

# The benefits of outdoor activities

November 7 2014, by Alexandra Macgregor And Phil Nelson

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The most recent figures from the Welsh Government show that outdoor activity tourism in Wales is worth £481 million. Outdoor activity providers such as Surf-Lines need to continue to attract visitors and locals.

The number of people regularly involved in outdoor activities has grown in the last thirty years, and researchers have reported increases in [self-esteem](#) and other positive outcomes as benefits of taking part. In other words, taking part in outdoor activities provides significant psychological and long-lasting benefits. Surprisingly, researchers still do not understand why and how these benefits occur.

For example, why and how does someone who takes part in outdoor activities increase their self-esteem in everyday life? This long-standing question is at the heart of the research that scientists at the School of

Sport, Health & Exercise Sciences are looking at in partnership with Surf-Lines.

By understanding what it is about outdoor physical activity that affects wellbeing, the researchers can help Surf-Lines to design programs for maximum impact. Bluntly, Surf-Lines will have a competitive advantage because it will be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of its programs.

So, what is the research story so far? When taking part in an outdoor activity that has some perceived risk emotions arise that individuals have to control in order to do the activity. In other words, they are forced to deal with their emotions (most often fear). In getting a sense of control and influence over the situation and their emotions, individuals learn to cope more effectively with difficult situations in general. The outdoor activity becomes a lesson for life; a lesson in how to deal with difficult situations.

We have found that regular involvement provided individuals with a greater sense of control over their lives and their emotions that then benefited their everyday functioning. Other low-risk sports (e.g. tennis) did not provide these benefits.

Although these are promising findings, an important question remains: Is it crucial that these activities are in outdoor environments or could similar effects be found in indoor environments? The final study is exploring this question looking at swimming in open water.

The thinking is that swimming in open water requires people to respond to an ever-changing environment (e.g. currents, variable unknown depths, wind and waves, poor visibility) that is not needed when swimming indoors. This need to cope with the stress of open water will allow people to develop effective coping strategies for [everyday life](#) (e.g. how do I cope with the change in my life circumstances?).

As a direct consequence of this partnership between Bangor University and Surf-lines, Bangor University will further establish itself as a world-leader on the psychological benefits of outdoor activities, and Surf-Lines will be able to market scientifically-validated claims that its outdoor activities provide an effective learning platform for boosting long-lasting wellbeing.

Provided by Bangor University

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