in all weathers and in all terrains to do so. I admire them greatly for all that they do, and it is important, as we speak about the value of outdoor recreation to our economy, that we recognise that those people underpin others' ability to pursue outdoor sports.

I commend to the Minister—I am sure she has already seen it—the “Reconomics” report, which is an excellent study of what outdoor recreation could mean for our economy. Outdoor recreation is hugely important financially and for our public health. As I said earlier, it is also about giving people values—independence, confidence and a respect for nature and the countryside. This is a pan-Government issue, and it would be great to see DEFRA working with the Minister to make sure that our AONBs, national parks and other areas of countryside and coast are properly resourced to meet the needs of the outdoor recreation industry. The bottom line is that we will get back far more than we spend, so this debate is hugely important, and I hope it means the Government will invest in this vital industry.

**Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC):** I, too, thank the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) for securing this debate, which is of great significance to my constituency and to the wider leisure economy of Wales and Britain.

I would like to invite the Minister and Members to visit Blaenau Ffestiniog if opportunities allow—perhaps next year, during “Wales 2016: Year of Adventure”. In Blaenau, a combination of home-grown initiatives and far-sighted investors has excelled in adapting the town's extraordinary backdrop of former slate quarries into a high-adrenaline adventure landscape, complete with

downhill biking trails, zip wires and trampolines spanning cathedral-like caverns—I hope Members will forgive me, because caverns are not technically outdoors.

Wales has first-class mountain biking facilities—not only those managed so ably by Antur Stiniog, but also Coed y Brenin and the Mawddach trail, also in my constituency. There are many others throughout the nation. The longest continuous path along a nation's coastline, the 870 mile-long Wales coastal path, has played a major role in extending the valuable visitor season beyond the traditional summer months. Nefyn golf course, like many of Wales's outstanding courses, is located on the coast, and plays its part in the golf economy, which contributes almost £38 million to Wales.

On a different tack, I want to take the opportunity to assess the value of the equine industry, for personal reasons. Sometimes I wonder whether it is the fact that it is an activity with a strong gender bias—almost 75% of riders are women and girls—that means that that leisure pursuit perhaps does not get its proper appreciation. I understand from the same report that the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) mentioned earlier that average spending on a horse comes to £3,600 a year; but I do not want my husband to know.

**Caroline Nokes:** I can assure the hon. Lady that I have been trying to keep that figure from my father all my life.

**Liz Saville Roberts:** Indeed.

Wales is ideally placed as a location to promote horse riding. Our native breeds of Welsh cobs and ponies are in great demand as show and riding horses across the world. We have excellent off-road opportunities, and surely we can safely accommodate Lycra-clad mountain bikers and more sedately dressed horse riders in the forests and mountains of Wales, alongside, of course, hillwalkers and mountaineers.

None the less, the competitive potential of Wales is undermined by the requirement to levy 20% VAT on attractions and hospitality. Reducing VAT to 5%, which is a long-standing Plaid Cymru policy, would give us a more level playing field compared with France, Ireland and beyond. Attractions and hospitality directly contribute 20% to the local economy in Dwyfor Meirionnydd and employ 4,400 people. My constituency would get an economic boost of more than £6 million from such a change, and the value to Wales as a whole has been estimated by campaigners at £167 million. That would be of benefit to young people, who are particularly likely to be employed in the sector, and it might prove an incentive to employers to pay above the minimum allowed by law.

I want to point out how great a role the public sector plays in promoting the leisure economy in Wales, and, given the non-statutory nature of those services, how vulnerable they are at a time of continuing public cuts. The prospect of a European referendum that might result in the UK leaving Europe would be disastrous to the Welsh economy as a whole, and also to initiatives such as Antur Stiniog, Plas Heli in Pwllheli and many others. Those employment-generating ventures would simply not exist without regional development funding.

Finally, I ask the Minister to consider how best to encourage overseas visitors, and perhaps home visitors too, to venture beyond the capital cities of England and Scotland. Search engines need to be able to direct potential visitors to outdoor recreation activities, events and attractions in locations across the United Kingdom, and thus encourage people to explore and spread economic value to areas where its impact is proportionately far more significant. The adventure, excitement and scenery of Blaenau Ffestiniog need to be accessible to people who do not—yet—know how to spell the name of the town.

**Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con):** I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, particularly the item about outdoor learning, which has been a lifelong professional as well as personal interest of mine.

If nothing else, the debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) has shown that although we are of course delighted to have the Sports Minister here, her place could easily have been filled by a Minister from the Department of Health, the Department for Education or the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Chancellor, indeed, could have attended, because most of what has been said this afternoon has shown that, as the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) put it, the issue is to do with investment that brings a healthy return, which the Treasury perhaps even more than any other Department should take seriously.

I want to make some observations, rather than raising concerns, about two areas. First, much as I welcome, admire and champion the adventurous theme of some of the speeches, and the emphasis on fit, active people, I think that the challenge for the Minister is to ensure that outdoor recreation and access to the outdoors is accessible to everyone—an 80-year old as well as an eight-year-old, a wealthy person as well as someone on lower wages, and families as well as individual mountaineers such as those we have heard about. That is a big challenge. There is compelling evidence that everyone gets some health benefits from access to the outdoors. Let us make sure that the Government see it not just as something for the fit and healthy, but something to which everyone can have access and that everyone can afford and benefit from.

Despite widespread support from the Government and non-governmental organisations, and colleagues on both sides of the House, and after all the years of agreement, it seems that there are still areas of barriers and conflict. The world of education is one that I have taken great interest in, and it seems that there is still some confusion, particularly in parts of the teaching profession, between outdoor education and outdoor entertainment. As long as teachers still believe that outdoor activity is a sort of alternative to education, we shall never make the progress we would like. It needs to be seen as just as important an element of a young person's education and upbringing as work in a classroom or laboratory.

Perhaps the Minister can help us with the fear—sometimes justified, and sometimes not—of the consequences of litigation if something goes wrong when children are taken on some kind of outdoor experience. There is the refrain of "It's health and safety; it gets in the way, causes added hassle and adds cost to the trip," but sometimes it is not health and safety that is the problem but the litigation element, which may be a consequence of health and safety restrictions or of breaches, inadvertent or otherwise. The Government can help in those areas, and I hope that the Minister will help us as part of the pan-departmental approach.

The result of what I have described is the charitable sector and private enterprise soldiering on, doing fantastic work in the outdoor recreational arena, sometimes despite rather than because of Government. Many hon. Members have quoted examples from their experience, and in my part of the world we have a competition called Ironman Wales. It happens in my constituency and involves 43 countries. There are 2,000 athletes and 40,000 spectators. It does not happen only on one weekend a year in the county, because there is training throughout the year. It has spawned an enormous triathlon-based industry in west Wales, reaching way beyond the people in Lycra whom we all slightly aspire to look like but are probably never likely to. I restrict myself to the other private venture fitness effort in west Wales—actually, it happens across the UK—called parkrun. Almost everyone can do 5 km on a Saturday morning followed by a croissant and a cup of coffee. I recommend everyone to experience that, as I do, every weekend. The point is that the economic

benefit from those events extends way beyond the weekend or day when they happen. It has a 365-day life that brings prosperity and jobs to an area.

In the area of education there are numerous charities involved. We all know which ones they are, but in my part of the world organisations such as the Field Studies Council now have compelling evidence that if children struggle to perform to their maximum capability in traditional classroom scenarios, taking them out of the classroom and educating them in a different, novel, adventurous and intuitive way not only brings them the pleasures of the great outdoors, and brings alive the world of nature that is often denied to them, but has positive benefits for the rest of their development. When they go back into the classroom they find that because they excelled outside, they begin to excel inside. It should not be left to the charitable sector to champion that approach, yet often that is what seems to happen. My plea to the Minister is to grip the Secretary of State for Education and say, "This isn't just a pleasurable add-on; it is an essential investment that the Government can make, for which there are huge returns."

Anyone who knows me will know that I am of course also going to ask for recognition of the country sports community's enormous work and its value to the nation. Angling, which so far has not had a mention, is the biggest participation sport in the UK. I think that there are more than 100,000 jobs, or full-time equivalents, in the industry, and that is not to be sniffed at. It is not a question of what we can afford to do; it is more a question of highlighting the things that we cannot afford not to do.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** First, I thank the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) for securing this debate. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in it.

The great outdoors is a great British tradition, and spending quality time outdoors has shaped us in many ways. Today's debate is timely as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has just concluded its consultation on a new strategy for sport, and the Government's spending review is currently under way. We are all aware of the great opportunities of outdoors recreation from a physical point of view, but there are also economic benefits. As the Minister knows, I am one of those who enjoy country sports; the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), who spoke before me, does too. I do not hunt or fish; shooting is my sport and the one that I want to speak about today.

However, I also want to quote Dr John O'Kelly, chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners Northern Ireland and an active GP. He has said:

"GPs are definitely seeing growing numbers of both children and adults who are overweight and obese. It is just passing on to another generation. We are already seeing a significant increase in Type 2 diabetes and expect that to increase. It also has huge ramifications on the health budget."

We are ever conscious of that situation; the cost of dealing with obesity in Northern Ireland is £370 million a year. With that in mind, we must encourage many people, young and old, to participate in physical activity, in order to address the growth in type 2 diabetes and obesity.

I will speak very briefly about country sports, to which the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire referred. I have engaged in country sports since I was about 18, or perhaps even younger. Shooting is a sport that gives me the chance to enjoy the country air, and to chase up pheasants; usually, my dog thinks it can catch them before I can shoot them, but that is just one of those things.

What I see in country sports is a great opportunity. I know that the Minister and I have different opinions about country sports—we both know that—but I ask her to consider the great benefits of country sports. Some 600,000 people in the UK participate in shooting sports; 74,000 jobs are created as a result; and in Northern Ireland 60,000 people are involved in country sports, with 12,000 people involved in angling and hunting. There are benefits for the countryside, with 3.9 million days of conservation and 16,000 jobs created as a result of country sports, which is worth £250 million to the economy. Those are the facts and figures about country sports, such is their appeal.

The benefits of country sports are not always physical; they can also bring peace of mind. Angling is too slow for me, but that is just my opinion; it gives other people great recreational opportunities.

I just hope that the Members here in Westminster Hall today clearly recognise that outdoor activities are not only physical activities such as mountain climbing, walking, cycling, motorcycling, quad biking or whatever they may be, but country sports as well, and I hope they recognise the benefits that country sports bring to all of us. Hopefully the Minister can appreciate that, even if it is from a different point of view to my own, and understand that country sports are very important, even integral, to the countryside and who we are.

**Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Gray, for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this debate. He is a great man and he made some powerful points.

In Britain, we are blessed with some of the most beautiful countryside and outdoor spaces in the world. Perhaps because of that, outdoor recreation is the UK's favourite pastime. Four out of five adults in England regularly visited the natural environment in 2013-14. I am a keen amateur sportsman, participating in parliamentary football games, rugby games, cricket matches and tug-of-war events; I think people will get the general idea. And if I can do it, anybody can do it; there is hope for us all.

I am also the chairman of the all-party group on running. I encourage all Members to apply for the London marathon; if anyone is interested, they can see me later. I am also the father of three children, and I am keen for them to learn the benefits of sport at an early age. My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) mentioned parkrun. My children and I are keen, enthusiastic parkrunners every Saturday morning. I am interested to know whether my hon. Friend turns up to parkruns for the croissant and coffee, or whether he actually participates in the run.

Worryingly, I have learned in this fantastic debate that it costs £3,500 to keep a horse. My daughter, who is eight, keeps on talking about "having a horse, daddy", and now people can see why I have got her into parkruns, because running is far more cost-effective than horse riding in my view.

In particular, I am keen for more people of all ages, shapes and sizes to take up running, or even walking in the hills. There are initiatives such as the excellent parkrun, and there is also the NHS's excellent "Couch to 5K" scheme. I encourage colleagues to consider that scheme for their constituents.

Recently, I abseiled; I was persuaded to do so by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, the great man. Although I am a keen sportsman, I had never thought about mountaineering before. If anyone knows Helsby hill, they will know that it is a famous rocky outcrop on the M56 that is in the shape of a face; some people say it is in the shape of a female face, but I am not sure. I did as I was

told when abseiling, and I am most grateful to my hon. Friend and to the British Mountaineering Council, which is an amazing outfit that puts safety first. I had never abseiled down a mountain before, but I felt relatively safe, and my 12-year-old son took to abseiling like a fish to water. I know that is not a very good analogy, but he abseiled down the hill perfectly, unlike me.

The countryside is a real opportunity for the local enterprise partnerships. I think the countryside's power of attraction is underestimated; it could be important for our constituencies and for the regional growth fund areas. I do not think that people pay enough attention to the countryside's potential to attract tourists from outside the local area.

Regular outdoor exercise is proven to provide both social and personal benefits, as well as to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing. The World Health Organisation and all four chief medical officers in the UK rate physical inactivity as the fourth largest risk factor for chronic diseases. Outdoor recreation can make a significant contribution to tackling the £10 billion cost of physical inactivity, crucially saving our NHS money, a point that was very well made by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann). Outdoor recreation also drives the visitor economy, with an estimated £27 billion spent on visits to the great outdoors, providing vital investment in what are often our most rural communities.

**Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con):** Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Gray. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this debate.

I think it is a given that there is an excellent positive impact from outdoor recreation; I guess the question is how we can boost that economic impact. So I will concentrate on a theme that has come through in all the speeches that we have heard today, which is the cross-departmental work that is going on and which probably needs to be augmented in the future.

Many different Government Departments have an impact on how people can participate in outdoor recreation. There is the Department for Transport; we have heard about its cycling and walking infrastructure strategy. There is also the long-term preservation of our nation's paths, trails, waterways, country parks and coastlines, which involves the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We have also heard about the national park extensions. DEFRA really should be given a key remit to provide more co-ordination of the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission, to see what they can do to improve access to and participation in outdoor recreation.

There is also the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, because we benefit massively from tourism. The "Reconomics" report by the Sport and Recreation Alliance, which many hon. Members have referred, mentions "staycations". Just one element of "staycations" struck my eye—overnight trips involving outdoor recreation by domestic visitors were worth more than £10 billion to the UK economy in 2013. That is quite an astonishing figure. We should be broadcasting more to the world about the wonders of Great Britain and any of the countries within it, because people can go to any part of Great Britain and find some fantastic things to do outdoors.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has a vital role in planning, conserving the existing outdoor environment that is used for physical activity and ensuring that places for such activity exist in any new-build environment, be they roads, estates or town developments.

Education is also important. Schools play a vital role in introducing people to new pursuits, and we need to encourage teachers to deliver a range of activities both inside and outside the curriculum,



including learning outdoors. Hopefully we can allow school facilities to be available for community use, too, which is a problem that many academy trusts are struggling with at the moment. Ofsted was mentioned earlier, and it should recognise and encourage good practice in that field.

However, the most important Department in this regard is the Department of Health. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield mentioned many projects, and the mental health benefits of activity are just phenomenal. It also helps to tackle our obesity and diabetes problems. We need to move to a more holistic view of what sport and outdoor activity can do, to make the Treasury realise that it will get much more bang for its buck by investing in this area.

**Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing the debate. When I first came to London in May, two things struck me: first, every flat I went to see seemed to offer the opportunity of a gym as part of the complex; and, secondly, London has a lot less greenery than Glasgow. Of course, Glasgow means “dear green place”, and it is well known for that.

Glasgow, of course, also benefits from its proximity to the outdoors. In my previous life I was a teacher, and it is great to hear so many Members talking about the benefits of the outdoors to young people. One of the best parts of the job for me was to get young people out experiencing what we have to offer in Scotland. I did that in two main ways. First, I was heavily involved in the Duke of Edinburgh’s award scheme, which built up their confidence and showed them lots of skills. It definitely developed their employability skills, which have not yet been mentioned. I believe that education should not be confined to the classroom, so I agree wholeheartedly with the comments that hon. Members have made about that.

One of the lessons that the young people learned was, “Don’t wear jeans.” Another was, “Don’t hang jeans on a fence in April if you have got them wet, because you will have to chip them off the next morning.” As a teacher taking young people away, one of the great things was that unlike on other school trips, when they are in the great outdoors there is no danger of them not going to sleep at night.

The second thing I did with young people was skiing. Skiing in Scotland is quite an experience. It teaches great technical skills, especially when the snow cover is not as good as might be hoped. Avoiding rocks, grass and the occasional sheep certainly builds up one’s technical ability. When we have good snow cover, the five major resorts of Glenshee, Glencoe, the Lecht, Nevis Range and Cairngorm can definitely compete with the best in Europe.

Scotland is definitely waking up to its potential. I was in the highlands a couple of weeks ago. Unfortunately we do not have the technical facilities for me to share my holiday snaps, but I stayed in a hotel that I had stayed in before. It was October, and the hotel would normally be quiet, but it was bustling. The manager told me that the hotel was going to be busy right through into the new year, which was fantastic to hear. Scotland has so many activities to offer: walking, climbing, sailing, fishing, canoeing—I could go on. There are also the activities for adrenaline junkies, one or two of which I may have tried.

The economic benefits to Scotland are massive. Some 82% of Scotland’s adult population have done some activity in the outdoors in the past year. Tourism in Scotland is worth £12 billion to Scotland’s economy and offers employment for 211,000 people, but I echo the remarks of other Members that VAT reductions would make a massive difference. One of the big issues that we have in Scotland is land ownership. Half of Scotland is owned by fewer than 500 people, and many of them are overseas landlords. Some are responsible, but others are not working for the benefit of the community. In the

mountains north of Ullapool, there have been recent reports of signs on footpaths saying, “Mountain closed”. That is a challenge to the ancient right to roam, and we need to be aware of that. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is currently going through the Scottish Parliament, is about ensuring that communities living on the land have a greater say in how it is used and allowing them to reap the economic benefits of their land. The relationship between people living in Scotland and the land of Scotland is of fundamental importance, and the economic benefits are crucial to us.

I ask two things of the Minister and everyone else here. First, come and visit the great outdoors in Scotland. It is spectacular and has so much to offer. Secondly, can we look at the transport links to Scotland to allow better accessibility? To conclude, when I was looking at flats in London, I thought, “I don’t need a gym; I’ve got Scotland as my gym.”

**Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) on securing this debate. The number of Members here and the good-natured tone of the debate are a tribute to his work and that of the all-party group, and I hope not to undermine that tone too much. Let me start by declaring a personal interest in outdoor recreation. Growing up in a city with the glorious town moor at its heart, in what is undoubtedly the most beautiful county—Northumberland—with the most stunning coasts and the glorious Cheviot hills, how could I not have that interest?

Despite the beauty of our countryside, which several Members emphasised, we have an inactivity crisis in the UK. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) gave many examples of the cost and consequences of the crisis. Together with the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), he highlighted some of the many mental and physical benefits that come from activity. It can reduce risks of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and address moderate mental depression and anxiety. That helps to reduce pressure on the NHS and helps people to live longer, independent and healthier lives, as well as reducing the cost of days lost to the economy. In addition, physical activity can improve academic performance and educational attainment, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) illustrated, and that can help to tackle youth unemployment. We cannot overestimate the benefits that come from the great outdoors, and we must not lose this opportunity to consider the social and economic benefits that come from sport.

We should also remember the many major tournaments and sporting events that we have hosted in the UK. The rugby world cup, which reaches its climax this weekend, has been a huge triumph for the organisers. It is predicted to generate up to £2.2 billion of output into the economy and has supported 41,000 jobs across the country. Sadly, it has not been such a resounding success for the home nations on the pitch, but—moving quickly on—the benefits of the 2012 Olympic games continue to flow, with the visitors to the UK and the businesses attracted to locate and trade here. More recently, the Yorkshire Grand Départ of the Tour de France provided a £128 million boost to Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex and London. I hope that a Grand Départ in Northumberland will one day provide a similar boost there. All those events help to inspire people to take part in pursuits, as well as generating economic activity.

Outdoor recreation is the UK’s favourite pastime. Along with tourism, it is a key economic driver, particularly in rural areas, as emphasised by the hon. Members for Wells (James Heap), for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) and for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts). Just this weekend, I set out on a red ramble with 23 of my Newcastle Labour comrades around Ovington in the Tyne valley, and afterwards we contributed something to the local economy in the local pub.

Whether it is walking, mountaineering, angling, canoeing, off-road cycling, horse riding or any of the other outdoor pursuits we have discussed this afternoon, we need to ensure that more people take advantage of the opportunities afforded to us. The hon. Members for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) and for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) emphasised that point. Expenditure in the sector supports landowners such as the National Trust, retailers and manufacturers, outdoor clothing and equipment shops, and outdoor centres. It supports many in different sectors and brings economy activity to areas where it is much needed.

It is essential that the Government deliver a strong, coherent and joined-up sport and physical activity strategy, which is what the Labour party and those working in the sector have been calling for. According to the most recent data from Sport England, there are around 400,000 fewer people taking part in sport once a week than there were in 2011-12, including 275,700 fewer women. That is of particular concern. Also, the percentage of those in the lowest income groups who participate has fallen from 29.3% to 25.7%. Those figures are an indictment of the Government's approach to sport, from removal of ring-fenced funding for school sports two years prior to the games to the decision to water down protections for playing fields.

I encourage the Minister to look at Labour's "More Sport for All" policy document. I am encouraged by the Government's recent consultation on sport, and I hope it signals a change in intent that the Minister will elaborate on. I hope she will take this opportunity to confirm a timeline for implementing a new sports strategy and let us know what commitments she has received from colleagues in other Departments to deliver a joined-up sports strategy going forward, and I hope she will respond to the many questions raised by hon. Members in this debate. I look forward to her responses to the proposals and to hearing how the Government look to address them in the upcoming sports strategy.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) for securing this debate, and for the constructive and interesting contributions that he and others have made today.

As I look around the Chamber, I realise that I have spent far too much of my recreational time with many of my colleagues here today, often with little economic benefit. A couple of hon. Members have mentioned that I climbed volcanoes in Ecuador—in the place of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield—with the hon. Members for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland). It has scarred me for life, in both a good and a bad way, but I can assure my hon. Friends that what goes on on tour stays on tour, including who was sharing which tents when.

This issue is clearly of great importance to our nation's economy and to the health and wellbeing of our citizens. I will try to respond in my speech to all the points made, but given the time limitations, hon. Members must forgive me if I do not. If I miss anything, I am happy to write. As a courtesy to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, who secured this debate, I will pick up on his key asks first, which were running themes throughout other Members' contributions.

The first theme was about how outdoor recreation should be an integral part of Government strategy. The sports strategy is forthcoming—it will be published before Christmas—and the consultation in the run-up to it had 10 chapters, only one of which had a foreword from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, so I can absolutely reassure hon. Members that this is an important issue for all Government Departments, so we need to work together if we are to deliver an effective sport and physical activity strategy going forward.

Another issue that was raised on numerous occasions was about adding “outdoor recreation” to my ministerial title. I am actually the Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, as well as for gambling and a whole host of other things. When I was originally asked to put “heritage” in the title, the early suggestion was that I would be the Minister for Sport, Heritage and Tourism. That was quickly vetoed for obvious reasons. Having sport, heritage, outdoor recreation and tourism in the title would make me the Minister for SHORTs, and I am not sure that would go down too well either. However, I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield that I will look to see if I can add outdoor recreation to my overall responsibilities that are listed formally. There is however one confusing aspect to this, which is that, as many other Members have mentioned, both DEFRA and the Department of Health have outdoor recreation in their portfolios, so it is important to discuss that with those Departments.

Today we have heard in particular about the economic value of the outdoors. We know that the outdoors market is vast and brings real opportunities to the local and national economy. It brings jobs and supports spending. This can be particularly important for the economy of rural communities. The Reconomics report highlighted the value of the sector to be some £1.43 billion in 2013. It also showed more than 26,000 people directly employed in outdoor education, recreation, development training and outdoor sport development. That is a huge number of people whose very livelihoods depend on the outdoors, and it is my job, and that of Ministers across Government, to ensure that they have the opportunity to work in the industry they love, which offers so much to our country—it is absolutely correct to think of this as an industry; it is a massive part of the future of the British economy.

Indeed, the outdoors is a vital part of our tourism offer—another area of responsibility that I have. According to data from VisitEngland, the estimated spend by visitors undertaking long walks, hiking or rambling is around £1.8 billion a year. The figure for cycling or mountain biking is £520 million a year, while for fishing it is £274 million and for sightseeing or exploring the coast or countryside it is more than £2.5 billion a year. These numbers are a huge boost to the economy, and we need to ensure that we make the most of this important opportunity. The Government are committed to supporting the sector, and I was particularly delighted to see the launch of the three-year Countryside is GREAT campaign earlier this year, designed to grow international visits, as well as the Adventure is GREAT campaign. Such campaigns are re-energising international perceptions of the British countryside and encouraging overseas visitors to explore different parts of Britain.

Our five-point plan for tourism is all about getting people out of London, exploring and experiencing our great outdoors beyond these city walls. It will help to support the wider recreation industry, including in Somerset, Hampshire, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, the south-west, Wales, Northern Ireland, Cheshire, Northamptonshire, Scotland, Northumberland and, of course, my own county of Kent.

Although the economic impact of the outdoors is of course important, we should not forget that outdoor recreation has many wider benefits and plays a huge part in delivering a more active nation, which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw and others spoke passionately about. The outdoors provides millions of people with the opportunity to participate in a diverse and interesting range of activities. It improves their health and, most importantly, it is fun.

I work closely with the public health Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison)—not least because sport and physical activity is undoubtedly valuable for everyone throughout life. As we grow older, getting active can be even more important, helping to tackle social exclusion and loneliness, as well as leading to better health and self-confidence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline

Nokes) said, no speech about the outdoors would be complete without mention of our inspirational national parks. They are a vital part of our heritage, not only providing beautiful landscapes for us all to enjoy, but helping to sustain many rural businesses.

National parks receive 90 million visitors every year, supporting 68,000 jobs and generating £4 billion for the economy. The Lake District and Yorkshire Dales national parks are to be extended next year, which can only be seen as good news. I want us to encourage those who would benefit most to get out and explore the great outdoors. It should be accessible to everyone, regardless of age, gender or ability. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) said, accessibility is an essential part of delivering that.

I am pleased that Sport England has already invested significantly in outdoor recreation so that people can engage in a variety of activities. To respond specifically to two colleagues who mentioned horse-related activities, Sport England has agreed a £6 million investment in the British Equestrian Federation to attract and keep more riders.

A cross-departmental approach is essential, but a joined-up approach at all levels of Government and governance is also essential. Clinical commissioning groups, local authorities, recreation facilitators and local enterprise partnerships all need to work together.

We have had a fascinating debate today. The potential for outdoor recreation is massive. I will publish the sport and physical activity strategy for the country by the end of the year. It is a cross-departmental strategy. I am keen that it takes into account the issues raised today and the potential that outdoor recreation has to deliver a much wider agenda, including the educational, environmental and health aspects raised in this afternoon's debate. We are at a unique moment in time, and it is important that all Departments join together to recognise the importance of sport and physical activity to everyone.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

These notes were taken from Hansards parliamentary publication and the original text can be found at the link below:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm151028/halltext/151028h0002.htm>