



DAVID BATHURST

THE JOY OF WALKING

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INTRODUCTION

'Walking is the best possible exercise. Habituate yourself to walk very far.'

Thomas Jefferson

Putting one foot in front of the other is one of the most natural of human activities. Most of us will, in the course of a day, do all sorts of walking – walking downstairs to breakfast in the morning, walking to the car, the bus stop or the railway station, walking to work or class, walking between offices and lecture theatres, popping down to the pub or the corner shop, taking your dog out – purposeful, yes, but borne of necessity.

This book is about walking, not for necessity, but for pleasure, enjoyment, satisfaction and happiness – a celebration of walking not because you're constrained to do it by the daily round but because you actually want to do it. We hope that this book will help you to appreciate walking for what it is – an infinitely rewarding pastime that will provide you with interest and enjoyment throughout your life. In these pages you'll learn of:

- The benefits to you, and others, of walking ([chapter 1](#))
- The history of walking for leisure ([chapter 2](#))
- Getting started – basic and easy walking ([chapter 3](#))
- How to get serious as a walker – wilder walking ([chapter 4](#))
- The challenges of long-distance walking ([chapter 5](#))
- Some remarkable and courageous – and very speedy – walkers ([chapter 6](#))

So read on – but don't expect to finish the book. For hopefully within a few pages you'll have tightened your laces and be off down the road towards the nearest public footpath ...

CHAPTER 1

WHY WALK?

'Walk and be happy, walk and be healthy.'
Charles Dickens

'The gym experience is not for everyone. Salvation comes in the form of a good old-fashioned walk.'
Clare Balding, TV presenter

Walking is often called the perfect exercise. It's remarkable that something so simple can be so restorative, therapeutic and utterly rewarding in so many ways. In this section we look at why walking for enjoyment is great.

Walking is good for your health: The Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates described walking as 'man's best medicine'. In our day there's a wealth of scientific evidence to show that regular walking helps to reduce the risk of many diseases ...

Stress
High blood pressure
Raised levels of cholesterol
Heart disease
Strokes
Some forms of cancer
Type 2 diabetes*

* Research by George Washington University suggests that a 15-minute walk after meals could help reduce the risk of contracting Type 2 diabetes.

... and enhances

Mood
Self-esteem

Here are some reported benefits from people who've come to enjoy walking through the Walking For Health organisation's Health Walk schemes:

- Feeling happy and energised
- Having more stamina
- Living longer, feeling fitter, enjoying life
- Keeping fit and independent in retirement
- Being able to enjoy life to the full
- Having a good, healthy heart, normal blood pressure and good circulation

Did you know that...

Recent research carried out at Harvard University found that walking for an hour a day increases life expectancy by four and a half years; even as little as 40 minutes' walking a week can increase life expectancy by nearly two years.

In the London borough of Tower Hamlets, a scheme called Walks On Prescription has been set up, where local GPs can refer patients for a 10-week walking programme – you may want to enquire of your GP if something similar exists in your area. Sustainable transport officer Rachel Maile explains that by joining the weekly walks, participants can 'proactively manage their weight, diabetes and other health conditions ... and [are] encouraged to monitor their progress, week by week, towards a more active lifestyle.'

The Government, in recommending we all do at least 30 minutes of physical activity five times a week, suggests brisk walking as one form of activity. Studies show that people who choose to walk at least part of the way to work are more productive, happier and take less time off sick.

Did you know that...

A 42 minute walk can walk off a pint of lager/ale

A 56 minute walk can walk off a hot dog with white roll

But it takes 2 hours 9 minutes to walk off a steak pie!

Walking enhances creativity

Walking has been described as an all-round lift for the mind, body and soul, its regular rhythm helping creativity to blossom in the mind. Charles Dickens, the prolific nineteenth-century author, was a really keen walker and recorded in his diaries how he would go on 20-mile walks to conceive the plots of his novels. Louisa May Alcott was out walking when the idea for *Little Women*, one of the best-loved children's novels of all time, came to her, and she remembers that she could hardly wait to get home and start work on it. It was walking in the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire that inspired the great British composer Edward Elgar to write some of his most famous works, and those same hills gave similar inspiration to the novelist J. R. R. Tolkien and the poets William Langland and W. H. Auden. Charlotte Brontë clearly knew the value of a good walk; the first ten words of her novel *Jane Eyre*, one of the greatest novels of all time, express the eponymous heroine's regret that 'There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.' In the modern age, walking helps you escape the computer screen and gives you space to think through new projects.

Did you know that...

In April 1988 the English Test cricketer Ian Botham re-enacted the exploits of Hannibal and walked 500 miles (800 km) from Perpignan to Turin across the Alps with a troop of elephants, all in aid of leukaemia research.

Walking enhances your social life

The author, Mark Twain, wrote that 'the true charm of pedestrianism does not lie in the walking, or in the scenery, but in the talking.' Many people, among them BBC sports presenter Clare Balding, enjoy walking as a social activity. The popularity of walkers' clubs, which will be explored further later in this book, shows that there is something special and fulfilling in sharing a walking experience with someone else and making new friends as a result of a common interest in walking.



Walking can help others

Charity walking has increased massively in popularity in recent years. Many people, wanting to raise money for a worthy cause, have opted for sponsored walks, asking family and friends to pledge a certain sum for every mile walked or on successful completion. There's no reason why you can't organise your own. Some charities now organise specific events, bringing together large numbers of people to take on a walking challenge and asking the entrants to seek sponsorship. The British Heart Foundation, for example, now organises a London to Brighton trek consisting of a non-stop walk of 62 miles (100 km).

Other recent charity challenges with an individual twist include:

- A trek across Exmoor called the 30-30, walking 30 km (18.75 miles) or 30 miles (48 km) while carrying a pack weighing 30 lbs (13.5 kg)

- A walk of 62 miles (100 km) along the Thames Path by night
- A London Moon Walk consisting of a marathon length (26.2 miles or 42 km) walk starting at midnight with walkers wearing a decorated bra in support of Breast Cancer UK
- An annual 'Hike in Heels' organised by a hospice support group in Chichester, West Sussex, where men take to the streets in stilettos.

Many of the 'ultimate' walks, described later in this book, have been undertaken in order to raise money for charity. For instance, John Merrill's walk round the entire coastline of Great Britain, accomplished in 1978, raised more than £40,000 for the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind.

Walking is educational

Even a short walk can give you a valuable history or geography lesson or tell you about the wildlife and plant life in the locality. Walking gives you the time to take things in and enjoy them, unlike a journey by car, bus or train, where the scenery can whizz past without your appreciating any of it. Despite modern building and road development, which have lost us so many acres of precious countryside and historic landmarks, just walking a mile from your doorstep, whether in an urban or rural environment, will almost certainly put you in touch with the past, some interesting or picturesque geographical phenomenon, or an area of grassland or woodland which supports a variety of plants, insects or even animals. We may even find sources of food such as edible fungi, flora and seaweed, not to mention the ever-popular blackberry (going out blackberry picking is a great reason for walking in September!). We are blessed in Great Britain with a massive number of historic churches; it's likely that there will be one such church just a short walk from you and whatever your religious inclination, entering and exploring the church will kindle your spirit and provide you a fascinating insight into community life, past and present.

Even just looking up as you walk can be an education in itself. Although our unpredictable British weather can be a nuisance, it provides an endless variety of cloudscapes. The wonderful book by Gavin Pretor-Pinney, *The Cloudspotter's Guide*, is great for explaining the difference between types of clouds, for example

between the rippling mackerel cirrocumulus skies and the nimbostratus, promising rain. You can become a weather forecaster just by walking!

And, of course, having tasted the educational value of a short walk from your doorstep, you may want to spread your wings and go further afield, perhaps travelling by car, bus or train to savour the historic, architectural, geographical or wildlife highlights of other areas, or joining an organised city or wildlife walk.



Walking is an adventure

There's something romantic and intimate about travelling on foot. In no other means of transport are you closer to what's actually going on around you. What's more, you're not dependent on a vehicle – you are entirely dependent on yourself and your ability to propel yourself.

"What none of you young fellows appear to realise," I said, "is that Clarice Fitch is essentially a romantic girl. The fact that she crosses Africa on foot, when it would be both quicker and cheaper to take a train, proves this."

P. G. Wodehouse, *There's Always Golf*

Did you know that...

In 2010, Ed Stafford became the first man to walk the entire length of the Amazon; his two and a half year journey saw him confronting alligators, jaguars, pit vipers and machete-

wielding tribesmen.

Many famous figures, who have distinguished themselves principally in other fields, have embarked on walking adventures during their lives.



Laurie Lee

Laurie Lee was born in 1914 and died in 1997. Setting out in 1934 from his Cotswold home, Lee walked first to London then sailed to Spain, walking across that country from north to south and scraping a living by playing his violin outside street cafes. His adventure is recounted in his 1969 book *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*.

Having completed his walk through Spain, he volunteered in the Spanish Civil War but his service was cut short by epilepsy and he returned to England. Lee became a journalist and scriptwriter and during World War Two he made documentary films and became publications editor for the Ministry of Information. It was in 1959 that he published the work for which he became most famous, *Cider With Rosie*, about his childhood in Slad, Gloucestershire, where he returned in later life. It took him two years and three drafts to complete the memoir.

'I was tasting the extravagant quality of being free.'
Laurie Lee, *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*

'I followed this straight southern track for several days... There was really no hurry. I was going nowhere.'
Laurie Lee, *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*



Eric Newby

Eric Newby was born in 1919 and died in 2006. His taste for adventure was demonstrated when he was just 19 by a sea voyage from Australia to Europe via Cape Horn. He was awarded the Military Cross for his part in the Allied raid on Sicily in August 1942. His book, *A Short Walk In The Hindu Kush*, was the written account of his adventure in the Nuristan mountains of Afghanistan, and was described by the American novelist Rick Skwiot as being told with 'understatement, self-effacement, savage wit, honed irony and unrelenting honesty.' In 1963 he was made travel editor for the *Observer* newspaper and was subsequently given a Lifetime Achievement Award of the British Guild of Travel Writers.



Patrick Leigh Fermor

Patrick Leigh Fermor was born in 1915 and died in 2011. He was just 18 when he decided to walk across Europe from Hook of Holland to Constantinople, arriving at his destination two years later. He took with him little more than a few clothes, letters of introduction, and some books of poetry. He slept in barns and shepherds' huts but was also invited into many country houses owned by the aristocracy. His adventures are recounted in *A Time of Gifts*, *Between the Woods and the Water* and *The Broken Road*. Fermor then spent some years travelling about the more remote parts of Greece on foot and by mule. During World War Two he belonged to the Special Operations Executive, playing a prominent part in the Cretan Resistance. He was described by a BBC journalist as a 'cross between Indiana Jones, James Bond and Graham Greene.' He was knighted in 2004 having previously received the DSO and OBE.

'All horsepower corrupts.'

Patrick Leigh Fermor

Walking gives you access all areas

Not quite all, but moving in that direction. Later in the book we'll look at the wonder that is CROW (Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000) – a piece of legislation that gives walkers in many parts of the country the right to go wherever they like. But even where the 'right to roam' is restricted, walkers can reach parts of the countryside that are quite inaccessible to motorists or even cyclists or horse-riders.

'I am monarch of all I survey; my right there is none to dispute.'

William Cowper

'Roadside verges always stink of petrol fumes, whereas two hundred yards away over the stile it is possible to smell the wild fragrance of the countryside.'

H. D. Westacott, *The Walker's Handbook*

It's true that many roads, even major roads, can take the motor traveller through magnificent scenery, but by their very nature they cannot provide a pollution-free countryside experience. And while many footpaths can and are used by cyclists, a very great number of them are for walkers only – where walkers alone can savour a remoteness and peace, uncluttered by reminders of the modern, ephemeral and temporal world. Moreover, through punishing terrain the cyclist will always be mindful of the potential damage to his or her machine and the possibility of mechanical breakdown. A walker has none of these concerns and can enjoy a variety of scenic experiences that is unparalleled by any other form of transport. Arguably the best is a hilltop. There is something particularly special about walking to a summit and gazing down on the landscape below which may be rural, a seemingly endless patchwork of fields, dotted with villages and farmsteads, or may provide a bird's eye view of one of our great cities. The good news

is that you don't need to have the mountaineering skills of Sir Edmund Hillary and you don't require ice axes or crampons to appreciate the beauty of the British landscape.

Six experiences for walkers only!

- *A ridgetop march in a Cumbrian mountain range*
- *Climbing to the highest point in England (Scafell Pike, Cumbria)*
- *A coastal walk over the cliffs of Cornwall*
- *A beachcombing walk*
- *Bogtrotting across Dartmoor*
- *A woodland walk on Exmoor*

Each one brings its own atmosphere, surroundings, colours, aromas, and joys – just for the walker.

'The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land – it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land.'

G. K. Chesterton

Walking is fulfilling

Later in this book you will read of some walkers who have achieved great things, from walking the coastline of Great Britain to walking right round the world. Their motives will have varied, but they did it, at least in part, because they wanted to tell themselves they could. In the same way, whether you walk for others or for yourself, you can learn much about yourself, your inner strength, your self-discipline and resolve, through walking, whether because of the nature of terrain, the distance you're covering or in conquering any physical or psychological fears you may have.

Alfred Wainwright, whom we'll meet again later in this book, wrote of conquering the Pennine Way, one of the biggest walking

challenges in Britain:

'You do it because you want to prove to yourself that you are man enough to do it. You do it because you count it a personal achievement. Which it is, precisely. You will be more ready to tackle other big ventures and more able to bring them to a successful conclusion.'

A. Wainwright, *Pennine Way Companion*

If you think just 'walking' is unproductive or unable to stir the soul, you could always be doing something else at the same time. Here are just a few wacky walking records set recently...



Emily Miethner threw and caught an apple sixty times when walking forward in an apple orchard in Lancaster, Massachusetts, in September 2012



Rolf Iven holds the record for the longest distance walked on hot plates, namely 75 ft 1 inch (22.9 metres) in Milan, in April 2009



Montystar Agarwal lifted a 50 kg (22.65 lb) weight with his hair and walked 12 metres (13 yds) at Goa Arijuna in November 2012



Patrick Young walked on his hands for 1 minute 10.22 seconds at

Lewisville, Texas in February 2013



Mariappan Palanichamy lifted a 40 kg (18 lbs) weight using just his mouth and walked 50 metres (54 yds) at Dindigul, Tamil Nadu in February 2013



Doug McManaman walked 2,000 yards (1.8 km) while balancing an egg on the back of his hand in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia in July 2013



Tai Star walked 10 metres (11 yds) on a barrel in 29.8 seconds in Tucson, Arizona in April 2013

And the great news is, walking needn't cost anything

In difficult economic times, walking is particularly brilliant because it is free. If you're starting your walk from home, the only financial outlay required for the walking itself is a weatherproof coat and some comfortable shoes – but you may have those already. It is true that if you go on a guided walk there may be a fee to pay or the expectation of a gratuity to your leader at the end, but if you go walking independently, whether on your own, or with companions, it will cost you nothing. Unlike many outdoor activities, you need no special training or tuition (although later in the book we'll look at what you *will* need in order to develop as a walker). You can start now! You do not need the fitness and stamina levels required for running or other energetic sports such as football or tennis. You can continue to enjoy it at any age. Once you start walking, it is

only tiredness in your legs or feet that will compel you to stop. The body has a remarkable ability to keep going and support you no matter how far you choose to walk.

Now let's see how it all started...

CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WALKING FOR ENJOYMENT

'Away we went in jubilant mood, determined to carry out the assault on Kinder Scout.'

Benny Rothman's memories of the Kinder Trespass as quoted in Sinclair McKay's book *Ramble On*

It may seem incongruous that in an age obsessed by technology and other sophisticated forms of entertainment, the simple pastime of walking is so popular. And even more incongruously, perhaps, it is only in the comparatively recent past that walking for pleasure has become the boom industry that it undoubtedly now is.

Walking becomes fun

Paths have been with us since prehistoric times, but not for leisure reasons. They were established for trading purposes and linked centres where essentials of prehistoric life were to be found. A classic example of a prehistoric trading route is the Great Ridgeway which linked Lyme Regis in Dorset with Hunstanton in Norfolk, the route serving as a drove road, a trading route, and a convenient track for invaders. Though some routes, previously trading routes, were used by pilgrims, e.g. between Winchester and Canterbury, these paths were never intended, or used, for

enjoyment. During the Middle Ages paths became used as a means of getting about the countryside by the shortest route. Although people might enjoy a stroll around a park or garden for leisure, or 'take the air' for health reasons, as recently as the eighteenth century rambling for pleasure was virtually unheard of in Britain. In 1782 a German pastor, Carl Moritz, commented that the pedestrian in Britain seems to be 'considered as a sort of wild man or an out-of-the-way being who is stared at, pitied, suspected and shunned by everybody who meets him.'

Did you know that...

A survey conducted by the walkers' organisation Ramblers revealed that 77 per cent of adults in the UK, equating to roughly 38 million people, walk for pleasure at least once a month, and nearly two thirds of these cover an excess of two miles at a time. It's estimated that 18 million Britons enjoy regular country walks.

It was only towards the end of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century that paths began to be used for recreational purposes, a welcome relief from polluted environments and the strains of daily life brought about by the Industrial Revolution. The novels of Thomas Hardy and Jane Austen have many references to recreational walks on public paths. The poet William Wordsworth and his contemporary, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, were both keen walkers; the essayist William Hazlitt walked with Coleridge and although he claimed he couldn't see the virtue of walking and talking at the same time he wrote: 'Give me the blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and three hours' march to dinner... '

A very short history of walking for fun in the nineteenth century

1810 – publication of Wordsworth's *Guide To The Lakes*, springing from his love of walking in the Lake District

1820s – establishment of first ramblers' clubs in Britain

1833 – formation of Select Committee on Public Walks

1854 – publication of Hugh McDonald's *Rambles Around Glasgow*

1884 – Scotsman James Bryce tries (unsuccessfully) to make an Access To Mountains Bill become law

1892 – formation of West of Scotland Ramblers' Alliance, Britain's first rambling federation

Did you know that...

It's estimated that Wordsworth had walked some 180,000 miles (288,000 km) by the age of sixty-five.

Did you know that...

The first walk from Land's End to John o'Groats was undertaken in September 1871 by Robert and John Naylor, wealthy brothers from Cheshire. They were inspired to do the end to end walk by reading literature about walks to Land's End from London and to John o'Groats from London.

It took them eight days just to get to the start, as they began by sailing to the Shetlands, sailing from there to Thurso and walking from Thurso to the start. They said they did this to avoid repeating anything! Displaying very impressive levels of fitness, they averaged 25 miles a day and their complete end-to-end walk was 1,372 miles (2,195 km) in length. They never walked on Sundays. It took them nine weeks to complete the journey.

During the nineteenth century rambling clubs continued to be established in northern England and the popularity of rambling was still growing in the early years of the twentieth century. During the inter-war years thousands of unemployed people left the industrial cities of the north every weekend, walking the hills of Derbyshire, Northumberland and Yorkshire. By the early 1930s, a number of walkers' federations had been formed and in 1931 six regional federations representing walkers from across Britain created the National Council of Ramblers' Federations. The walking movement was gaining momentum!

But – and it was a big but – the interests of walkers were still in fierce competition with private landowners closing off their land and refusing public access to it. The huge network of signed and mapped footpaths and bridleways we enjoy today simply didn't exist. Walkers at that time wanted more, much more access. Landowners dug in their heels.

The battle lines were drawn...

The Kinder Trespass

One of the most popular areas for recreational walking at this time was the Peak District in Derbyshire. From the late 1890s climbers were turning their attention to the gritstone edges of the northern part of the Peak District, the so-called Dark Peak area, with bog-trotting – the traversing of tough sections of moorland – proving increasingly popular. By the 1930s some weekends saw as many as 10,000 walkers in the area. However, walkers found themselves frustrated at the lack of access to large parts of the moor. On 24 April 1932 around five hundred walkers decided to make a stand against this. They assembled at the small town of Hayfield, a gateway to the Dark Peak, and set off into prohibited territory in peaceful protest. A group of gamekeepers met them, fighting broke out, the police intervened and as a result, a number were prosecuted and five spent time in prison. But their efforts were not in vain. The protestors excited massive support and sympathy from those who wanted greater access to our wonderful countryside.

The Ramblers

It was less than three years after the Kinder Trespass that the Ramblers Association (later the Ramblers) was founded to represent the interests of recreational walkers at national level.

Things you may not know about the Ramblers

- It was officially created on 1 January 1935
- Throughout its existence the Ramblers Association has campaigned for increased access to the countryside
- It was instrumental in the establishment of National Parks and National Trails
- Every year, its volunteers lead 28,000 group walks attracting over half a million ramblers
- In 2013, its president was the well-known TV presenter Julia Bradbury
- The Ramblers have campaigned robustly to secure public access to the coast in Wales and England, and in May 2012 achieved a notable victory with the opening of the complete Wales Coastal Path. They have called on the Government to go further and create a path round the whole coastline of England as well.
- In recent years they have been campaigning for the preservation and safeguarding of the National Trails, the official long-distance footpaths, in Britain
- In 2007, they launched a Get Walking, Keep Walking project in England aimed at helping inactive people in the inner cities to walk independently through a 12-week walking programme. This project received a lottery grant and is estimated to have helped over 100,000 people.

National Parks

The concept of National Parks sounds modern but the first National Park in the world, Yellowstone in the USA, was established in 1872. It was 'dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.' Years before that, William Wordsworth had a similar vision for his beloved Lake District. Numerous Bills were laid before the British Parliament during the early part of the twentieth century to improve public access to areas of outstanding beauty,

but none were successful. It was only during the Second World War that an architect, John Dower, was commissioned to write a report with a view to the establishment of National Parks, which in 1942 were stated to be long overdue. John Dower defined a National Park in this way:

'An extensive area of beautiful and relatively wild country in which...

The characteristic landscape beauty is strictly preserved
Access and facilities for public open air enjoyment (are) amply provided

Wildlife and places of architectural and historic interest (are) suitably protected
Established farming use is effectively maintained.'



During World War Two a blueprint for National Parks and greater access to the countryside was laid down and these were realised by the most important piece of legislation for recreational walkers ever enacted: