

## Transcript of Podcast 048: Environmentalism & COP 26

{Intro.

*AMANDA: Our experience so far of COP26 down here in Australia has been a bit of a nightmare, because we have an idiot Prime Minister at the moment, and instead of going along and actually doing something useful for our global future and sustainability and all that, he managed to get into a tiff with some other countries' leaders and so on, and make Australia look like we're absolute idiots.*

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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 'whys' behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}*

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

I know it's been a while since any last pod. I know I'm one episode out of kilter, and I know that, as you can tell already from the title, I'm not doing this episode on what I promised last time. There are reasons for this, I promise you, plus of course it wouldn't be on-brand for me to actually go through with anything I promise, would it? As I've said previously, I'm simply amazed I've reached 48 episodes of this pod in the first place.

There are a couple of reasons for the change of episode and schedule. The most obvious is that I live in Glasgow now, and at the start of the month, Glasgow was also home to the COP 26 Climate Summit, and so it made kind of sense to do a pod that aligned with that, given that you know I talk a bit about political subjects on this pod, and those of you who've known me longer will know I also edge into Green issues from time to time. In the middle weekend of COP26 there was even a protest march through the streets of Glasgow that I had full intentions of attending, especially as I've surprisingly never been on a protest march before, despite having an entire episode dedicated to how to do it. Obviously it wasn't me who drew up the details of The Guide To Your First Protest, but it's there. However it coincided with a severe cold-related bug that Was Not Covid, or at least the cheap Lateral Flow Test that I took came out negative, but even so I didn't think it'd be right to be in the presence of lots of people with a virus, even if it was outside. I didn't even do Parkrun that day, that's how gruff I was feeling.

The other reason though, and I note that I'm typing up the script for this episode on International Men's Day, the much maligned day of the calendar which is designed primarily for men to stand up to other men and (overthrow the patriarchy) talk about things that (the patriarchy) are generally deemed not topics to talk about with other men, particularly mental health; I've not been particularly, I genuinely don't know what the word is here, vibrant? active? on that score of late; indeed this very day I simply could not get out of bed until after midday, which isn't terribly useful on a workday. I've barely been outside for the last couple of weeks, only to the local shop and, last week, to Parkrun - it's November and I've pretty much forgotten what sandals are. And you really don't want me to talk about my personal grooming habits, suffice to say I've not needed to do any laundry for a while. It was going so well, but then ... but then it wasn't. I'll talk about that next time though; let me click myself back into gear first, as despite how it might appear at times, my podcast is not a therapy session. I pay a therapist for that.

So, no, I've not done a heck of a lot this month so far, so I've nothing really to say. Oh, wait, hold on a second, I've just realised that because this pod is two weeks late, I never spoke about what I did at the end of October. Right. So. Yes. You remember that I was going down to London for an awards ceremony, right? Well, I did. An overnight coach the night before, which I managed to get some sleep on, perhaps surprisingly, before a couple of nights in Hackney, a borough which I've been to before but which over those couple of days I

realised, like Camden, is much bigger than you imagine. I'll go more into this next episode, obviously, but when a friend arranges to meet with you in a pub in 'Hackney' and you're staying in the centre but you find out nine minutes before you meet that pub is actually two stations away along the Overground, but it's still 'Hackney', you realise just how big London is. I was only about 17 minutes late and I soon caught up with the beers; it was fine.

The Awards Ceremony itself was a lot less stressy than I was fearing. The outfit I wore, and I realise by saying that phrase you all must imagine I was trying to be someone kind of elegant influencer type person, was pretty casual and pretty much well-regarded. I posted a pic of it to my Instagram feed but essentially it was a beer-themed t-shirt, a pair of long-length denim dungarees with two fabric daisies I'd sewn in to them, a daisy-enriched hairband, and a daisy hairclip attached to one of my two crocheted barefoot sandals. About as on-brand as you can get, if my brand is 'weird hippie vibes'. Which of course it is. I'd irked internally about whether I'd feel comfortable wearing that kind thing to/from my hostel, but in the event no-one seemed to notice or care. As one of my friends remarked afterwards: 'it's London; people see far more eccentric things daily'. It makes you wonder why I never moved there, but ... again, I'll talk about that next time, suffice to say with hindsight it would have led to a very interesting debate as to what makes me 'happy'.

Anyway. It was cool to meet with a few people I know from Twitter who I either knew well, or knew online but had never actually met before, even if one of them (Tayo, the 5 to 9 Traveller) has even appeared on a previous episode of this pod. We were both nominated for one of the awards (Best Opinion Piece), but in the event neither of us won, but hey, it was great to be nominated even. My Imposter Syndrome is quite large ...

After London I went up to Merseyside to meet with an old school friend in a micro pub in Southport for several hours on the Saturday night (Alistair; he's appeared once on this pod before talking about the best places to find alcohol in Yemen, should you ever go there and want to know). Oh and I also met my mother. The main reason for seeing her for the first time in ... several years was because I wanted to interview, if that's the right word, my step-dad about his time in the Merchant Navy, for use on a future podcast episode. I was worried I may only get 20-30 minutes of recording but I came away with over. Two hours, and that's just scratching the surface it appears. He has a lot of stories, only some of which came out in the recording, but regardless, it's going to make a very interesting episode I think.

Coming back to Glasgow was fun, given that that weekend The South had had a big storm and the rail network in Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire ... pretty much stopped, to the extent no trains were leaving London that day. Or going \*to\* London, a fact that, again, I'll talk about next episode, but it was kind of ironic that a climate-change-influenced storm affected travel to a climate-change summit.

Which leads us nicely on to the last-minute topic of this pod. It's a subject I'll come back to, with more contribs, because it's something we as people who travel the world are directly involved with, partly from a meta point of view - the sheer aspect of travelling itself is a contributor to climate change, from the mode of transport we use, to the equipment we take with us, to the way we interact with destinations once we get there - but also partly from the point that us being in a particular place affects that place's geography and environment.

What I mean by that is that we are not locals, so our being in a particular place as a tourist, as a visitor, adds to the environmental impact of that place that wouldn't occur if we weren't there. I know that one person's impact isn't great, and I'll talk about a specific reason why shortly, but ... and I know I'm quite unusual in that I often travel to places that are lesser 'developed' for, not so much tourism per se as 'visitors' in general, but many of the places we visit as travellers, especially as travel bloggers, aren't necessarily set up with infrastructure to cope with us. Which is fine if it's just me, but it all falls apart if you have several coaches or a cruise ship turning up.

Environmental impact is very different from economic impact, of course. A community might be unsustainable without tourism, but might be environmentally doomed with it. It's very much a weird knife-edge. Like, I've never been on a cruise ship so I don't know for certain what effect they have in either direction. But, economically speaking, it's never that sensible to base your economy around one thing, because what happens when that thing disappears for some reason, like, you know, Covid. But I suspect the economics and economic impact of travel is a subject for a future pod. It probably requires graphs, which is quite tricky to replicate in the medium of audio.

Anyway. A couple of weeks ago I had a chat, a live interview-type chat - shock! - with Amanda Kendle, of the

Thoughtful Travel Podcast, because she'll do an episode in the indeterminate future on LGBTQIA+ travel and needed my input as an asexual. But while I had her on the ... I've no idea what program we used, except that it wasn't Zoom, wasn't Skype, wasn't Google Meet, wasn't Microsoft Teams, and wasn't Discord. [Recently I found out that one of the Instant Messenger programs I used when I first went online, ICQ, still exists! It wasn't that either!], anyway, yes, while I had her on the whatever it is I had her on, I had her talk about her views on environmentalism, sustainability of travel, and other related thoughts, and you'll hear extracts from that conversation at points in this podcast episode.

Firstly though I want to talk a little about Climate Activism, given that we've just had COP26 here and that caused some protests and the like. Also, in related protestations, there've been ongoing protests by Insulate Britain, a campaign group specifically dedicated to insulating social housing and demanding more emphasis on a low-carbon future. They're vaguely related to, more in spirit than in practice, the much larger and wider-scoped 'Extinction Rebellion', who rally against climate change and government policy towards it.

As an aside, there's a number of people on my Twitter feed who are quite critical of the Insulate Britain / Extinction Rebellion style. In case you don't know, both parties are made up of activists who take to blocking roads to protest. Insulate Britain have recently blockaded the M25. In Nottingham Extinction Rebellion's modus operandi was to block the pedestrian crossings on a couple of the main routes into the city for around 6 minutes at a time; in London they blocked a bridge. My Twitter friends made comments of the type of 'this is disruptive, what if someone's late for work and gets sacked as a result; what if someone's ill and the ambulance can't get through'.

See, the thing is, the clue's in the name. Rebellion. A fight for change against the status quo. Change never came without some level of disruption. In fact, I'd argue that nothing at all would change if no-one gets disrupted, and the act of disruption itself is necessary to bring about change. If you're too selfish to only worry about yourselves and not see the bigger picture, then maybe, just maybe, you're part of the problem. A few minutes delay isn't going to harm you - a delay in bringing about fundamental change in climate policy is very likely to harm you in the future.

The other important thing to say is that with a lot of these protests, there's always those who think they've scored a goal by saying things like 'you protest at COP in Glasgow against unnecessary flights but how many of you flew to get there?' and 'You rally against capitalism and yet you own a smartphone'. Like, dude, firstly, sit down, you're a knobhead, secondly, we take part in society because that's the nature of society; we're trying to change things from within, and it's kinda hard to instigate fundamental change in humanity if we're all sitting in a wood in the wilds of the Scottish Highlands spoon-whittling and arguing with a herd of deer about rights of way, and thirdly, there's a huge difference between individual practice and corporate malpractice. The vast majority of protests are shouting about the much bigger picture, against government and big business policies and practice which, if changed, would blow any benefit the individual can do out of the water.

Case in point, the COP26 summit itself:

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*BAREFOOT: What I'm doing is I'm just looking up to see if there was actually an overarching theme for COP26*

*AMANDA: Ooh yes, I mean .... emission reduction.*

*BAREFOOT: ... I mean, obviously. Which is quite amazing if you think about the fact that everyone flew to get there on private planes.*

*AMANDA: I know, yeah, and I don't think any of them would have adopted my theories of sustainable travel either, so ...*

*BAREFOOT: I mean, almost certainly not.*

*AMANDA: [giggles] I mean guaranteed not, really. They're certainly not doing slow travel. They, er, I mean the private jet thing is another level entirely, and, er, I think, you know, horrifying. It'd be interesting to know the local European leaders, did they all privet jet in or did any of them travel in a more sustainable fashion. I suspect not.*

*BAREFOOT: I certainly ... our own Prime Minister flew in on a private jet from London.*

*AMANDA: Yeh, there you go see, it all starts from there doesn't it.*

*BAREFOOT: It does. Around 400 private jets arrived at Glasgow for the talks.*

AMANDA: 400?

BAREFOOT: 400.

AMANDA: *Oh my goodness. It just makes my green heart break just a little bit.*

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I'll talk more about flying later, but first I want to talk about another situation where there's traditionally been a huge disconnect between individual and corporative practices. This is recycling and the issues around plastics usage, including its relationship with provision of clean drinking water.

So, One of the most fundamental human rights is to have access to pure, clean, drinking water. Though there have been improvements in recent years, it's still estimated that 9% of the world's population don't have any access to a clean water source (where 'access' is determined by a nominal limit of 'within 30 minutes; - your mileage may vary on how appropriate that is), while around 30% (just over 2.1 billion people) don't have access to a clean, safe, water source at their home. This latter figure is the more important and concerning figure, given there's also a disconnect between maintaining a supply of clean water and the provision of sanitation - it's believed 4.5 billion people, or 60% of the population, yes, over half the world, lack safely managed sanitation - something as simple as the lack of soap means that the act of collecting and transporting clean water with dirty hands and buckets makes the whole process somewhat pointless.

Another aspect is the practice of open defecation. Yes. In some parts of the world it's seen as a weird and illegal fetish, but for around 950 million people, again mostly living in the tropics, it's a necessary way of life. Some countries do their best to educate the people, for example in Togo there are huge signs by the rivers in towns advising people not to do it, but in my experience they're largely ignored. Eritrea seems to have the largest issue with it, where just over three-quarters of the population regularly go to the toilet in the open. And obviously, without waste disposal, there's nothing to stop diseases spreading from it, plus there's no guarantee that it will happen away from water sources - especially for the 9% of people without access to any clean water, as they'll often be using the rivers etc anyway. Remember, if you're going to drink from a river, make sure the water's fast-flowing, and always drink upstream of cows. And towns.

Where clean water is available, at least at a village level, it takes several forms. My experiences on the islands of Vanuatu is that the village has a communal tap, that's fed from one of three places - tanks of collected rainwater, tanks of water provided by an external source, or piped directly from a local stream. The latter obviously isn't always guaranteed clean, and one of the weirder problems with the former is that it relies on the rainwater itself being clear of pollutants. While Vanuatu doesn't have many issues with traffic or industrial pollution, it does have volcanoes, so for example on the island of Ambrym (which doesn't have any free-flowing water), the locals advised me not to drink it because my body wouldn't have been used to the acidic and mineral content of it.

So, what's the alternative?

Let's turn back to the Western world for a moment. Now, there's all kinds of media attention onto the plastics crisis we have in the world at the moment, on how there's too much of it that's single-use (straws, plastic bags, etc) and how a lot of it isn't strictly necessary. Much of this hatred falls onto the humble plastic water bottle.

The feeling is, plastic water bottles are a waste; they just get thrown away and end up polluting the land and seas, and why don't we all switch to refillable water bottles rather than keep using endless numbers of purchased bottles. And I quite agree - I carry a refillable bottle around with me all the time (they're the item I lose most frequently when travelling as I always leave them behind somewhere!); indeed there's one on the table next to me now.

The problem is this is a very Anglo-centric view of the world.

We in the UK have pure, clean, drinking water available literally on-tap 24/7. There's no **need** for us to use bottled water anyway, except if the supply's cut off for some reason - and even when it is, it's usually only for a short period of time (the average property is off-supply for less than an hour a year). Bottled water is popular for people when they're not at home, but installation of water fountains in public places, coupled with a relaxation of shop/business rules about being able to drink your own water rather than being forced to buy

theirs, should see a reduction in that.

Indeed, Amanda Kendle highlights some people in Australia seem to rely on bottled water. Although I will say, as a caveat and an expression of my middle-class background, we were very fond of buying mineral water in the late 1980s. Admittedly in glass bottles, and mostly it was fizzy, but that was in the days when such things were posh and new, and before I realised that sparkling water just tastes of smug trickery and betrayal.

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*AMANDA: But then there's plenty of people who are travelling in places with perfectly safe water who still buy bottled water and stuff, and that's the people who I'm thinking 'come on, it's Australia, we have taps. Just bring your reusable water bottle and turn the tap on, it's fine'. So, that drives me nuts.*

*BAREFOOT: I mean, the thing is, you can get a lot of bottles these days with filters in the bottle.*

*AMANDA: Yeh, exactly, yeh.*

*BAREFOOT: I know that water is different in different parts of the world, so even water that is perfectly safe for you might not be for me cos I'm not used to the minerals in it, but just get a filter bottle, and it'll be fine.*

*AMANDA: yeh yeh yeh, some people are like 'the water tastes different there' - I mean yes, water tastes different from place to place but really? Just drunk it. I just don't think that's a good enough reason to buy bottled water.*

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But as highlighted earlier, quite a lot of the world doesn't have this privilege. So, for both locals and tourists, sometimes the only option is processed water in plastic. Especially as many of these countries have a reasonably warm climate too, making drinking water much more important. Indeed over a weekend in Sigiriya in central Sri Lanka, despite not really doing a lot, I ended up with seven plastic bottles of between 1 and 1.5 litres.

It's not unreasonable to assume that many of the 2.1 billion people without access to clean water at home resort to drinking water out of plastic. This is especially true in West Africa, where plastic sachets of water are readily available. These are around 500ml, and cost the equivalent of about 5p; local women and children walk around towns and villages with baskets on their heads full of them, and they're incredibly popular with locals. The trouble is, of course, that many of these countries have poor waste provision (and almost no concept of recycling, outside the major cities), so the inevitable happens. The ground in Togo and Burkina Faso is made up of orange dust littered with the remains of plastic water sachets and bottles, cast away as it's not just the easiest thing to do, it's very often the only thing to do. And obviously this then gets blown by the wind into rivers, which feed into the oceans. And because the water is so cheap and readily available, it's much easier to ignore the problem as the alternative of improving infrastructure would prove incredibly costly, not to mention changing the habits of a lifetime of the people. Even as long ago as 2004, according to nextcity.org, it was estimated that plastic waste weighing up to 270 tonnes was being produced in Accra, Ghana's capital, **per day**, and the majority of this was these water sachets.

If we want to solve the plastic crisis, we can't just find the 'easy actions' in our own countries - banning plastic bags and drinking straws merely makes us complacent, that we're "doing our bit", 'ticking the box' as you might say to give the impression we care rather than actually it doing anything fundamental to change anything. This feels rather like people who buy plastic red noses for their cars for comic relief but do nothing else for the rest of the year (and indeed, these plastic noses change every year to encourage continual donation, but that just adds to the amount of plastic in the world). It's performative, rather than actionable. That's not to say banning plastic bags and the like is pointless; for instance it's estimated single use plastic carrier bags will decay in the ocean (where most of them end up) in about 20-30 years so if the entire world banned them now, then that messy scourge would be eradicated within my lifetime. Plastic water bottles though? Those things hang around for around 450 years if left to their own devices. Rather, it's just one very small step we need to take, and we shouldn't ever consider the plastic pollution problem to be one that can be solved purely by the actions of the individual, because in reality, most of the problem occurs at multi-national levels.

And, while not entirely down to the lack of drinking water, it's interesting to note that most of the worst offenders for plastic pollution are in the tropics, and which lack nationwide clean water for the general public (the likes of Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Nigeria, and Bangladesh). We have to ensure that the rest of the world

has access to piped clean drinking water (this will help a number of other issues too), otherwise we're just pissing into the wind.

None of this is the fault of the people in these countries, it needs to be said. When you're living at or below the arbitrary 'poverty line', you're not going to think about the cost/benefit analysis here, you're just going to get the 5cent water sachets because that's your only option. Rather, the 'fault' lies fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the governments and the large businesses and corporations that these governments allow to manage policy.

Let's take an example here – the city of Flint, in Michigan, which was without clean water for .... a while; around five years in total. Now, this is a city in one of the richest and most generally affluent countries in the world, so you'd have thought that there was both the political will and the financial clout to fix this. However, a combination of political intransigence (far be it from me to suggest anything, but it's notable that Flint is 56.6% African-American, and according to stats on welfareinfo.org, 41.2% of people in Flint live below the poverty line as compared to a rate of 15.6% across Michigan as a whole; one imagines had the same issue occurred in Bel-Air, it would have been resolved quicker than you could say 'Fresh Prince') and the role of big business in supplying bottled water to the residents (as a public service, no less) has prevented the original problem from being resolved. This sets a very bad precedent, as it suggests the easiest solution to the problem is both the cheapest and the most profitable. It's no different from the 5 cent water sachets in West Africa; it's an easy way for someone to make money. But both solutions merely add to the plastic pollution problem, and are therefore unsustainable in the medium term.

There's also issues in regard to recycling. I think recycling makes perfect sense; you're re-using the materials you already have so you're not needing to create anything new from scratch, meaning you no longer have those initial setup costs (finance and resource), and once you've worked out how to recycle, it becomes a self-fulfilling concept, or at least a lot more so than 'use once and destroy' which is very much an end-to-end process. However. Obviously firstly not everything we use can be recycled. This is true of several types of commonly-used plastic (including the aforementioned single-use carrier bags, but also crisp packets and other metallic-layered plastic food pouches). It seems weird with hindsight that we'd actively create a product we can't reuse when we should be able to create similar-acting packaging that can be. Another related problem is that other types of plastic used in everyday living **could** be recycled, but require more specific processing that isn't commonplace in municipal recycling tips – an example of that is polystyrene. One of the other rules is you can't recycle things that have food residue on them, which always causes my brain to overanalyse when washing out my tubs of peanut butter; not the easiest substance in the world to remove from under the rim of a plastic tub that narrows at the top.

My other over-arching concern though is, in the UK at least, every council seems to have its own rules about what can be recycled and what can't be (based presumably on the facilities available locally; heaven forbid councils speak to each other to create a nationwide recycling policy). This also includes the way its collected; in Glasgow and Ashfield in Nottinghamshire for instance, plastic and cardboard/paper is collected together, while in Sheffield you have to put them in separate bins. Sometimes I have very little faith in the separation mechanics at the refuse sites these collections go to. And then of course there's that feeling, that fear, that if you get something even a tiny bit wrong – you know like leaving one little smudge of peanut butter or a small part of a non-recyclable label on a packet, or something – then the whole lot will be cast into general waste anyway and none of your bin, possibly even your whole street's bins, won't be recycled at all.

Again, I'm not saying don't recycle. What I am saying is, if all we do is wash our jars and scrape food off our pizza boxes, it's not going to stop the environmental problems we're causing as a species. As I say, the trouble is issues that require a fundamental change in government policy are quite hard to change on your own; hence the need for active protests and affirmative group action.

*{section separation jingle}*

Much of the talk about environmentalism and climate change centres on discussions around rising sea levels and how many of the world's island nations are at risk from flooding – places like Marshall islands, Kiribati, Maldives (oh no, where will travel influencers and honeymooners go now! Quelle horreur!). But change is evident much closer to home, or at least, much closer to my home.

Two years ago I hiked across Great Britain. You're probably sick of me talking about that but in truth I

probably don't talk about it enough. But that's by the by. We started, as you know, from the furthest westerly point of Great Britain, at Lowestoft in Suffolk, and we walked around the coast of Norfolk for six days. Much of this, certainly on the early stretches, was dominated by walking along either the shoreline, or on cliff tops overlooking the shoreline. But I'm mentioning this not as a means to paint a picture of the route, but more to highlight a very important aspect present across this entire path.

We stopped for brunch on the second day at a small cafe near the village of Winterton. Called the Dunes Cafe, it served up a great selection of breakfast sandwiches and small meals, and a good array of drinks. It was a beautiful, clear, sunny day, and the cafe and road up to it, and a little way beyond to the beach, were both proving pretty popular.

Listeners, it no longer exists. Within a year and a half of visiting, the cafe had been demolished, because half of it was teetering on a cliff edge.

The whole of this coast suffers greatly from cliff erosion. Some villages have been moved back a couple of hundred meters over the years, others have been lost. Walking along the beach, you get a sense of it as you can see how tall the cliffs are, but also the patches of them where the sea has worn them away. But it's only when you're walking on top of them that you get a fully clear picture as to the extent of the issue. There are places where the route of the path has clearly been lost down what looks like a crater, jutting into the land, and only the repeated patter of hundreds of feet creating a makeshift path along the new edge of a farmer's field identify the new route. Looking out to where the land once stood, you can see the chasms created, the landslides that have happened. There are no fences to protect you from a false step either – there's no point really as they'd be pulled down by the cliffs just as soon as they'd be erected. Even the footfalls tracing the new routes have moved over time as the erosion gets closer and closer to the new path.

The part of the coast between Caister and Cromer has been the most affected by this erosion; it's been estimated that up to 100m of land was lost in 12 years at the turn of this century. It must be said the cliffs here have always been eroding, due to their makeup (soft boulder clay, easily washed away), but the rising sea levels and more frequent storms hitting the coast have been exacerbating it in more recent times. The effects of climate change happening before people's eyes.

Now, several attempts have been made to mitigate this. Along part of the shoreline, stretching out to sea, wooden or metallic structures have been constructed. These are called 'groynes', and they serve to break up the waves, and prevent sediment (beach sand, mainly) from being washed away - the more sand there is, the less the water can reach the cliff to erode it. While not foolproof - some groynes in the area were themselves washed away in big storms this century – it serves as a 'stopgap' to allow a couple of decades' grace while more permanent solutions are found.

One such solution was enacted a couple of months after we walked through, at the village of Bacton. This is a place that was very familiar to me in my previous life in the energy industry; it's the site of huge storage facilities for natural gas collected in the North Sea oil fields, as well as being the British side of the continental 'Interconnector', allowing natural gas to flow between the UK and Europe, and thus allowing easy access to energy from abroad. Obviously therefore being at a location potentially in danger of erosion, alternative preventative measures needed to be undertaken. Using a technique honed in Netherlands (a country well versed in flood and erosion preventive measures), sand has been relocated directly and new entire sand dunes have been created, changing the layout of the coastline and preventing easy erosion. One possible downside is some believe it merely shifts the problem elsewhere along the coast, but for now, Bacton is safe.

Obviously this is a very big engineering task that if you applied it to the entire Norfolk Coast would cost incredible amounts of money. The question is, how much is it worth to save your village?

*{section separation jingle}*

I mentioned earlier about flights. Now obviously in my previous life as a travel blogger *{stock laughter}* I took quite a few planes, but that's largely because the places I were going to were often ones very difficult to get to any other way with the restrictions of time and money that I had. And in fact as an aside, both are more than just the simple fact that a train or even a bus take longer. That journeys aren't as direct means they may end up costing more than the flight, especially if you're returning the same way you came – think how many trains and

buses you'd have to get to travel from, for example, the UK to Singapore. The other problem with fully overland travel is administrative. Regardless of what colour passport you hold, many countries will require you to get a visa, even for transiting, and sometimes these are quite hard to get hold of en-route, or they may require evidence of entry/exit and that means you'll have to book lots of travel in advance (which may not even be possible if your intended method is a local bus). And as I noted on Podcast 25, visas can be expensive. There are also some inconveniently-placed countries for long-distance travel where even transiting is generally impossible for administrative or safety reasons.

Of course this aspect is ramped up if you either live on, or want to travel to, many island nations or a continental landmass with no land connection to other parts of the world. And this seems like a good place to pick up the conversation I had with Amanda, who lives somewhere quite far from the rest of civilisation.

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*AMANDA: So, I mean, let's start with flights, because obviously a key part of sustainable travel would be to fly less. Obviously cutting down flying is one of the most effective ways we can be more sustainable travellers, but of course I live in Perth. It's a long way from everywhere, by some mark it's the most isolated city in the world. You know, there's people, I've seen people, Northern Hemisphere people nearly exclusively, saying, pledging to never fly again. And I'm not pledging to never fly again because I would like to leave Australia again, and not on a cruise ship, so you know, there's not really many alternatives. So basically, I have to fly at some stage to travel. I would like to fly less, but I still have to fly a little bit, but then I have to, well I don't have to, I choose to, really try to embrace the whole slow travel thing and stay in one place for a longer time. You know, back in the day, when I was younger and less, I dunno, less aware I suppose, I would take lots of short flights, I'd go to Europe and go to five different countries and fly between them, because it was cheap and and easy and why not? Whereas on my last trip, pre-Covid, I went to Denmark, and of course I was tempted as I always am, you know, people are saying to me, 'oh you'll be near ... you're quite close to Germany, you should fly down there and do this, and fly up to, you know, the top of Norway or blah blah blah, but what I ended up doing was just spending those several weeks based only in Denmark, you know, a longer time in each place. I did rent a car for probably a third of the trip but even then still did the slow travel part and distances in Denmark are pretty small actually, didn't even need to fill up the tank of that car until I returned it, despite covering a fair swathe of Denmark.*

*So, the slow travel and longer time in one place kind of thing, I think, I hope that more people will cotton on to how valuable that is, but I'm not sure. So, like, for example at the moment we can, East Coast Australians have now been able to, can now leave the country and come back, as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, so it's pretty new, and I was following a guy who's gone to Singapore, and there's still some quarantine or some kind of arrangement there where it's not worth going, basically, if you're only going for a few days, and in the past a lot of Australians would go to Singapore for three or four days cos it's relatively close, you go there, go out a bit, have interesting meals, go shopping and come home. So there's been a lot of discussion about 'oh, it's not worth, I'd never go to Singapore for a week, what would I do for a whole week?' and it just makes my blood boil a little bit and I've stopped actually replying to these people because they obviously are not thinking the same way as me, but I was like 'Well I've been there for a week, and I could still go back and spend weeks there, there's so many different things you could do, you just have to change your mindset and your approach to travel', and I don't know if I'm fighting a losing battle, but I feel like perhaps I am, but I think that's the best thing we can do to be more sustainable.*

*BAREFOOT: I don't have the attention span to spend too long in a place. So I'm ..*

*AMANDA: Oh, really?*

*BAREFOOT: I always have to move, yes, it's probably related to ADHD, but I always have to move on, I always get bored and I always go 'I need to go somewhere else now'. But the last holiday I did before Covid was an Inter-Rail trip around Europe, so I had a total of about 3 months, so while I was only in a place for like 3 or 4 days, potentially, at maximum, it was just a case of then hopping on a train and then going somewhere else, so ...*

*AMANDA: Which is, yes, and that I think is totally fine, well it's funny, you're sequeing me into my next point, because my next point is that I think rather than trying to convince people to behave better, we just, the best way is to provide them with less choice. So, for example, so basically, making the tourism industry better so the choice is more sustainable and you can't, like, so sustainable travel happens by default. So, for example, in France, is this already enacted or is it coming, where you won;t be able to take a flight for a short, like an internal flight?*



*BAREFOOT: If there's a domestic train that takes two hours then you can't take a domestic flight. Unless presumably it's a connecting flight?*

*AMANDA: Yes, I don't know the ins and outs of it, but basically you can't, if you can take a short, a train trip instead of an internal flight, now you will be forced to do so, so therefore the sustainable choice is the only choice and then people don't have to think about it. And although I would love to think everyone would actually think 'oh well, it'll actually be much better for the environment to take the train, I won't take this flight', also I think for a short flight it's much simpler and easier to take the train but anyway, but if they can't fly no matter what, then they just have to be more sustainable, and that's good. So, I think that sort of systemic change is probably the way we're going to make, really shift the needle, because expecting people to always make the most sustainable choice is great, but most people probably won't, and I think in travel especially because people think of taking trips as their, it's a pleasure, it's a reward, it's a bonus, all of that kind of stuff, and so then they kind of excuse themselves from being sustainable, like they might be fabulous at home, and they always take the train to work, and they recycle, and they do all the right things, but often people forget those kinds of values when they travel because they're spoiling themselves, or it's just once a year, or whatever, and so I think it's idealistic to expect people to be sustainable travellers altruistically, unfortunately.*

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Now. There's a number of takeaways from that conversation, but going back to what I said earlier; I've taken quite a few trips (and my adventures around both West Africa and Southern Africa spring to mind) where I've flown to the region but then spent my weeks travelling around it by land, which is, I'd say, a valid compromise. My only flights were intercontinental rather than locally country-hopping. It would have actually been impossible for me to get to West Africa overland at the time – I know this because that was my original intention. But at the time ebola had closed some of the internal borders and civil war the others. One day I'll get to Guinea. One day.

This is because of course it's the shorter flights that cause the damage. There's a lot of them and many of them are unnecessary, tho of course by no means all. I've pointed out before that I've no qualms about very short inter-island flights, as seen in Orkney and Vanuatu. The latter doesn't appear to have an inter-island ferry service at all (and many of the islands, being volcanic, don't have a suitable place to moor up a usefully-sized vessel), while the former has a ferry service but often has issues with weather, especially in the Winter. Also many of their terminals are nowhere near the island villages. /me stares at Westray.

It's the flights between close cities that are the main problem. It's often touted as a 'domestic' thing, as in the France example earlier, but in reality it's international too. In a straight line it is 345 miles (555 km) from London to Glasgow; this is a very similar distance as London to Dortmund in Germany, or, in North American terms, Boston to Baltimore or New York to Toronto.

I have flown twice in 2021. Well, three times but one was a return. I flew one-way from Papa Westray to Kirkwall in Orkney (flight time 17 minutes, but an inter-island flight so it's fine), the other was Glasgow to Birmingham and back (flight time about 50 minutes). And why did I take that return flight? Because not only was it quicker than the alternative methods of transport, because of the distance involved (about 250 miles or 400 km), the coach would have taken too long and departed/arrived at inconvenient times, and the train would have been considerably more expensive. Like, double the cost. As well as taking longer than you might expect for a fast route between two of the most major cities of the country, tho that's partly because it stops at most of the other sizeable towns en route.

In principle we have a really good rail service in this country. It connects considerably more places than you might expect, including many of the smaller ones, and despite its critics it does run mostly efficiently and regularly. It just, like much else in this country, has suffered from decades of underfunding and overmanagement. The trains are often old and uncomfortable (Yorkshire has only recently stopped using old train units that were only ever designed as a stop-gap and scheduled for replacement in ... around 2005), much of the track itself is often not strong enough to withstand modern trains travelling at modern speeds so trains don't go as fast as they could, and as the storms pre-Cop26 showed, there are a number of weak links in the network that if one line is closed, much of the entire system is forced to shut down for a while.

I am fully aware the service used to be bigger and we're still reopening some of the lines and stations closed as a result of the Beeching Report in the early 1960s, but in all fairness, many of the routes that report cited for

closure ... were probably were right to close. He just went way too far and was too eager. Especially in assuming commuter routes were unviable (his belief was that many of these routes were loss-making because they were only used at certain times of the day) – closure of these types of lines forced more people into cars, thus adding to the problems of air pollution and climate change. But cars are a subject for another day.

The issue in the UK is that domestic flights are cost-effective, not just in price but also in terms of time and comfort, than other forms of travel, thus making them popular. The problem is, one of the touted alternatives, the so called HS2 high-speed railway line, is only planned to run from London to Birmingham, with extensions to Crewe and the East Midlands. The extension up to Yorkshire has now been shelved. Even if it hadn't been, we'd've been waiting 10 to 15 years for it. But. And here's the rub. No-one flies from Birmingham to London. I don't even think you \*can\* fly from Birmingham to London. HS2 would shave a full 30 minutes off the current high-speed journey from Birmingham to London, from about 80 to 50 minutes. I'd argue the cost and hassle of building the bloody thing don't justify a 30 minute saving on what is already a short journey, especially with the rise of teleworking, which is a far more environmentally-friendly thing to be doing anyway. If you're going to build a high-speed link in this country, it needs to be one that makes a significant difference over a longer distance; you know, like London to Edinburgh and Glasgow. And in any case, even if you could fly from Birmingham to London, I'd expect the cost of a ticket on HS2 to be out of the price range of the people tempted by cheap flights anyway. I know who HS2 is really targeted at, and it's not people like us.

What I'd argue really should be doing in the UK is improving local and regional local transport, encouraging people to move away from car usage for short journeys, making long-distance trains cheaper and more pleasurable to travel on, and funding the regions away from London that would mean we wouldn't have to go there anyway.

I appear to be ranting. Let's not do that.

*{standard section separation jingle}*

While writing this pod I realised I could go off on lots of different topics, including things like palm oil, motoring, and veganism. Indeed I have a contribution for the latter ready to use, I just couldn't see a way of fitting it in to this episode without covering every aspect of environmental concern, and I think that'll be good to crowdsource more contributions for. So in a few episodes time I'll do a follow-up to this one and talk about ethical and sustainable travel. Hopefully without ranting too much about transport; that'll be your job!

My next episode will be on London. Finally. I know it will, because I've already written most of it. Until then, reduce, reuse, recycle, and remind the government and international corporations that they should be doing things too, oh 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.}*