

Transcript of Podcast 027 – A Beginner's Guide To Your First Protest

{Intro}

{Soundscape from a protest march; indistinct voices, but mainly a repeated chant of "Black Lives Matter"}

{intro music – jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello, and thank you for downloading. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a weekly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello.

It's a very strange time at the moment; I mean obviously, you just have to look at the world, and you don't need me to talk about everything that's happening there – though bearing in mind you already know the title and subject matter of this pod, you know that's exactly what's going to happen.

But this is manifesting itself in different ways in different places. Over the course of the last week I've had at least two different rants on Twitter about the Travel Twitter Community itself. Who knew a world full of influencers could get so catty and bitter. Trite trends, peer-policing, bad takes, narrow-minded arguments on all sides and lots of doubling-down. It's not a healthy place; I've already ragequit once in the last couple of weeks, though that was more because People Are Stupid in general rather than anything to do with Travel Twitter specifically.

But this is not the forum to subtweet on. I mean, who am I kidding, I subtweet on here all the freakin' time, but usually to specific individuals. 70% of the time it's to my mother. Is it still a subtweet if you call it out as a subtweet while you're doing it? I never quite knew the rules. What I mean is, I don't want to use this podcast as a means to subtweet an entire community on Twitter. Rather, I want to use this pod as a means of distributing information in an accessible and fun way. Inform, Educate, Entertain. Which would make a really good tagline, but I can't help but feel I've heard it before ...

Anyway, I wanted to talk this time about political protests, about riots. After all, "Well-behaved women seldom make history", as it is often said (research has suggested that famous quote originated in a paper written by History student Laurel Ulrich in 1976), while early 80s new wave / blue-eyed soul band Dexy's Midnight Runners, in a musical context admittedly, made a more direct comment: "the only way to change things is to shoot men who arrange things".

There's a feeling amongst some people that people oughtn't have a right to protest, that two wrongs don't make a right, and that regardless of the circumstances that cause it, there is no excuse for the destruction of property that isn't yours, for vandalism, and for obstructing the public highway preventing people from using it for its designated purpose.

These people are entitled to their opinion, of course. Just as I'm entitled to mine. And my opinion is that these people are twats.

Oh I'm sorry, did I offend your sensibilities? Did I make you think your trip to B&Q to buy some white paint for your picket fence wasn't important? Are you upset that your journey to the local football match was held up? Did I make you 5 minutes late for your illicit date with your work colleague?

Tough. It's not about you, you selfish prick.

And regards property, as several of the businesses affected by recent protests in the USA have openly

tweeted: "we have insurance. And property can be replaced."

If you're ever in a situation where you have to choose between someone's life and someone's material, while yes it's hard to replace something that's been destroyed, it's hurtful and saddening, and yes maybe expensive in the short term (although note if you're an affluent enough business, replacing everything is only a day or two's job), it's something you can only do if you're alive. What good is property when you're dead.

Ah, but, say people, violence, or even outward visible signs of mass protest don't change anything. There are peaceful, quiet, personal, ways to protest, have you tried them.

Well, funnily enough ...

For one thing, you don't like it when people do that. You don't like it when people make gestures on word stages, like raising a fist, or taking a knee. [As an aside, I've never understood why taking a knee was so controversial. Over here at least, kneeling is a sign of subservience, of honour. People take a knee when they get knighted. Or, you know, collared, but I wouldn't know anything about the world of domination/submission. Taking a knee during a national anthem strikes me as being ... a bit formal, but highly likely]. You don't like it when people withhold their taxes. You shout us down when we Tweet, and criticise our use of words. And in some places, you pass laws preventing us from doing even this. In any case, over a hundred thousand of us could sign a petition but you have the right to ignore it, and have parliament debate it in passing in five minutes and laugh about it amongst themselves.

It would be wonderful if we could enact change from the comfort and safety of our bedrooms. Remember that not everyone has a comfortable and safe bedroom; sometimes the basics of human life are denied to people. What then? When the sheer act of living becomes a protest, when going to sleep at night becomes a political act through no fault of your own. How do you peacefully affirm your right to live, to be, when you don't have the right or ability to have one.

This also applies to the right to be yourself. What if you live in a state where your every move is tracked, your lifestyle controlled, your right to be who you want to be is restricted, simply because of an accident of your birth, or a factor in your upbringing? What if, not just that people hate you for simply existing, but actively put barriers on that existence? What if you're prevented from loving because somebody several thousand years ago may have had a beef with a rival and won the right to talk about it? What if you're prevented from owning your own body, your own mind, because someone else in the past was on a huge ego-trip, wanted control of his wife, and surrounded himself with 'yes-men'? And what if all the laws are made and maintained by a group of people who do not look like you, who do not act like you, and do not even consider you worthy of listening to?

The suffragettes didn't just write letters to the newspapers. Activists at Stonewall didn't just stick things in their windows. And Black Lives Matter isn't just a twitter hashtag.

Of course protest doesn't have to be specifically violent, and it's not for me to advocate starting an actual riot just to get what you want. It's just unfortunate that sometimes the only way to enact necessary change isn't by writing a letter to a newspaper, or even sitting on top of a pole. Sometimes people have to get hands-on, to get outside and fight for change, with marching feet and banners on the city street, in a large movement all shouting loud, in solidarity.

Now, protesting isn't for everybody, but for those of you who do feel they need to go out onto the streets and fight for the cause you hold most dear – at the time of recording this podcast obviously Black Lives Matter is the focus of pretty much every protest around the world but with the evergreen nature of online media, you might be listening to this in 2023 and are in the midst of overthrowing the Fascist dictatorship in the United Kingdom of England and Wales, or on the march to protest the imprisonment of two female journalists in the Republic of Dixie – and you might want some safety advice.

The internet is full of memes and posters about how to safely protest, and it's not for me to cast aspersions on them, given that I've never protested anything in my life. In fact, if you'd have asked me twenty years ago I'd have said that i didn't have strong enough opinions on anything to consider joining a protest for, even a small one in a room. Evidently, I've changed a bit. The only reason I didn't go to the Black Lives Protest march in

Sheffield on the weekend that I'm writing this pod is because I live in a country that refuses to accept that there's a worldwide pandemic occurring, and I don't want to worry about killing people because I've been on a march to protest about people killing people. My landlady is a 'key worker'- she works in a daycare home for vulnerable children – so it would be easy for me to both catch and transmit a virus to people who really shouldn't be exposed to it.

One person who has protested in the past however is my friend Victoria, but you can call her V. Now, you'll have seen no doubt several images and memes about "how to protest", but here I bring you, for the first time, V's guide on "How to Protest If You've Never Protested Before", as told by someone who was, literally, an anarchist. She's now married with four kids, just in case you ever wonder about what happens to dreamers.

{Victoria Pearson explains to the nation}

A lot of the world seems to have suddenly exploded into Direct Action, and I'm loving it, I really am. But obviously that means for a lot of people, you're considering protesting or the first time. Not really sure what to expect, not really sure what to bring, you're not really sure what to wear. Maybe you've been on a few marches before that were heavily organised, but you never really worried about having any trouble at the marches, and now it's something that you're a bit concerned about. So I'm going to run through with you, just a few pointers for your first time at a potentially violent protest.

We'll start with basic etiquette.

If you are a White person, and you are at a Black Lives Matter protest, you are there to listen, and to support. That means that you don't get to lead chants at this protest; it is your job to make space for Black people to lead chants. You've got to think about the optics of what you're doing, about how you're taking up space as a White person in a Black Lives Matter protest, and about whether you are creating trouble in a protest that the people there do not want you to be creating – they're trying to show a peaceful, progressive movement, and you are smashing things up, that isn't always a good look, okay? And so you need to be mindful of your behaviour, and that you are centring the people the protest is in support of, and that you are thinking about how your behaviour is reflecting on them and their movement as a whole.

The flip side to that is, as a White person at a Black Lives Matter protest, you are not in a position to be 'tone policing', okay? That would be the same as if you were a straight person at a Pride parade, or if you were a cisgendered person at a Trans Lives Matter Parade. It is not your place to police how people feel, and how they express the anger at the treatment they have been receiving. You are there to listen, and to centre their voices.

So that's basic protest etiquette around that kind of thing. I'm going to cycle back to before you set out on your protest. I'm not going to tell you what your legal rights are, because this is an international podcast, so that will vary depending on which country or state you are in. So, before you go off on your protest, check your legal rights. Write them down. Put that on a piece of paper, not on your phone, that's going to go into your bag, so that you remember it, and so that you can tell other people who may not be aware of their rights what their rights are, okay?

While we're talking about your bag. It needs to be a comfortable bag that you can carry for much much longer than you expect to have to carry it for, okay? If you end up getting kettled, or even end up in such a big crowds that public transport can't handle it, or whatever, you need to be able to comfortably carry that bag around without it giving you blisters and backache, so the weight needs to be spread evenly across your back, you need to have a well-fitting bag with comfortable, nice wide straps.

You also need comfortable clothes that you can wear for a long period of time. Jeans have got some protective element to them a little bit, but also they're very slow to dry, so they may or may not be the best thing to wear. What's important is that you can move comfortably, that you can walk and run comfortably in your clothes. A hoodie's a good idea as well because you can cover up your head, not just to cover up your identity but also so that your hair isn't absorbing tear gas or things like that. And you can pull the drawstring

of your hoodie closed around goggles or sunglasses or something like that to protect your eyes, so a hoodie is a fairly good garment to be wearing. It's also fairly gender-neutral and fairly shapeless and helps you stop being as easily identified. We'll come back to being identified in a minute, but for now I want to talk about what else is in your bag.

Oh, actually, no I don't. First I want to say, cos this should go without saying, but, given which podcast you're listening to right now: Please wear comfortable shoes that cover your toes up, because you're gonna have people running around, you're going to potentially have broken glass on the floor, you could have horses all over the place, you don't want your toes being exposed; put some shoes on.

Okay, so, in your bag, your very comfortable bag that you can carry for much longer than you want to be out for, you're going to have some bottles of water to drink, you're going to have some snacks, protein bars or something like that, so if you are kettled for a very long time, or you're unable to get food for a very long time, you're not going to be fainting. And you want some cash as well, because you don't want to be taking your debit card. So, you want some cash in your bag, but you also want some cash in your pockets or in your bra or on your person somehow in case you lose your bag or it's stolen from you or whatever. Also in your bag you want an empty bottle, okay. That again is just in case you're kettled for a really really long time, and you desperately need a wee. You'll be really glad you had an empty bottle in there.

As well as your drinking water in your bag, you want another bottle of water, as an eye-wash bottle. Now, some people will say you should use bicarbonate of soda and water mixed, some people say you should use milk as an eye-wash for tear gas. I've never seen a paramedic use anything other than water to wash out people's eyes; I've never seen a police officer use anything other than water to wash out their eyes, and I would personally say that pouring an unrefrigerated dairy product into your eyes is just asking for an infection, and probably not a very good idea.

However, so, water. But you want it in the kind of bottle where you can pull the lid up and it opens, you can squeeze or suck water out, and then push it closed it again. Like a Fruit Shoot bottle, but obviously other bottles are available. And the reason you want that is because if you're washing somebody's eyes out, you don't want to just pour, you want to squeeze that bottle so that it washes their eyes with some force. I'm going to talk you through how to do that now.

So if somebody around you is tear-gassed, they're going to be in a lot of pain, they're going to be very disoriented, and they aren't able to see. So it's really important you talk to them in a calming, soothing voice. Tell them, repeatedly, that you are going to wash their eyes out, that you are going to help them. Have them kneel down, and put their hands on their thighs. That is so they can concentrate on keeping their hands on their thighs, to give them something else to think about, but it's also to stop them instinctively rubbing their eyes and making the problem much much worse.

When they're on their knees with their hands on their thighs, you're going to stand behind them, and ask them to tilt their head back. Their eyes will be screwed shut at this point because they're in a lot of pain. And so you will need to open their eyes, by putting your fingers just below their eyebrow and pulling up gently but firmly. They will fight against that – it's their instinct to screw their eyes shut – but you need to get that eye open so you can wash their eye properly. Then you are going to squeeze your water bottle with the nozzle pointing at the inner corner of their eye and wash to the outer corner of their eye, with a considerable amount of force on the water. That will blast any debris out of their eyes and it will help them to feel better.

Once they've got calmed down and their eyes are cleared out, you need to make sure that they're buddied up with somebody because it's a really disorienting and traumatising experience being gassed. They need to go home, they need to have a cold shower, and they need to wash their hands really thoroughly with lots and lots of soap and cool water, many times, before they touch their face or their genitals again,. That's really important, It burns.

If you yourself are tear gassed, or even if you've witnessed a situation where there's tear gas and riot horses and all this sort of thing, be kind to yourself the next day. You are going to need some self-care after that. It is a traumatising experience. You will be processing emotions, and it is a physically difficult experience as well, so be aware of that, be aware you may have some shock after this sort of experience, and make some

space to be kind to yourself through that.

Also worth noting while we're talking about gas that it can cause spontaneous abortion, it can cause miscarriages and potentially birth defects as well. So if you are pregnant or trying to become pregnant, nobody is going to be upset if you support the protest in a different way without actually being there. I will talk about that further towards the end.

Phones, and documenting. I personally wouldn't take my phone to my to a protest. I would consider maybe taking a burner phone, a cheap SIM card, pay-as-you-go, Nokia-type 3310-type handset that I wouldn't mind losing or getting broken, and that doesn't contain a lot of personal data about me, because you're in a chaotic situation and you may well lose your phone. If you do decide to take it with you, turn your data off, put it on airplane mode, and be aware, if you're using it to film, because you feel the need to document the protest, be aware of the people around you. Okay. There is facial recognition technology that police and security services use to arrest people after protests, by combing through footage that they find online.

You need make people aware that you're filming, if you're filming, try and get consent to film if you can – that can be very difficult – so be very aware of who you're filming, and the danger that that might put them in, You might feel comfortable to be a public face that's involved in the movement, you might feel comfortable to be arrested, your privilege might allow that; the people around you that isn't always the case.

So, if you are filming, I would personally carry a protest sign saying 'I'm filming ahead, mask up around me', so that people have that opportunity to move away and not be on your camera. If you're putting up pictures of the protest, pixellating people's faces is a great first step, but the code in the image can be unscrambled if you do that, so if you're putting up pictures of protest, and you're blurring people's faces, take a screenshot of that and post your screenshot instead, so the image can't be unscrambled and can't be used against people that are protesting.

Facial recognition cameras can also pick up on your gate analysis, and that's something to be aware of. You may not ever be able to 100% guarantee that your identity won't be revealed in a protest situation. You can reduce the risk by masking up, but facial recognition cameras can read the contours of your face underneath your mask and get a fairly good idea of who you are and what you look like. And so a mask alone is not enough to protect your face. An umbrella can help if you carry it low enough to cover your whole facial area, that can be really good, and that can also be used to shield you against tear gas and things like that as well, especially if you lock umbrellas with other people. But yeh, you can wear putty underneath your mask to change the contours of your face, you can wear a bulky scarf over the top of your mask, or, I have heard as well that holographic strips can affect how facial recognition cameras pick up the data of your face, like reflecting strips. Laser pens also mess up facial recognition cameras, so if you happen to have one and you're pointing it at the camera, you're doing good praxis there. I've also heard that juggler makeup can fool recognition cameras; I wouldn't want to trust it personally on its own, maybe with other, like a mask or a scarf or something like that that changes the way your face looks, but I maybe wouldn't trust clown make up on its own. You may see people covering cameras for that reason, because even with our best efforts at masking up, the technology is good enough that they can still read the way you walk, the shape of your face under the mask, it's easier to just take out cameras.

If this is your first time at a protest and you are a little bit concerned that it might be a bit rougher than other things that you've gone to, you can stick to the edges of crowds so that you're less jostled about, also means you can peel off from the crowd quite easily and go away from any trouble that you might see coming ahead.

Whilst you're in and about the crowd you might see people putting bricks into the road, or setting fire to bins in the road, or moving Biffa bins into the road, and you might think that's really just senseless isn't it, and that looks bad and I'm going to clear it up because that'll look good for the cameras. Don't do that. The reason that they are doing that is to keep you safe from vehicles being driven into crowds, and to keep you safe from police horses being charged at you as well. So if you see people putting debris into the road, they are doing it for a reason, it's not just mindless, it's to keep you safe, so leave that alone.

You may see members of the Black Block around your protest. If you see; that would be people dressed identically in black – you shouldn't be able to tell what gender or race or anything like that that they are

because they should be fully masked up all over their bodies, and their job really in the crowd is to draw police fire away from other people. So if you see a lot of people like that massing up, remove any vulnerable people from that area, get yourself out of that area, because you are likely to get a lot of clashes with police where you get a lot of members of the Black Block. That's what they sign up for, they don't expect you to come and help them with that. If this is your first time at a protest, it is easiest to stay out of their way, that is the most helpful thing that you can do for them.

Also within the crowd, as well as members of the Black Block, you will have undercover police officers. They'll be there to be gathering intel, but they'll also be there to be escalating trouble, really. They may hand you things to throw at police officers, they may hand you bricks to throw through windows, things like that. So it's a good rule of thumb to never take anything from anybody at a protest, don't take a protest sign from them even if you agree with what's written on it – there may be logos on it that you don't understand, all sorts of things, you don't know why somebody is giving you something, whether that's something to throw, something to carry, something to chant, you don;t know, you don't take it. You don't know that person, you don;t take something from that person.

You can generally spot police officers in the crowd from their gait as well, and the way of holding themselves, but also look out for – if you see a strip of cloth tied around somebody's arm, tied around their leg, hanging out the back pocket; if you see a few people with that same colour, the chances are that is the police officer's 'colour of the day' and that is how uniformed officers are recognising undercover officers within the crowd, so they're not arresting their side. If you see somebody with those colours, check out their boots. That will be the dead giveaway. They'll have steel toe-capped boots on, they'll be well-looked after cos those are their work boots. And if you see people handing things to people to throw, or trying to chat and be chummy with you and they have those things, treat them very warily, don't trust them, don;t talk to them. If you're not sure, and you shun somebody that isn't a police officer, they will understand why you've done that and they won't hold it against you.

If you do see somebody being arrested and you don't feel able to de-arrest them, taking their name and date of birth can be useful, okay, because you can then pass that to support networks, of which there'll be lots of them about - if you go to an aid station or somewhere where there's a lot of water, somewhere where people are giving out medical care to protesters, they will be able to help you find who you need to give that information to, so that support networks can get in contact with them in jail, but also so police officers know that they are being watched and that we are aware that they have arrested this person with this date of birth, and that we may be checking up on them.

Sometimes, as a White person at these protests and dealing with police, the best thing you can do is channel your 'inner Karen' and go full 'I'm taking down all of your details because I wish to speak to your manager'. That can be a way we can leverage our privilege to actually be useful and help.

Now I did mention earlier about tear gas can cause spontaneous abortion. It can also cause a lot of issues for people with respiratory problems like asthma, and other things like that. Also you may have a mobility problem, or a caring responsibility, or a job you could lose and it could cause serious consequences to your career if you're seen at this protest, all those sorts of reasons; there's lots and lots of valid reasons why you may not feel able to actively go and support a protest that you do support yourself. But that's okay. We all have different strengths. There is a role for everybody within these causes, even if you aren't able to protest.

For the vast majority of people, a protest will be a peaceful day out. You will listen to music, you'll see some people dancing, you'll hear some impassioned speakers, you'll make some new friends, you'll be around like-minded people, maybe help pull a statue down, it'll be great, yeah. But sometimes change is messy. And in being prepared for that messiness, we're reducing the risk to ourselves and those around us. But for some people, no amount of preparation will make protesting safe 'enough'. Okay. Like, if you have a disability, or very small children, or you're pregnant, or something like that, there is no way that we can reduce risk effectively enough for you to be at that kind of protest.

So whether you're marching in the protest itself, or you're flooding snitch lines with fake info and noise, or you're providing food and medical care for protesters, or you're donating to legal funds for those who are arrested, or you are retweeting about the protest like mad, and helping to lift voices up on your platform, all

of those things are important, all of those things are a valid way to help. We are all needed to change the world, and we all have a role in doing it.

{Back to Barefoot Backpacker}

Well, I hope you found that useful, and that you now feel more comfortable to protest safely.

Next week I'm going to continue this topic, and talk about a couple of examples where mass protests on the streets of the UK have brought about considerable, important, and/or effective change. Until then, remember, revolutionaries need to wear shoes sometimes, and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}

{Outro voiceover:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice. I'm really bad at that sort of thing myself, so I'll understand perfectly if you don't.

Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure was written, presented, edited, and produced in the Kirkby-in-Ashfield studio by The Barefoot Backpacker. Music in this episode was "Walking Barefoot On Grass (Bonus)" by Kai Engel, which is available via the Free Music Archive, and used under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

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Until next week, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}
