

Transcript of Podcast 045: Get Outside

{Intro. Zoe - Splodzblogs

Being kind isn't exclusive to the outdoors of course, but the outdoors can certainly provide us with a backdrop for kindness, and we all need more of that.

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{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly 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 :)

Further to my last episode, you may not be interested to learn that I have finally seen my mysterious neighbour. I only saw him briefly, as he was coming up the stairs to go back home, and all I can tell you about him is he's a man and he seems a bit younger than me. But at least I know he's alive and he exists.

The only other people I've come across in the block are a woman who moved here after I did, but only from a neighbouring building, an older man who at some point I need to ask if we can borrow his stepladder - I'm conscious this may end up being a long-term issue as if any lightbulb goes in the flat, I'm not sure I'm physically able to replace them at the moment, but in the short term I need them only to secure the black card above the front door that blocks the stairwell light, and my flatmate needs one to put up some fairy lights in her room -, and another man, who may well be somewhere between slightly younger than me, and 70, it's hard to tell, who for some reason reminds me a little of Garrison Keillor.

Obviously socialising is not my forté. That said, I'm planning to go meet up with a load of kinksters in a couple of weeks' time. In a park. It's a social munch vanilla meetup, nothing exhibitionistic, don't worry. It's the first real socialising I'll have done for a while with a group - the writing group in Sheffield went on a couple of walks around the city parklands but apart from that, obviously Covid has restricted a lot of meetups but even outdoorsy things I've not done for quite some time. I'll be talking more about the concept of outdoor meetings later.

One of my aims in coming to Glasgow is to develop more of that side of me; it's one reason I moved to Sheffield but of course That Did Not Happen For Reasons Well Known. Back at the start of 2020 I made a list of all the things I could do to self-develop, and I'm now starting to look at that list because it's starting to become possible. I still haven't found a casual self-defence class though (all the ones I've found so far have been proper martial arts themed and long-term). I'm also looking at volunteering at local radio stations, writing groups, and even theatre groups, though we'll see on the viability of the last one. Athletic clubs seem quite expensive for what they are tho, given most of the time I'd just be doing my own thing, but access to a proper athletic track might be nice, for when it's too dark, cold, and damp for me to enjoy running on the roads as much.

I didn't do running last weekend even though it was bright and sunny, because I had a cold. I'm not sure how I managed to get that, given I thought colds had been pretty much eradicated this season because people are reacting to Covid and the cold virus is generally much weaker, but there we go. I think, because my previous weekend had been quite busy with a lot of walking and some running, I was feeling quite exhausted and it must have just hit me at the right (wrong?) time. And it was a cold, not Covid, by the way - it was very much a blocked and runny nose, with just the occasional cough.

I've pretty much now fully moved out of Sheffield; the only thing left is I'm going down this weekend to help my friend repaint the room I was renting. I'm sure you can imagine just how bad I am at painting, but as all I really have to do is cover walls in a mostly empty room with white paint on a roller, there's only a limited number of things that can go wrong. We're not painting the ceiling.

There's nothing for me to bring back either. I had several boxes that were too big for me to shift on my own and I was having some real problems finding someone willing to transport it. The issue being that there was too much for a car, yet nowhere near enough for a proper removal firm. I ended up posting on one of those 'bid for work' sites, where you could tell people didn't want the job because the quotes I was getting were almost identical and quite large, and I was getting a bit angsty about it, but then a couple of people started to under bid each other. At first this concerned me because I was like – really, that low? That's not even going to cover your petrol costs for the mileage? But it turns out the chap I chose lives about 8 miles from the flat, so he was doing the journey anyway – bringing my stuff just gave him a bit of extra cash.

What else, oh, yes, well, hm, at the suggestion of my flatmate I bought something I thought I never would – dumbbells. It's always occurred to me that while my legs are pretty strong, I have the upper body and arm strength of a dead gnat, and this seems to be the best way to develop that, well, that doesn't involve going to a gym anyway, because I am not the gym type. Obviously. We had some trouble finding some as they seem to be a much more common thing in the USA than the UK, but I managed to source some, with adjustable weights even, and a couple of Saturdays ago I went to the city centre to pick them up. Now, I'm used to carrying a heavy backpack, but the weights alone in the box were 20kg so it was a bit of a struggle to get the pack on and off. This became relevant after 400m when I tripped over.

Quite what I tripped on is unclear; I suspect it may have been my own foot / sandal, although an obscure small raised rubber tube in the pavement, presumably used for putting temporary signposts in, may also have been the guilty party. Either way, I fall partly into the road, much to the amusement of my flatmate. I was perfectly fine, just a grazed arm, but because I had the backpack on I resembled an upturned turtle. And I couldn't take the backpack off easily because I was lying on the waist strap clip. And I couldn't easily move to free it because I had a 20kg backpack on ... fortunately there wasn't much traffic coming. Two people walking past offered to help me get up but I did point out that I couldn't get up without taking the backpack off anyway.

We did manage to get me moved, and all was well in the end, but it was quite embarrassing, and I was overly careful about where my footsteps were going on the rest of the 4km walk back home. Not that it's the first time carrying a heavy backpack has been involved in an incident whilst walking, of course. But. And, and, as I got my cold not long after this adventure, it's taken me until today to feel up to using them, and, on my, my arms are so weak it's unreal. Like, on the lowest setup of weights, I can just about do ten reps with them. But, you know, I've never been able to do a press-up either, so it doesn't surprise me.

Anyway. So I'm writing this around the time of the Autumnal Equinox (so happy Chuseok (pron. 'Chew-so(ck)) to anyone in Korea, and Bonne Année to anyone listening in from post-revolutionary, pre-Napoleonic France); it's also Harvest Festival here in the UK (and Dozynki (pron 'Dozh-in-ki) in the Slavic world), a time beloved of folk singers and beer drinkers. In a way, given it marks the passage into Autumn here in the northern hemisphere, and the point where the daylight is shorter than the darkness (hello to my Southern Hemisphere friends for whom we've reached the start of spring and the onset of warmer days, but I still prefer the Australian winters), it may seem a slightly odd time to discuss an outdoorsy topic, but I was informed last weekend that Sunday 'Get Outside' day.

This is an incentive created by the Ordnance Survey – the definitive map makers here in the UK – to encourage and help people to, well, 'get outside' more often. The principle behind it is that they believe getting outside more helps you live longer, stay feeling younger, and allow you to enjoy life more often. I'm fully aware there's some unintentional ableism there if you apply it holistically, as not everyone can get outside for reasons of habitation, health, ability, politics, etc, and even if they can, for many people 'outside' is a concrete jungle rather than the wide open spaces that the Ordnance Survey's principles aspire to, but as long as you read into it the feeling that 'where you can, if you can, when you can, try to do', then we're all good. They also suggest that similar benefits can be obtained by just looking at calming pictures of outdoor scenes, so I guess that means anyone using Windows 10 on their computers can just lurk at the logon screen for a few minutes and stare wistfully.

It's a relatively new 'call to action'; as far as my research has told me, the first one was in 2019, and obviously last year was ... affected, shall we say, by the pandemic – although it was ironically close to Get Outside Day that I took my trip to the seaside at Skegness and walked through the nature reserve at Gibraltar Point, but that's a tale for another podcast. Episode 34, on British Seaside Resorts, apparently. But, yes, Get Outside Day. Each year has certain 'themes', as all these celebratory days do, and this year is 'be kind'. More specifically, it's 'be kind to ourselves, be kind to each other, and be kind to the environment'. And although I've done an episode of my podcast already on 'the great outdoors', it was as long ago as Episode 6 and it's always good to revisit old themes. Plus this pod will be more about 'being kind' specifically. Which [spoiler alert] leads in to my next podcast episode quite nicely, but more of that later.

Firstly, let's talk about 'being kind to ourselves'. And by us, I mean Zoe, from Splodzblogs, who is herself an Ordnance Survey 'Get Outside' Champion – which means she's been selected by the Ordnance Survey as someone who actively espouses the principles of 'Get Outside', and to be fair her Instagram feed is mostly mountains.

{Zoe - Splodzblogs

For me, and I can only speak for my own experience, being kind to myself is about doing things that fulfil whatever emotional need I'm feeling at the time. So, things that help me rest and relax, or things that help me feel excited and motivated. Getting outside, spending time in the countryside with the views, moving my body, does all of those things for me. The Great Outdoors really is good for my body, my mind, and my soul. I know it's cliché, but it's absolutely true, and I definitely use it as part of my self-care toolkit, every single day if I can.

I'm a hiker. I think. Maybe I'm just a walker. But it's exploring on foot that I enjoy the most. I mean, I love all kinds of outdoors activities; a couple of years ago I did a challenge to see how many different outdoor activities I could do in 48 hours, and managed 71. And I'd live my life like that if I could. But walking for me allows me to see the views, smell the country air, and soak it all in in my own time, slowly. I try and walk every day – it really is the best way I've learned to be kind to myself over the years.

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< sotto > One day I will have to ask her what her blog name means < / sotto >.

Someone else who believes in the power of getting outside for her own self-improvement is Maja, from Away With Maja. She is again someone who's usually to be seen up a mountain somewhere, and has recently discovered the delights of solo wild camping.

{Maja - Away With Maja

Getting Outside always helps me be kind to myself. It's ... getting outside is a huge part of my life, and it's a huge part of self-care and kind of how I take care of myself, both physically and mentally. I love going for hikes, I love walking, I always feel better when I can be outside, get some fresh air; if I'm stressed, if I'm anxious or worried about something, I always find that going outside, moving my body, and being in a different environment always helps me with that.

You will hear more from both of those two later. But first, I want to talk about how getting outside helps me be kind to myself.

For me, this is very much linked to my mental health more than my physical health. I mean, I know that walking for like 7-8 miles isn't going to harm me, especially when compared to sitting on my chair all day at my computer, but while I like the physical side of exercise, it's the mental side that benefits me more I think.

That's not to say I don't go out for physical reasons. At school I was accidentally sporty, I kind of fell into cross-country running a bit my accident but I really enjoyed it once I did. And I never really baulked a lot at the idea of getting up at sparrow's fart in the middle of January to run around a country park for 10km in the snow [you warm up after about 200m, don't worry!], so while these days I might whinge to the marshals at Parkrun every Saturday, I do at least willingly turn up. Incidentally I'll be doing a future podcast episode all about Parkrun,

well, running in general, but that's not going to be until I think June next year. But for now let's just say that while I do them, and I know it keeps me fit and active, it's not why I do them.

I'm one of those people who gets, what you might call, stir crazy. I don't like being in the same place for too long. It's evident even when I travel, and I move to a new city every three or four days because otherwise I get bored and slightly stressed and angsty. The same applies to my living conditions – while I might be surrounded by the same walls for months and even years on end, if I don't get out of them every so often (and I pretty much mean daily), it starts to grate on me. And while in principle it's better if I can get out somewhere a bit open and wild, even just a walk around the block definitely helps my mind.

It does many things. It allows me to clear my head. It helps me focus. It even serves to wake me up, if I'm feeling a bit lethargic. Where I used to work was on a business park just outside the edge of the town I lived in, and the other side of the car park was a small woodland. So sometimes, if I was feeling tired or stressed, I'd leave my desk for 10 to 15 minutes and just walk a little through the trees. Despite its location, there were rarely other people there and you could barely hear the traffic from the main road, so it was nice and restful, peaceful even. I also generally walked through that wood on the way to and from work; I tended to walk from my house to the office, in daylight anyway, as the route took me not just through that small wood, but also along a road in a large woodland and over the fields of the nearby country park that used to be a railway yard serving the local coal mine. I didn't do it in darkness because it was largely over grass with a couple of steep inclines and no lighting; you can guess how someone of my ... shall we say, abilities, would fare with that. In Winter I tended to take the road through the town centre – it was about a mile and a half longer, much less interesting, but at least I could see where I was going.

And I guess that's an example of showing that even people who live in suburbia, who drive to work, can often find a small piece of outdoors that serves their needs, even if it's just a few minutes a day in a lunchbreak.

I have a particular passion for woodland; I've described myself as a wood-elf before now, and, I'm sure I've talked about this before, I think it stems largely from when I was a teenager and used to run home from the nearby nature reserve through the pine forests. I'd be the only person there for much of it, just me and the trees, and the red squirrels which I very rarely saw, and it was very pleasant, very relaxing, I could just cast away the worries of my school life (for which I'm now in therapy, thank you for that, you little shits), and think only of my breathing, of my footsteps, of the air, a mix of pine and salt, of the quiet. It felt, safe I guess. It felt like it was my territory, my home.

There's a recent trend, a concept apparently imported from Japan, called 'forest bathing'. The idea is, simply, to immerse yourself in the woodland and let your senses be flooded by the forest atmosphere. It's believed to recharge you, improve your wellbeing, and kickstart your nervous system, reducing any stresses and 'fight or flight' stimuli you might be feeling. It's also believed to be beneficial to improve the immune system.

The Ordnance Survey website gives this, maybe scientific, explanation. I'm not a scientist, let alone a neurologist, so I'm just going to say what they say. And I quote. "*The sympathetic nervous system is also known as fight or flight. It helps direct the attention and energy from our body into keeping us safe when we come up against a stress factor. This is where we should only be spending short bursts of time. The parasympathetic nervous system is our rest and digest mode - this is where we should be spending most of our time. Whilst any time outside will help boost your mental and physical health - nature therapy is a gentle practice designed to help support your wellbeing in a natural environment - be it a woodland, beach, park or even your own back garden.*

Also known as forest bathing - it's the practice of immersing yourself in nature to open up your senses to the world around you and to kick start your parasympathetic nervous system. In essence, it improves your wellbeing."

All I'm saying is I was feeling the benefits of woodlands long before it became trendy.

It doesn't have to be woodlands of course, and certainly when I'm hiking or walking there's a whole plethora of environments I feel relaxed and comfortable in, including cliffside footpaths and wide open spaces in the foothills. It's just, for me, it's always been woodlands I'm more drawn to, and where I feel the most relaxed and chilled, if I allow myself to let go (which is always the bigger problem, but being in that environment certainly

makes letting go a lot easier). Well, not *the* most relaxed, but that's ... a tale for a very niche podcast episode that I've not thought about yet. Hi if you're listening to this via Full Swap Radio, you all know where I'm going with that.

Regardless of any scientific benefit to the nervous system, being outside, being in woodlands, certainly helps my mental state of mind, which is much harder to measure and prove. I just know that after spending time outdoors, I feel more awake, happier, and calmer than I did before I started. The same is true for my running, although the huge caveat here is that the main reason I feel less mentally stressed is because all my run-time (ho ho) is filled with thoughts of 'omg this hill is going to kill me' and 'why am I doing this, why, why', and thus I don't have the time or space to think about what's been stressing me. And then when I finish running, I'm too physically exhausted to think about my angst. That said, also, the state of mind of 'having finished' a run is one of euphoria, the sense of achievement of having done something that ... hard. The best part of a long run is looking back and going 'wow, I did that', and it's something that can never be taken away from you. I'll concede I've never run a marathon – indeed while not the longest I've ever run for, the longest official race I've ever done was a half marathon back in ... 1992, in Southport, a town also not noted for its hills, so as half marathons go, it wasn't exactly taxing. But, still, I did it.

The other modern theory that has been popular online, and related to forest bathing in a way, is that of 'earthing', also known by some as 'grounding'. Again, I'm no scientist so I don't know if this is a valid concept, or if it's just some 'hippie woo', but in holistic terms, the principle certainly has beneficial effects for me.

Earthing is a very simple concept. In basic terms, it's the idea that connecting yourself with the earth directly is beneficial for our health, both mental and physical, and is said to reduce inflammation, and chronic pain, and improve the cardiovascular system and even your mood. The alleged science behind this is to do with electrical conductivity. In essence, being 'grounded' allows electrons to pass between your body and the ground, restoring the body's natural defence systems. This can only happen of course with direct contact – skin to soil, as it were, with nothing in between.

You can see where I'm going with this, obviously.

While it's perfectly possible to 'earth' yourself through any body contact, lie sitting on the grass with your hands on the ground for half an hour, most people who advocate earthing tend to promote doing so by being barefoot. The logical reason for this is it's the easiest and most efficient way to ground yourself, as you can do it without any extra and convoluted effort on your part. Rather than going for a walk and having to run your hand along every single hedge and bush you find, and going out of your way to touch the ground at every opportunity, being barefoot means you're constantly 'grounded' and therefore getting the full and maximal benefits you can.

Studies have shown, albeit in small groups, that going barefoot does indeed seem to reduce pain and improve mood, although in addition both of these two factors are hard to measure accurately. And the exact mechanism for this apparent improvement is yet to be scientifically confirmed.

But, of course, I don't walk barefoot because I believe that makes it easier for electrons to travel from the ground into my body. Rather, I walk barefoot in part because, regardless of the exact mechanism why, it definitely does improve my mood. When I Get Outside, I'll often be barefoot because the combination of both makes me less stressed, more calm, happier, in a way. Interestingly, it's not just me that's noticed this. When I was on The Hike Across Great Britain in the summer of 2019, my hiking partner Becky directly stated that I appeared to be happier, bouncier, more amenable to chatting etc, when I was able to hike barefoot, and even when I was in the minimalist sandals that I had for the journey, I was much less content and a little more irritable. The early days on the Pennine Way, after the ripped toenail incident, when I was stuck in walking shoes, when the rain was relentless, and the views misty, were a bit of a low point on that hike, and I'm sure I'd have felt a bit better if I could have waded through the damp patches barefoot.

As to why, I talked a bit about this in my very first podcast episode all about Barefoot Travel, but in essence I feel too restricted in shoes, even sandals most of the time to be honest, and being barefoot means I feel free, and therefore more comfortable. My feet get too warm if they're enclosed and that affects my mood negatively, in the same way as if you're wearing a sweatshirt on a hot summer day. Plus I feel lighter, I feel more attentive to my surroundings (although my experiences with my dyspraxia might suggest otherwise), and I feel more like

the person I feel I am, rather than masking or hiding myself behind a fake ... face, I guess. And I mask my real identity a lot more than you might imagine; I mean I pretended to be a heterosexual man for a couple of decades lol.

If you abide by the principles of 'earthing', there are certain surfaces that don't 'work', as it were. These are mainly man-made surfaces like asphalt and concrete, so my barefoot parkruns generally wouldn't count. But for me, that's still Getting Outside, that's still freeing my feet, that's still making me chilled, and I still feel the mental health benefits from it. But certainly when I Get Outside on hikes for instance, I'm doing it over grass, over natural ground, through woodland, on ciffside walks, in the hills, in wide open spaces, and they're all surfaces that 'earthing' promoters advocate for. And while I definitely feel happier in the countryside than the local park, that's less to do with the surface I'm standing on and more to do with simply being somewhere out in the vastness of nature, where I can breathe in the fresh air and stand and look out at the landscape, where I'm more likely to be on my own, and can feel content in myself, without external stress. One of the last hikes I did near Sheffield before I moved up to Glasgow was to finally visit Mam Tor, and while the top of that hill was quite busy, the path heading eastwards towards Lose Hill was both comfortable under bare feet and somewhat devoid of people - I almost saw more cows on the trail to be honest. It was a late afternoon to mid evening, the skies were clear, and the views vast, and it just felt like a really lovely place to be.

But.

That's not to say any of this Getting Outside always works for me and is 100% foolproof, of course. There have been many occasions where I've dragged myself out of the house in a funk, and shuffled along listlessly as I walk through the local area, forcing every stride rather than enjoying it. Where my mind is so overburdened with angst and mood that it's all I can think about with each footstep. And in those states, I tend to walk slowly, much slower than normal, as if nothing really matters and I don't feel like I have any need to do anything more than trudge because either it won't change anything or I'm actively avoiding it. And when I arrive back home, I'm feeling no better than when I left. But, of course, I'm feeling no worse either, and the chances are, even if I didn't enjoy it, the act of going out stopped me from slipping even deeper into my mood.

[an alternate jingle?]

The second strand of Get Outdoors Day is to "Be kind to others". Here's Zoe again.

{Zoe

I guess that while kindness to ourselves is about self-care, you know, doing things we enjoy, finding ways to remove the stresses from our lives, being kind to others is about reaching out, doing things for them, doing things for our environment. Maybe it's inviting someone you know is stressed out or who could do with a chat to join you on a walk. Maybe it's campaigning for better access on your favourite walking routes so that those with mobility needs can enjoy it too. Maybe it's litter-picking in your local area so it's both cleaner, so it's nicer, but it's also better for wildlife. Or maybe it's simply smiling and saying 'hi' to others you meet on a route. I mean, there's really not enough of that these days.

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Given what I said at the end of the section on being kind to myself, you may be unsurprised to hear that this is the aspect I have the most detachment with. That said, Zoe makes a very valid suggestion - the mere aspect of saying 'hi' to someone you meet on your walks is a start. Despite what she says, I've felt it very common for people to wander past and smile, nod, say 'hi'. Maybe it's because I'm from The North, where people are stereotypically happier and more receptive to it, but I think for me it's because I'm often hiking in the countryside, or in more remote areas, and people tend to be less ... I don't now if 'guarded' is the right word, but certainly if you're on a path where you might only expect to see three or four people, you all have that shared experience, you're there for the same reason, you have something in common, as opposed to walking down a suburban or city street being passed by lots of people, some rushing to catch a bus, some focussed on simply getting through their daily 'need to do' list, people in an everyday setting who may have nothing in common with you. Being in the countryside is, I think, more of a 'shared feeling'.

That's not to say people don't smile in the city, but again I think it depends which city, and when you're there. And certainly if you live in a city and said 'hi' to everyone you passed on an average day, you'd lose your voice

within the hour. And people might find you a bit odd, to be honest. But passing dog walkers down a footpath that was once a railway line, or two joggers crossing paths in a park, that's usually worth a 'nod' at least.

Speaking of parks, now here's an observation from my flatmate. In these pandemic times, with, well I guess here in the UK there are fewer actual restrictions but certainly people are more wary of meetups inside pubs or venues, you'd have thought there would be more groups meeting in local parks or the like. Covid transmission is lower in the open air, and it's very much easier to socially distance – there's a lot more room to spread out. Most towns have some green spaces, and many cities over here have reasonable parklands dotted around not just the suburbs but even near the city centres themselves, and obviously even the introverts have friends, if not the occasional social group. And as the benefits of 'getting outside' are well-known, the combination of socialising in the outdoors should be a no-brainer. But for some reason, this isn't happening anywhere near as much as it should – people are either still having virtual meetups, which is great for rainy days but it's not as easy to foster connections, or they've gone back to indoor meets with nominal protections, which many people are still wary about.

As I said earlier, I do have a rare outdoor social meet in a couple of weekend's time, but so far it's the only one outdoors. In theory I should probably look into a hiking group or something, but to be honest walking in general has always been a solo pursuit for me, similar to running as I also mentioned earlier.

This leads me quite naturally onto Parkrun. In the context of 'Getting Outside' and 'being kind', it's pretty much the ideal combination. This is because, despite its name, it's less about the running and more about the, uhm, 'park'-ing, so to speak. For those of you who don't know, Parkrun is a worldwide, I guess 'organisation', which puts on free 5km running events in primarily public parks (they try to shy away from defining routes on public roads, well, pavements, because extra admin) on Saturday mornings. They can be quite popular – although the one I used to go to in Sheffield (Castle) has an overall average turnout of 56, nearby Endcliffe Parkrun averages 451. Because it's flat, I guess.

The thing is, if it were just about the running, they'd never be that popular – most people would have better things to do at 9am or thereabouts on a Saturday morning, especially in the winter. But that's not its prime focus. It's designed as a way for people to exercise and socialise in the open air, and not specifically as a race. Obviously there are always people who actively use it as running training and/or try to break a PB each time, but most people are just there because it's a way to get out on a Saturday morning. They jog with people they know, with their children, or even with a dog. You don't even need to run – a lot of people simply walk around the course to chat with friends. There isn't a cut-off time as such, though an hour is the generally accepted time limit, but even so there's a marshal in the race whose job it is to tail-walk and be the last person to finish. People often spend their parkrun simply walking around with them, chatting.

The other thing about Parkrun is that it's more of a social community. It's not just about turning up to do 5k around a park. There's a lot of people who put on each run, marking out the course, making sure people go the right way, acting as timekeepers at the finish, etc. Each race also needs organising – there's a whole group of people who ensure each run can take place, and take place safely. They're all volunteers, and indeed people alternate between volunteering and running. Most parkruns have their own online social media community (particularly on Facebook I've noticed), and the idea is very much to help each other Get Outside, not just to exercise and improve their physical health, but also to meet people, to get involved, and to make people feel like they're less alone. It is, very much, an example of being kind to others.

Parkrun is the simplest and most common way that people Get Outside to help others, but there's other ways too. Hiking groups exist, as mentioned, and these are either dedicated – often to specific markets; retired people's hiking groups are quite common, for instance – or they're part of a larger community group which has regular outdoor activities, like The yes Tribe, whose members often arrange to meet up for hikes, wild swims, paddle-boarding, or other activities. Some people also do Geocaching, which involves hiding things at set locations in the outdoors for other people to find – thus encouraging people to Get Outside and even if they might be doing so on their own, it's with the support of an entire community. I've never done it, perhaps surprisingly, but I have several friends who do. In a similar vein is orienteering, where cross-country running meets treasure hunts, and of course only a couple of steps beyond that is the whole Scouting and Guiding movement, the archetypal example of where Get Outside meets Be Kind To Others, and yourself, though obviously Your Mileage May Vary on that point.

{Alternative jingle again?}

The last of the three tenets of this year's Get Outside day is 'Be kind to the environment'. Here's Maja again.

{Maja

I think there's a lot of ways that we can be more kind to the environment when we get outside, but the most important thing is to leave no trace, make sure that you aren't littering, that you're not destroying the environment or having any negative impacts on that, and I think it's also really nice to get outside with others, go for walks with friends, and just kind of share that experience with people that you care about, I think that's really important.

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Most of that is pretty obvious of course, and I'd like to think all of you listening to this episode are people for whom this is second nature to think about. Indeed I don't have anywhere near as much to say about this aspect as it's one of those things that's talked about a lot elsewhere so I don't really have much new to contribute.

That said, I have a couple of things to add. The first is about water. There are many websites about hiking that suggest you carry about 2 litres of water per hour that you're out for. This is probably excessive, especially in the UK and doubly so if you intend to be out for several days. Even if you do adhere to this principle, the question comes – how do you carry that amount of water anyway. The simplest way of course is plastic waste bottles, but you don't need me to tell you how bad this is for the environment, even if you take them with you as empties when you leave and recycle them back in town. Many hikes have refillable canteens or bottles; when we were on you Hie Across Great Britain though we had waste filtration bottles. These are usually solid plastic bottles with a filter in the lid, so you can fill up from streams and effectively treat any water supply as fresh. Ours were from a company called water-to-go, but others are of course available. While this does rely on hiking in a region with many streams crossing by, it does mean you're not only carrying less, but you're not going to be littering either.

On a holistic level though, I think people are more likely to be kind to the environment if they know more about it. My knowledge of the natural world is notoriously small, as I've referred to many times on this podcast before. But I think if people see what's around them, if people know what that plant is, what that bird-call is, what sort of thing they can find even in their own garden, never mind the local park, woodland, etc, then they may be more likely to appreciate what they have and less minded to take it for granted and assume other people will clean it up.

It doesn't have to be an appreciation of wild flowers and birds though; it could be on a much more personal level. I mean, have you ever tried to grow your own vegetables? I have several friends who do, including my old landlady in Sheffield who has a fine array of root veg and salad leaves. In addition, my friend V sent me a picture earlier today of a courgette she'd managed to grow which was roughly the size of a large human baby. You don't even need a garden – a couple of friends have allotments, though I know the waiting lists for these are quite long in some areas these days. But you can even do wonders with a window ledge and a watering can. For my part, I've tried in the past growing herbs. It went as well as you imagine. Mint, though. It's very hard to get mint wrong.

I want to leave you though with the thoughts of Sarah, who blogs online as The Urban Wanderer. She gave me her thoughts on Getting Outside and I want to share them with you.

{Sarah - The Urban Wanderer

I feel sometimes that getting outside is the magic pill for so many things. I've worked from home for over eight years, and it's finding a bit of space between work and home life, it's finding the space for the thinking in my mind to settle, like the snow in a snowglobe, and walking gives me that space and getting outside to just ... get away from it all really, pack the to-do list and laptop down, and just ... go.

It also helps to build a connection with the people and places around me. So from a small smile or wave, to a conversation with new friends. And it's also a great way to keep active and to get my heart pumping by walking

fast, which always makes me feel good.

With a lot going on in my life at any one time, I'm a bit of a 'do all sorts of things' kind of person, I find that local walks tend to be the main answer to my getting outside during the week, or even on the weekends depending on how busy I am. I also like to potter around the garden or enjoy a walk [she says 'cup' which may be a regional dialect-ism] around the local Business Park lake, which is only a short walk from my house, but it's enough to have that break from what I'm doing.

I'm also fascinated by the minute changes every day brings when you walk the same route. I do a 'reverse commute', which means I have to get out at a certain time and come back to my desk at a certain time, as I would if I were working in an office. It creates that nice break I was talking about before. I find that the little differences and little changes make every day just that little bit exciting; it's fresh and new every time, and it kind of helps my brain warm up for the day, which is a nice way to start as well as getting some exercise.

I think we all need to remember that getting outside is different for everyone. And what works for me might not be your cup of tea. But we're all out there doing it. And there'll be shared reasons if we care to find out about them. I find that giving some of my time to someone else while I'm out walking, or sitting, or just spending time outdoors. There's often a way of building a connection and finding out what those similarities are. And it can be beneficial for both of us, because we've had that time to chat, and take a break from our normal lives. It's kind of a moment of 'newness' in that connection, and a friend you'll get to meet again. It makes going out and seeing the same people exciting, because you get to learn about them and find out what their reasons are for being out.

I think we just need to remember that everybody's doing their thing, and a small smile can go a long way in someone's life, and I know for one I really appreciate it.

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{standard section separation jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me in another two weeks for another venture beyond the brochure. That episode will be acknowledging more awareness-type days that are coming up in early October, but can be summed up mostly in one expression: 'Coming Out'. Intrigued? Well, you'll just have to wait to hear it! So, until then, look where you're walking, 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.

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