

Transcript of Podcast 054: How To Save The World

{Intro:

YOU CAN CALL ME V: Of course, the most eco-friendly way to travel is vicariously, through the Barefoot-Backpacker, from the comfort of my sofa.

}

{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 :)

While not the biggest or most important news this fortnight, you may not be interested to know I did not do Parkrun on the Saturday morning after my last podcast. I did however volunteer at my local Parkrun for the first time ever. It's a very different vibe and experience, They gave me the job of handing out the finishing tokens. Obviously I was constantly worried I'd drop them, but fortunately I managed to keep myself under control.

Part of me feels really irksome with myself for not running. Another part of me realised that at least I'm doing *something*, and if I wasn't going to run, or enjoy the run if I did, then it's perfectly obvious to volunteer instead. After all, without volunteers, Parkrun wouldn't happen, and it's not like there's a time limit on taking part in Parkruns in that sense.

They didn't need me last weekend though, which ... I'd done some hard (for me, anyway) hill training in the same park on Friday assuming they would, then when they didn't I decided I might as well run Parkrun anyway, even if my policy tends to be not to run on successive days. I took it easy and it was my slowest time yet. Didn't feel too knackered though till Sunday evening after I'd done another long walk to take advantage of the dry sunny (but still cold) weather, to another park in the city where they do a Parkrun (Tollcross) just to have a walk around it. One day I might do a blog on the intersection between Hometown Travel and Parkrun, and the way it can take you out into parts of your local area you may never have thought to otherwise go. Given I passed Celtic Park, home to one of the big football clubs in the area, suggests the same is true for most kind of sporting activities. I know I did a pod on sport once, but that was going abroad for it.

Anyway.

I'm sure there are bigger and more important things happening in the world right now, but I'm Generation-X. I spent the first 14 years of my life expecting nuclear war to take place at any given moment, and then the Berlin Wall came down and everything was all right at last, and the world became a much safer and nicer place, and it was just a question of when we'd get around to full liberation and freedoms for everyone, And you don't want to know how pissed off at Boomers I am right now. They're still there, fecking everything up, and it just feels like all that hope we developed in the 90s has come to naught. Obviously I blame Tony Blair. Heh. [I am fully aware the 90s weren't 100% nice for everyone and there were some major trouble spots, but on a global scale, they were safer than the 1980s. YMMV on whether 3-4 years of war were better than 30-40 years of repression, indeed YMMV on the repression involved, but that's why I don't talk about Bosnia-Herzegovina very often.]

And on a similar note, Mitrovica in Kosovo is a very interesting place, with a very strange Tito-era monument shaped like the Greek letter Pi. It's something to do with mining heritage, but honestly, I've no idea.

On a completely different subject; I've now done three Twitter Spaces conversations and they get more fluid

each time. V says it'll be interesting to listen back to the early attempts and see how amateurish they are. A bit like my podcast really. I try not to listen to my earliest episodes because I know the quality and style were still very much ... clearly I've no idea what I'm doing, I am half-tempted to re-record them. Episode 3 was the one I really feel irksome about, which is exactly why I redid the subject of Bucket Lists for a later podcast (episode 38). People still listen to my early episodes, which is great, but I feel I've improved since then. My most popular episode is my first episode, the introduction to me and why I'm The Barefoot Backpacker, which, I mean, it's appropriate I guess. It's not the worst episode in my back catalogue.

Anyway, yes, Twitter Spaces. So the most recent was on Travel & Health, including gratuitous mentions of toiletry habits, which apparently lost me a few live listeners, but hey we did warn you beforehand we'd be talking about that kind of thing! Because of when my VA is generally available, I tend to do Spaces at 12:30 UK time (currently GMT) every other Thursday (in weeks when I'm not releasing podcast episodes), but because the Spaces recording is only available for 28 days after broadcast, I'm minded to start releasing old ones in the intervening weeks of my podcast after they expire. Since the first one we did has now expired, it's possible you'll see it in your pod app of choice next week. I've not decided yet. It requires me to transcribe it. I find it hard enough to transcribe my contribs for my normal pods, tho saying that, it often helps me to write the rest of my pod around them. Yeh, I often don't know what I'm podding about until I get the contribs, which ... isn't the most standard way of recording a pod but I am, very much, an outlier.

Anyway.

This pod is a follow-up to episode 48. That one was about environmentalism, given that at the time of writing, we had the COP26 summit taking place a couple of miles from my flat. At the time I said I'd do a follow-up pod, but then I got distracted by London. And stuff. But here we go.

{section separator jingle}

One of the topics I didn't talk about last time was agriculture and food. I had a slot for it, but it didn't make it in. But I've recently written a blog post about my hike along the Pennine Way, and that got me musing again about the whole Hike Across Great Britain that we did in the Summer of 2019. That hike started in East Anglia, and I mentioned a bit in Pod 48 about the erosion we encountered along the cliffs of the Norfolk Coast Path.

There was another thing we noticed on that path though, that seemed to have been a problem specifically around the time of our visit, but worth mentioning in a much wider context. Parts of the path around Bacton Gas Terminal are unmarked and scheduled to run along the beach itself (because no-one wants barefoot hikers wandering through a site of national importance). This does lead to issues at high tide since at some points the passage between the sea and the cliff edge is quite minimal. And this is important since it means all manner of things get washed up onto the sand on the tide, including large chunks of palm oil.

It's strange stuff. It looks and feels a bit like huge irregular shaped lumps of soap. Each lump was maybe the size of my hand on average, with jagged edges as if it were bits of rock chopped off a cliff by the water, and it's quite smooth to the touch. And it was everywhere on the section of beach around Bacton, like every few meters we'd encounter another lump.

I didn't think anything of it at the time, but there were signs up telling people to be aware of it. One of the major problems from a local point of view is it's poisonous to dogs. And we met a lot of dogs on our hike in this section.

In this specific instance, it's been dumped overboard by ships in the North Sea, and has coalesced on its journey ashore. This is legal if and only if the ships are at least 12 miles offshore when they dump, but either this isn't far enough or some ships were doing it illegally.

Palm oil itself has a whole world of issues, none of which I was really that aware of before doing research for this pod, and the dumping of it overboard appears to be the least of the issues surrounding it. The main issues seem to be an over-exuberance on behalf of some countries to grow it (because it's both profitable and efficient in terms of the ratio of what you get per hectare of plantation) at the expense of the natural environment (especially rainforests. It's always the rainforests), and the working conditions of those involved in growing it, at

least on the larger plantations.

Much to the annoyance of my VA who has been nagging me to write a post about palm oil for a while, I will not be going into detail about it on this pod, because there are other people who can talk about it in far better ways than I ever could. I know I often talk about things I don't have much knowledge of (but have done some limited research) but this one feels a bit big for me. Someone who has is Hannah Ritchie and Max Rosa, who did an article for ourworldindata.org on palm oil, so go check it out, they know far better than I do.

It does however open up a wider debate about agricultural practices in general. Now, many of these aren't something we as the average traveller can do a lot about. I mean, sure, you could boycott countries and products that use agriculture in negative ways, both socially and environmentally, but, you know ... unless you want to set up your own commune and source your own corn, you're always going to be at the behest of big corporations etc.

There are, however, other ways to 'do your bit', as it were. Here's Roo, from Roo Loves Travel, talking about something close to her heart in this sphere.

{Roo - Veganism}

From trying to use less electricity, less plastic, and buying more second-hand in order to be more environmentally conscious, there are many lifestyle changes I've made and many more I can work towards. However one of the biggest impacts that can be made by lifestyle is by reducing animal products. Livestock and its by-products such as fashion account for 51% of all worldwide greenhouse gas emissions, according to Goodland et al. This is huge.

For many, the idea of adopting a Vegan lifestyle repulses them. I've known many people who hate vegetables, hate substitutes, and say they couldn't give up the comfort of their love of leather seats or their love of cheese. And it's true that I've found many challenges in giving up treats that I love, but I've also broadened my horizons as well.

I will say my love for animal welfare trumps my love for the environment, but the environment has to be healthy for animals and humans to thrive. I do worry about the impact on future generations. How could I tell a child that my love of Cadbury's was greater than my love for our entire planet and all of the species in it.

I know many people struggle with change, and with willpower, but making small swaps over time, and eating more vegetables over animal products would collectively make a huge difference to our world. Start small, learn more, and try to be open-minded. And at the very least I'd like to see less hate on those of us who have made this change, because we're all in this together.

Now. I'm not vegan. Sorry Roo. I'm not even vegetarian. Sorry V. Although as an aside there's quite a few people, both online and who I've shared office space with, who assumed I was vegetarian, because, well, my general lifestyle appears to scream 'environmental hippie', but also more because I had a tendency to bring in food for lunch from home. Because I lived alone, I tended to have lots of leftovers when I cooked meals for myself, and very often these would end up as lunches (often in baguettes). Many of these meals were vegetarian stir-frys; often with halloumi, or root vegetable based curries, but certainly always involving peppers, shrooms, onions, herbs, spices, and sometimes rice or noodles. In truth, it was largely because they were easy to cook, and I didn't have the worry about 'is it cooked enough'. Undercooked chicken can get you in the toilet for a while, if not indeed the hospital. Undercooked noodle stir fry just means you feel the crunch of pepper or the squeak of halloumi. Also, because meat tends to dominate the meal with flavour, cooking purely with vegetables means you can experiment more with spices. When your curry pot is filled with chunks of sweet potato, parsnip, and bell peppers, you don't need meat to bulk up the dish, and you have plenty you can get your naan around. Not a euphemism.

But anyway. I'm not suggesting everyone goes vegetarian or even vegan. That's for you to decide. Me, I like cheese too much to be vegan. My lodger in my real house is vegetarian and she used to date a vegan. Whenever we'd meet up she'd be like 'I neeeeeeeeeeeeeeeed cheeeeeeeeeeeese!' and we'd get pizza, because certainly at the time, vegan cheese did not pizza well. I also like pig too much to be vegetarian. There used to be a vegetarian cafe in Nottingham that offered vegetarian bacon as an option on many of their sandwiches.

When pressed about it, they admitted 'yeh, we know, it's basically cardboard, but some people like it I guess'.

But. That's not the point. The point is, one thing we could do to improve the world is to maybe eat less meat. Again I'm not specifically promoting well-known concepts like 'meat-free Mondays' - it should be your choice and your convenience, if you decide to do it at all, but it helps to bear in mind the environmental choices you could make, if you're able to make them. Some people might even be able to grow vegetables and fruit in their own garden or allotment, though I know the waiting lists for the latter are often incredibly long. And while my mother grows her own chillies, my mother is posh and has a greenhouse and they're not very big anyway. You're always going to have the problem of importation of fruit like bananas and mangos. I had a honey pomelo the other day. Lidl was selling them for 95p. I'd never had one before. It's a bit like a grapefruit. It's not my favourite fruit. Give me a mango or a melon any day.

You could raise your own chickens and pigs if you wanted. The environmental cost of that would be much lower, but it would require more land than you tend to find in the average council flat. I do know people who do have chickens, actually. They cry when one dies.

I've never really worked out the environmental or moral issues around eating bugs and insects. I've had them, in SE Asia and southern Africa. But generally only deep-fried. If you deep-fry anything it tastes like the dregs of a KFC Bargain Bucket, so your mileage may vary there as to the desirability of them. I quite liked them though. Great for snacking on. Better than twiglets, but then most things are. I still eat twiglets though. God knows what they put in them; some kind of addictive drug I'll wager.

Can't really make a roast dinner out of locust and caterpillar though.

{section separator jingle}

One of the latest 'buzz phrases' in the travel blogger world is 'slow travel'. This seems to be a catch-all term for any number of different types of travel, but all of which are focused on taking time to travel rather than just blitzing your way through a series of tick-boxes and then on to the next one. In essence, it's the exact opposite of group tour travel.

And you'd think therefore this would be something I could truly get behind, something that really matches the core ethos of how and why I travel. Because everywhere is interesting, right? So everywhere deserves time to stop and smell the history.

You'd be mostly right, of course. A lot of it concerns things like taking local and land-based transport rather than flying. And that's definitely something I can get behind. It's widely known that flying isn't great for the environment, and that's something I touched on in Episode 48, but also ... let's be honest, flying isn't really that enjoyable really, is it? The benefits of flying are that you can get to somewhere far away or awkward to get to, quickly and easily, in relative terms. The malefits are that you're squashed into a small metal tube with lots of other people, given little legroom or comfort (and yes I have flown Business Class, which I was going to talk about here but it deserves its own pod to be honest) ...

..., the food's unappealing, the views are terrible, you have to go through a lot of admin to even board, and, if you're not taking hand luggage (and the airlines that allow you to this cheaply are slowly diminishing), admin and wasted time at the end of the journey, and then, because airports are rarely near where you want to go, the extra journey time at either end makes you wonder why you bother. Flying is a bit like having sex. Some people enjoy it, but many more people believe it's great because everyone else tells them it is, whereas in reality their experience is actually pretty awful, they just don't want to say lest they break the illusion.

However. One of the major issues with the over-emphasis on slow travel is that it relies on having the time to do it. Many slow travel proposers suggest spending a couple of weeks in one place, and ideally longer. Get to learn about a place. See it as a local. Don't be rushed. Take your time. Which is great if travel is your job, or you're a consultant who only works 6 months of the year, or you're retired or independently wealthy. Fact is, most people simply can't "slow travel" in the way many people demand, because they only get a limited amount of time off every year, or they only have a small budget so want to maximise their value for money, or they know they'll never come this way again. It's fine to say 'the best way to see Paris is to spend a month there' but if you have two weeks and want to see more of France than a large city with gridlocked streets, overrated tourist

attractions, and suburban streets that ooze charm at 6am, but city gravy by 1.15pm, then you are not the target market for slow travel. And that's perfectly valid.

As an aside, I'd say Paris is probably the foreign city I've visited the most. I will almost certainly visit it again many times in my life. That doesn't mean I love it. I've actually described it as a better city to live in than visit, so in terms of Slow Travel, it's a perfect spot. Settle down in an apartment near Pere Lachaise or something and live some kind of bohemian life. It'd be cool. But as a tourist? Nah, see "the sites" then bugger off after three days to somewhere prettier and more interesting.

I wonder if I'll alienate half my audience with this pod. The audience I haven't already alienated by saying I dislike Italy and find pizza boring, anyway.

Anyway.

Oh yeh, slow travel. Someone who feels the same way is Agnes, from the blog 'Travel on the Reg', which if you look it up, is short for 'regular'.

{Agnes - Travel On The Reg

Slow travel is an interesting concept. It drips in privilege of course because there's only a certain subset of populations worldwide who can afford to spend more time in destinations. It's also not necessarily something everyone even wants to do, when they're out there exploring the world. I have an acquaintance who believes all trips abroad should include hours spent at cafes, people watching, soaking in the scenery, sipping on Java. That's fine if that's your thing, and something you love to do to get a feel for the place you're visiting, but my issue comes in when it's described as the way 'locals do it'. My response to her as it would be to anyone who considers hanging out at cafes to be the way locals do it, is to remind that slow traveller that if you really wanted to do as the locals do, you'd get a local job. Locals work before locals play.

Slow travel is subjective, ideal travel is subjective, and there is no way to travel as the locals do because, put simply, they live and work in that place you're visiting.

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Working and living abroad. That's a whole 'nother topic, and subject of a future pod. I'm not sure when, though I have at least one contrib on it already.

There's another commonly-said thing about 'slow travel' and 'local travel' too. "Eat where the locals eat" to get a better and more genuine experience. This may be true in many places, vaguely, but I can tell you now, try that in a lot of the UK and you'll end up in the local Wetherspoons, feasting on cardboard chips and pre-cooked microwaved curry. In the travel blogger world we seem to have an idealised picture of 'locals' but if you think about it, most people aren't privileged enough to be able to go gallivanting around the world so their everyday food would be generally quick, cheap, simple. Think about how often you go out to eat in your everyday lives, then think how often you get takeaway, or visit the local pub. If someone was visiting your town and asked you 'I want to do what the locals do', what would you say? Where would you suggest?

I mean, getting drunk on pints of Tennants Lager in the pub and then ordering a takeaway Papa Johns pizza is certainly 'eating and drinking like the locals do', and I guess if you're a foreign traveller it might be seen as a cultural high-point of your journey, but maybe it depends what sort of traveller you are. That was not a subtweet, though certainly I used Papa Johns rather than Dominos not entirely accidentally.

Anyway. Slow Travel.

In fact most of my backpacking trips could be classified as slow travel, in many ways, since I spend time in a country or a culture, I see what I need to, I stay in local accommodation, take local transport, eat in local places, and then move slowly on to the next place seeing the countryside as I go. And this is exactly what the Slow Travel movement is for. Rather than just sliding in to a place, taking pictures, and sliding out again, and not taking any time to explore somewhere, you stay a while, you get a feel for it, and, most importantly, you contribute to the local economy in exchange for experiencing local culture. Local cafes are good for this, but also markets, shops, even visiting local community projects, speaking with local people, and not feeling like you're in a rush to see everything.

The difference is ... I have a really short attention span. And when I plot my trips, insofar as I do plot them at all, I make a note of what I want to see, and assess if they're places that, overall, I feel the urge and need to visit. When I'm there, I see what I want to see, do what I plan to do, and then move on. I spend no more than four days in any one location, because after that I simply get bored. I need something new and exciting to see and do. And this is where the majority of slow travel proponents leave me cold. I don't care if we're talking about New York or New Cross, Paris or Padstow, this is very much my limit. "You need a week to see everything in London", like, dude, I calculated that after three days I'd be in Hounslow visiting obscure museums. Give me a week and I'd be having to do day trips to Lyme Regis and Norwich, just to be doing something different. I had a week in Athens once, travelling with a friend, sorry, "friend". Spent half it in pubs. It did make me appreciate that Greek craft beer was much better than I'd expected, but still ...

The other thing I'd like to say about slow travel is that, as you are aware, though I am equally aware I don't talk about it anywhere near as much as the achievement deserves, in the summer of 2019 I hiked across Great Britain for 57 days. It's the subject of Podcast 10, and I've recently written a blog post about the Pennine Way section, in and of itself a huge achievement. In one sense this is the absolute pinnacle of slow travel. In another ... we spent very little time *in* any given place, we just wandered through, stopping off in pubs, cafes, etc, but not really *seeing* anything each place had to offer, and in the whole trip we only spent more than one night in (excluding our own home, as it was en-route) three places (King's Lynn, Peebles, and Glasgow), and one of those was due to illness. Is that slow travel? Yes. Does that espouse the aim of the Slow Travel movement? Technically no. There are people who do things like walk the length of The Nile, or cycle around the world. Is that slow travel? Is it still slow travel if they try to do it in the quickest time?

It also, and I am 100% sure this is not the intention, implies that the archetypal British summer holiday of 'pack all your things and let's go to the seaside for a week' is a very Slow Travel vibe. At least if you stay at a seafront B&B and not in a holiday camp. Or a resort hotel. But Benidorm could be a Slow Travel destination with a bit of application. What could be better for the environment than spending the day on a beach?!

On a related but side note. Some places are not meant to be more than a Bucket List tick-off. One of my good travel podcasting friends, Amanda Kendle (of The Thoughtful Travel Podcast) released an episode a few months ago about slow travel, and one of her guests ranted about people who'd go around Rome with a tick-list, walk up somewhere like the Trevi Fountain, and go 'yep, seen it', and move on somewhere else. My question back was: 'well, what else are you supposed to do?'. Some things are interesting, but interesting for five minutes. With the greatest will in the world, you wouldn't have me at the Trevi Fountain for longer than that. Worth seeing? Yes, absolutely? Worth lingering for? Feck no. See it, take a picture, admire it for a bit, then go to a cafe or something. Like a rainbow. Or a waterfall. Beautiful, impressive, definitely something to stop what you're doing and look at, but there's only so many ways you can look at something before it all rolls into one and there's other things that require your time. What can you possibly do at the Trevi Fountain that requires you to spend an hour looking at it? It's a fountain. It's better than the fountain in your local park in your hometown, but it's not the Grand Canyon. You don't need to spend an hour looking at it from every possible angle. What do you want them to do, shoot an artsy black/white movie? Audrey Hepburn died in 1993. And anyway you're not even allowed to sit on its steps any more.

It has been pointed out to me, as I type this episode, by RooLovesTravel that if you stand with your back to the Trevi Fountain to toss a coin in, to ensure of course that you return to Rome, you're facing a McDonalds. She said that's a much less charming experience than in her imagination,.

Anyway. On a different tangent. I mentioned earlier that Slow Travel prefers staying in local accommodation rather than chain hotels. Here's an extract from a chat I had with Amanda Kendle, host of the aforementioned Thoughtful Travel Podcast, that I used a lot of in Ep 48. Here we briefly mention accommodation.

{Amanda and Ian Talk AirBnB}

AMANDA: So, I mean there's the obvious stuff of, like, plastic waste and have a reusable water bottle and don't use hotels' tiny shampoo bottles and all of that stuff. And then ... it's kind of all connected I suppose, don't stay in a big chain hotel. Find a local Ma & Pa Bed & Breakfast or something that's actually, the money will stay in the county, because all of that helps as well but, I guess that kind of gets beyond sustainability to just, I mean it's sustainability of the local economy then as well, rather than the resort where it all goes to some

billionaire somewhere.

BAREFOOT: You know what I have a habit of doing? Staying in AirBnBs where they're home-owned. So the owner is renting out one room in them.

AMANDA: Yes, I love that.

BAREFOOT: Like a glorified couchsurfing.

AMANDA: Yeh, exactly. Yeh, I've stayed in somewhere like that. Like in Denmark, we stayed in someone's basement. So they were there, but we were separate. And especially when I'm travelling with a child, I feel like I want that separation. You know, we're not staying 'with them' with them. But yeh, they lived in the main house, and we were in the basement, and they brought fresh bread rolls every afternoon, and it was amazing. And yeh, you know where that money's going and what they're doing with it. And you get to meet some local people, it's like 'win win win'.

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There's quite a bit of vitriol aimed at AirBnb, and much of it for good reason. In big cities and near popular tourist areas, people have indeed found a loophole and have bought up housing specifically to cash in on the rental market. This is A Bad Thing, and incidentally isn't limited to AirBnB. There's quite a bit of the UK for sure, and I believe it happens in other countries, where housing is bought up by richer people or corporations and then set for the rental market (short term and long term), pricing locals out of the housing market. This leads to huge inequalities, an increase in the proportion of renters (and as we all know, rents are higher than mortgages, but for reasons of Capitalism, it's almost impossible to convince a mortgage lender that because you're paying £1000 on rent means you can easily afford a £500 mortgage), and a migration of people to bigger towns with more available housing options.

This does not happen in Kirkby-in-Ashfield. There's about 5 or 6 AirBnBs there. No-one is buying a house in Kirkby-in-Ashfield to make money from AirBnB.

I think my point is twofold. Firstly, in the vast majority of places, although not necessarily the places most people go, you shouldn't have any ethical concerns with everyday AirBnBers. [The excessive costs sometimes levied, that's a different issue]. The second is, as I mention in the extract of my conversation with Amanda, I tend to stay in people's spare rooms. I did this twice in my Northern Ireland adventure, in Derry and Belfast. These are people who already own their houses, are living in them, and are just making some money renting out a spare resource. In a sense this is exactly what AirBnB is for. And if you promote the whole Slow Travel movement, these are also exactly the sort of places you should be staying in. Because they're local, you're contributing directly to someone who lives in the local community rather than to a chain hotel, and very often having someone local and on-hand is absolutely invaluable if you want to explore the immediate area, or need tips on what's interesting, what to buy, where to go, what to see, and the best ways of doing so. You also get to see a part of a town (or indeed a whole different town) that you otherwise wouldn't have thought of, and it might even be cheaper too. The last bus from Nottingham to Kirkby-in-Ashfield leaves at midnight. It takes about 40 minutes. It's not a major inconvenience.

My only caveat is I own a house in Kirkby-in-Ashfield and a) realistically, no bugger would ever want to use it as a place to stay (it is, like Paris, a place better lived in than visited, which is a comparison probably never said before in the history of world travel culture!), and b) like I'm a good point of interest for things to see in the area. I mean, I know there's not a lot, and I know I've blogged about the area, but still ... I wouldn't even know the opening times for Newstead Abbey let alone any quirky feature about the place. I lived in the area of 15 years and went there twice. Which is, granted, twice more than I visited Cadbury World despite living only a couple of miles away from it for several years.

Also I don't live there. And my lodger probably wouldn't appreciate the company or the admin. The most I can do is hope she gets my front yard cleared of weeds before they start attacking passers-by. Maybe I ought to grow triflids. It's possible I already do without knowing.

{section separator jingle}

In my previous pod on environmentalism, I was talking about how Dr Beeching closed a load of railway lines in the UK in the 1960s, and I said the following:

{extract from previous pod: 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 pod.}

I have genuinely no recollection of what I was going to say about motoring. So let's talk about transportation in general. I know I had a bit of a rant last time about trains in the UK, and vaguely mentioned short flights as being annoyingly a cheaper alternative. Okay, so.

I can't drive. They probably shouldn't let people like me behind the wheel of a car, or, let's be honest, in charge of anything that has the capability of causing serious injury or death to anyone, and in my case, most likely the operator of said device. But that's a topic I covered in Episode 46. For the purposes of this pod, it's enough to know that I'm reliant on paying other people to transport me around. This, coupled with my vague political stance that the planet is worth looking after, and my desire for long-term efficiency (you know, building an entire economy on a resource that will one day run out is not a sound basis for growth, but hey, you do you), suggests that I might be coming at this from a biased viewpoint, but, hey.

Annoyingly, cars are convenient. They provide an effective and efficient way to get from point A to point B, at any time of day or night, without being beholden to timetables, an operator willing to provide a service, or a need to move yourself to a convenient location to pick up the transportation in the first place (and the same at the end of the journey when the transportation system drops you off). In addition, using a car makes the journey as direct or as roundaboutery as you want. Need to make the journey in two hours? You got it. Want to make detours to random pretty places that are several miles from the nearest public transportation stop, and stay there for precisely 23 minutes and 46 seconds? You got it. See a side road to somewhere unexpected and decide to take it? You got it. Cars are brilliant for freedom and exploration. I am not anti-car.

Where I had issues with Dr Beeching was the fetishisation of the car for absolutely everything, including commuter traffic. I live in a relatively popular and busy suburb of Glasgow. It's, what, 2, 2 and a half miles, from the centre of the city, mostly up a direct main road. That road has any number of bus routes that cover the journey, and within a short walk of my flat I can catch one of three different rail services to Glasgow Central railway station. If I worked in the city centre I'd have no end of options to do it by public transport. But in other parts of the country, in other cities, in many towns, the only option is car. This is especially true of both my old job and my current job, both of which were in offices on out-of-town business parks next to motorway junctions, best accessible by car.

[As another side, my VA complained when I said 'real job' to describe what I do on a daily basis, because she said it was underplaying my website and pod, thinking of it as 'lesser', but my 'day job' pays for my beer and everything I do for Barefoot Backpacker brings in precisely £3/month. I think I'm justified in my use of 'real job' here.]

An endless procession of mostly single-occupied vehicles, all going to different final destinations, yes, but many of which going to a specific location where the journey home (or to the pub, or the shop, or wherever) becomes walkable, or bussable, or whatever.

And. And. Where I used to work. The business park had two exits, both of which dumped out traffic onto the same main road, maybe a mile apart, if that. If there was ever an accident on the M1 (which happened in that area rather more often than averages might expect, for some reason I was never able to work out), or if there was snow (and by snow I mean, casual falling for five minutes causing a mass exodus from the entire business park), it was genuinely quicker for me to walk home than catch a lift anyway. And I lived 2 and a half miles away. It's these sorts of incidences that make our fetish for cars feel somewhat inefficient and counterproductive. As an aside too, it's also why I irk at government ministers talking about 'oh we mustn't work from home, we must all go back to the office to save the local economy'. Like, dude, the office I worked in was on the edge of the business park nearest the local main road, and even that was still a fair trek to the nearest shop - a pub in fact. Working deeper in that business park, you were never going to be able to have lunch anywhere other than your desk because by the time you even got onto the main road, half your lunchbreak would be gone. We don't all work in city centres.

From an environmental standpoint, while each individual car produces less pollution than, say, a bus, given how many people you can fit on a bus, given how many single-occupancy cars are traversing a more-or-less similar route, and given how much cars cost to run, one can't help but feel it's cheaper, quicker (because there

would be fewer vehicles on the road, so there'd be less traffic, and therefore traffic jams), and better for the environment if more people caught public transport rather than used their cars for the daily commute.

Or, if you have an office job, work from home more often. The Covid pandemic has been great to see what's been possible. Let's not break that momentum. Though that might be my introverted persona speaking, That said, in my old job I used to specifically go to the office (I walked, occasionally I jogged) rather than working from home, even though I could, because I needed the change of scenery to focus. And because at the office I had a desktop computer that was more powerful than the work laptop. But that's a different story. But it's the same reason I write my podcasts in the pub or in cafes, Change of scenery, Easily distracted at home.

I really need to send that e-mail to my GP about my ADHD.

Anyway.

A long time ago, I did Economics at 'A'-Level, like, in that age 16-18 period, and I did a whole essay on transport and road pricing. It, and the essay I did on inflation v unemployment that I did on a 5-hour train ride back from Swansea, were my biggest marks in that subject. I may, however, have come to slightly different conclusions than I would now, In my younger days I was probably best described as 'Libertarian'. Twenty years working for a privatised utility kicks that right out of you. I know it would have been cheaper, easier, and quicker, to take a tab of acid, and I know that I was exactly the right age for Rave Culture and the Second Summer Of Love, but in the words of Bob Dylan (who, like Billy Bragg, is a much better poet than singer), "ah, but I was so much older then. I'm younger than that now.

One of the interesting and general conclusions I came to, which some genuine economists tout as being an issue, is the belief that traffic, like a gas, expands to fill the space left for it. That is to say, if you build a road between point A and point B, people will use it to beyond its original specifications, and it'll be clogged with traffic. If you then upgrade that road to, say, a dual carriageway, within a short period of time, people will go 'oh it's a dual carriageway, that means it must be a quick and decent road, let's use that instead of going the usual way' and it will eventually exceed its design specs again. Upgrade it to a motorway, then a four-line motorway, then a five-line motorway ... people will see the improved road and use it, rather than taking alternative routes and methods and before you know it what you have is the same traffic jam, just bigger, smellier, and uglier.

However, I'm absolutely not touting removal of roads and downgrading of the road network. That would be, well, quite silly. And indeed we will always need new roads, bigger roads, better roads, for the precise purpose of making places easier and quicker to get to. It's notable, for instance, that the easiest and quickest way to get from South Wales to North Wales is via Birmingham, because the nature of the terrain meant most of the roads needed to be narrow and bendy, and no-one's seen fit to change that yet. Rather, our development ought to be about creating a holistic transportation policy, that adds roads where needed, but not at the expense of rail, nor should we create entire road networks without also providing a coherent bus network that uses them as well as cars.

In Central Asia and West Africa, amongst other places, they have the concept of the share-taxi - the missing link between the car and the bus. You turn up at a designated taxi rank (think of it like a small bus station), say 'I'd like to go to Fergana', and then wait for others to turn up who also want to go there, or at least in the same direction. You agree a fare, then you're on your way. The advantage is that it's a direct service that can go at your convenience, like a taxi, but because you're sharing the ride it becomes cheaper for each person, like a bus. The disadvantage is, if you don't want to pay for the whole taxi, you might be waiting a while for others to share the ride with. Imagine bus fares being priced based on the number of people in the bus. They also tend to go from rank to rank, like a bus, rather than to your exact preferred destination.

I'm not sure the share taxi concept would work here because we have this thing about personal space in cars, but I can certainly see advantages of it over the bus network, especially if you have luggage. Plus they're quicker than buses and don't stop everywhere to pick others up; once the passengers arrive at the origin, you're good to go.

Cars are Not Bad. Having Too Many Cars is A Bad Thing, but cars themselves Are Fine. You'll notice I haven't yet mentioned electric cars. This is because it's too early to tell. Plus of course while they themselves pollute less than your average petrol or diesel car, you have to factor in where you're getting the electricity from to charge up the beast in the first place. It's no good saying 'woo go me, I have a clean car, aren't I great' if the

electricity you're using comes predominantly from coal-fired power stations, you know?

We will not talk about self-driving cars, which as a dyspraxic should be a good idea. But they'd be far safer if they were on some kind of guide-rail so they could take a defined path and not do random stuff. A good fixed distance in front of the next one to prevent crashes. Controlled by signals. Hmmm, sounds a bit like a personalised tram. Now there's a thought ...

{section separator jingle}

Shall we talk a bit about about privilege again? Yes, let's bring the whole thing together and talk about privilege. Or rather, let's have Victoria, you can call her V, talk about privilege.

{You Can Call Me V}

From time to time, like when they were doing the pod on travel privilege, BB will ask me for a contribution and I end up totally thrown. Because I don't travel, for financial reasons, so what could I possibly have to contribute? To which BB says, well yeah, that's the point.

The travel industry and the conversations and community surrounding it are, I'm sorry to say, steeped in privilege. I won't rehash why here again, because boring, and because you can go listen to the travel and privilege pod to hear why I think that.

The eco-friendly movement is too, in lots more ways than I have direct experience of and probably also in ways that haven't occurred to me because of my own privilege. The person suggesting we all just cycle for example, isn't considering the needs of people with mobility issues, or balance problems, or people with small children, or who live in very busy city centres. To take another example, barefoot backpacker, living alone in a big city probably finds it quite easy to hop on a bus to get a weekly food shop in. I used to have to shop for my family groceries on public transport when my children were small, and I lived in a village with poor transport networks. Lugging a weeks worth of shopping for 6 people on the back of a double buggy is hard enough but when you have to get two buses and a train to do it, it becomes a massive challenge. Buying frozen food is next to impossible, and all those transport tickets eat into the food budget. What is a simple easy thing for BB, would be a battle for someone else.

So bringing both topics together to talk about eco friendly travel makes it very difficult to not talk about privilege. But it also opens the question of what does eco travel even mean anyway?

Every 5 years or so, we take our family to the seaside and stay in a caravan park for a few days. It's probably, on the surface of things, quite a low impact way to travel, maybe? Almost certainly in comparison with a long haul flight at least. Only, my car is 16 years old now, and the intake manifold is broken so it's probably putting out more emissions than it needs to (maybe it would be more eco friendly to get a newer car emissions wise, but that would mean junking a usable vehicle, and causing another to be produced, neither of which seem very low impact to me either). Public transport isn't even an option; even if we could afford tickets for us all, there's no way I can carry all the stuff my kids need. Kids need a lot of stuff, most of it bulky and inconvenient to carry.

Incidentally, when I looked up ticket prices to visit BB in Scotland from where I am in South East England, by far the cheapest option to travel was by air - also by far the most polluting way to travel.

My budget means a lot of eco friendly options for things - whether that's eco washing powder replacements, or buying bananas that aren't wrapped in plastic - simply aren't options that are available to me. I can't afford to pay a premium for things that claim to be better for the environment and also feed my children. I can make small changes where I can - making sure I recycle that plastic wrap, eating fewer out of season products that need shipped from halfway around the world, etc but that all ultimately feels futile while we are doing things like flying empty planes around the world so we don't lose landing slots. But even when I am looking for those small ways I can change things, the messaging is so confusing. Is it better to buy organic bananas in plastic wrap, or non organic ones that aren't? Who has time to work that out?

As a poor person I'm probably a bit of an eco saint in some ways, purely out of necessity. I don't make short car journeys (I can't afford the fuel) or go on long haul flights (can't afford the passport). I keep the heating

turned down (can't afford the gas). But I'm also forced into buying things like fast fashion, plastic wrapped food, cheap shoes that don't last and end up in landfill, so maybe I'm an eco sinner too.

I dunno. Maybe the most eco friendly way to travel is vicariously, through BB and this podcast.

}

I have no idea what an 'intake manifold' is, what it does, or why it would be a problem if it breaks.

Anyway.

V talks there about the other issue with cars. For some people, it's their only option, both because as alluded to in the previous pod, public transport in this country can get excessively expensive, and also because they're just so convenient. And given the cost of a car journey is essentially 'fixed' (it would cost the same, more-or-less, fuel efficiency aside, regardless of if there's one person or six people in that car), the more of you there are the more the cost-per-person drops. Hence the share-taxi idea.

For the record too, by the way, when I do my weekly shopping I actually walk to the supermarket. There's both a Lidl and an Aldi within a 15 minute walk. I take my hiking backpack with me to do this so I have an easy way of carrying it all too. In Sheffield, and in Kirkby-in-Ashfield, I did generally catch a bus as they were longer journeys and involved hills, but either way her point is valid. Living alone means I don't need to buy as much, and I can cook large meals and freeze it too, so overall I need to buy less anyway. The other privilege I have about this in a way is that because the supermarket is so close (and the smaller shops closer still - one of my nearest shops in total is a Greggs), and because I work from home, I'm not restricted as to when I can go shopping. On Tuesday I had a late lunch and went to Lidl around 2pm. It was virtually empty. But the more people like me who can do that, the better it is all round, so Saturday afternoons aren't filled with indecisive shoppers like me lurking in the aisles while two families with three kids, a buggy, a lot of stress, and a limited amount of time struggle to get past me.

V also talks about eco-friendly shopping and fast fashion. I'll be honest, it's never been something high on my mind, but that's partly because, certainly with regard to fashion and clothing ... I tend to wear things until they fall apart. Like, literally. A few tears and ragged edges are fine - I tend to throw things away only when they literally become unwearable. And because I have quite a lot of clothes, and because I don't tend to do a lot of heavy duty stuff in them, they tend to last a while. Even the cheap £5 t-shirts from Primark. I tend to shop at Primark rather more than you'd expect of someone like me. Because it's cheap.

I am fully aware why they're cheap. I never once said I was ethical. I am not a role model.

That said.

I have never professed to being a style icon or fashion blogger. There is a movement amongst a few of my online friends to try to make me into something like that, and your mileage may vary on how successful that would be, but in general, the fact is I've never really keyed in to the debates in the fashion industry. I am very much irked by many fashion reporters in the media raising an eyebrow when a woman, and it is always a woman, wears the same outfit more than once. Like, granted I'm not a woman (your mileage may vary on that one too, but that's a whole 'nother story), but the idea of only wearing an item of clothing once and then throwing it away, even donating it, seems rather odd to me. Like, I really do want to get my money's worth out of it, and not doing so just feels like a waste to be. I simply don't ... 'get' it, you know?

Note the financial concerns of cheap fashion (and the related Captain Vimes Boot Theory) is something for a different pod.

To be fair I have tried to be more ... ethical with regard to my clothing and accessory purchases recently, and all my dungarees have been sourced from small businesses online who make a point of their ethical manufacturing processes. But because of the way I wear clothing, I tend to not buy it very often anyway, because I simply don't need them, so I guess when I do buy, I can afford to be more particular and thoughtful. But then I'm not a family of six on a budget.

I could do with a new long-sleeved flannel shirt though. And why can't male-presenting people wear crop-tops? Hm, there's a whole pod here in the making on clothing and travel. I'll get my VA to make a note, because,

well, like I'm going to remember.

So, what have we learned today? We're an overdeveloped species who like things 'cheap and now', but we've developed a society where for a lot of people, that's all that can be realistically obtained. It would be lovely to be more mindful and conscious of the environment and everything we share the planet with, but we're not in a position where that's accessible to everyone, and while we need to work towards those goals, to promote that now as *The One True And Only Way* highlights your privileges and alienates opinion rather than encourages those goals to be met.

And there's an awful lot of travel bloggers who now hate me.

{standard end pod jingle}

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me again next time for another adventure 'beyond the brochure'. Until then, if mine is the last voice you will ever hear, do not be alarmed. 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.}