

Transcript for Spaces 008 - Hike Across Great Britain

Hello :)

This is the recording of the eighth edition of my semi-regular Twitter space sessions. Today's episode was all about hiking, but specifically the hike across Great Britain that I did with my hiking buddy Becky back in the summer of 2019. We're chattering today about why I chose to do a hike of such length, how we planned it, the high and low points of the journey, and ponder on how people willingly do ultramarathons.

Usual disclaimer, be aware this conversation took place over the phone and is then recorded directly from playback on Twitter. I noticed there's a few biffs and bangs in the first few minutes, but they settle down. Also, a shout out to somebody, and you know who you are, because there are very few people who do call me, and one of them I was already on a Twitter space with, who tried calling me at the very end of this recording. When this happens, it causes my audio quality to drop considerably, for reasons known only to Android.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy it.

{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

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

{Music fades. Spaces recording begins}

BB Good Grief.

V Hello.

BB There we go. That took some time.

V It took forever. It was because I had uninstalled and re-installed my Twitter app since our last space, and so it changed all my permissions. I apologise for that, but I think it fixed my technical issues I was having earlier.

BB Well, that's one thing. That's a good thing.

V Yes, and we're starting just on time still, because you came in early, so that was brilliant.

BB Yes, I came in early just so I had it open. I could just invite you as a co-host, and that just took longer than I thought.

V Yes. I think we still haven't broken our streak of not starting a space with good grief.

BB It's a catchphrase.

V I was just about to say perhaps that should be your catchphrase.

BB What I've learnt from doing all of my podcasting and writing out my episodes beforehand and things like that is I haven't over-enthusiastic the use of the word actually.

V I have noticed.

BB And then an even bigger use of the word anyway. Actually and anyway are my two biggest words, I think, if you were to do a word cloud of my... In the days when Wordle was word clouds, if you did a word cloud of my podcast, you'd probably find the word actually is one of the most common.

V I'm now quite tempted to try and find out if there's a way that we can do that, because I'd be interested to see what your main themes of your podcast are, apart from anyway and actually. But anyway.

BB In the old days, because I did it with my poetry and I actually had a t-shirt printed with a word cloud of my poem, of the most popular word on my poems. Yeah, there used to be a website called Wordle that did it. You could just load in copying-pasting all manner of text and it would give you a word

cloud. It used to use it a lot at work.

V I would imagine that it's either got a different name now or has jumped quite far down the Google rankings. Other Search Engines Exist.

BB I suspect it is no more and hasn't been for a number of years.

V Yeah. Shall we start talking actually about your height?

BB Yeah, I suppose.

V And I'd better do a little introduction for people that might listen to know who the heck I am. So I'm Victoria Pearson, but you can call me V. And I'm here today, as you know, with the lovely Barefoot Backpacker, who is RTWBarefoot here on Twitter, we chat every couple of weeks about various different aspects of the Barefoot Backpacker's travel style, which essentially boils down to barefoot and beyond the brochure. Last time, though, we were talking about hiking, specifically hiking barefoot, I think. But today, we are focusing on a specific hike that Barefoot Backpacker and their friend Becky did back in 2019. So do you want to tell us what that hike was?

BB I'm impressed. There's all manner of 'B's in this, in this introduction.

V I'm very impressed with myself that I didn't stumble over any of that.

BB Indeed. I appreciate it. So what was the question? I can't remember.

V So what was the big hike that you did that we're talking about today?

BB Right. So I did, with my friend Becky, a hike across the island of Great Britain from the furthest eastern point to the furthest westerly point.

V OK. And you've told me this already, but for our listeners, that is different to hiking across the UK. Yeah?

BB Yes. Great Britain is essentially the big island that makes up the UK. I did some research as to how big it was, relatively speaking. And I think I'm right in saying that Great Britain is about 86 percent of the UK. So it's like it's the big island. It's most of the UK, but not all of it.

V So you didn't do the traditional Lands End to John O'Groats. You went from the easterly most point to the westerly most point, yeah? How far is that exactly?

BB Well, in a straight line, it's about four hundred and thirty miles or seven hundred kilometres, that straight line is going over a large bit of water.

V Which I was going to say, I assumed that you couldn't go in a straight line, though. So do you know how many miles you ended up hiking in the end?

BB Nine hundred and fifty two, it was definitely not a straight line.

V That is a long way. How long did that take you then to hike all that way?

BB We took 57 days in total. We were planning on taking more; when we did our preliminary preparations to work out how long it would take and how much stuff we needed to take and all of that, we estimated it would take about two and a half months. But that was working on the basis of walking 15 miles a day and on having more rest days than we eventually took.

V Oh, so you did it quicker than you expected.

BB We did it far quicker than we expected. We did it, because we were, in the event, we averaged about we averaged about 15 or 16 miles a day if you didn't count the rest, if you counted the rest days, if we didn't count the rest days and talked about only the days that we hiked on, we were averaging about 18 miles a day. We went a lot quicker than we thought we would.

V I was going to ask you, actually, was that you hiking hard every day? Or like, did you have days where you didn't hike at all and you took complete rests or did you have like specific days where you'd hike really hard and other days we'd just stroll along?

BB Yes. I mean, we had only six days of complete rest. And one of those was involuntary because Becky came off worse in a battle between her and a dodgy meat pasty. But apart from that, we only had about five days. One of them was in Kings Lynn at the end of the first section, which we'd planned to do.

One of them was, the walk took us past where we lived in Nottinghamshire. So we had a day's rest there. Then we had a day's rest before we started the Pennine Way. And then we had a day's rest in Glasgow. Now ...

V That's not very many days considering how many that you actually spent hiking.

BB Indeed, indeed. We did take a couple of we might call half day hikes. So, for example, the last day we had on the Pennine Way was just seven miles to the end, and then we stayed in the pub for the rest of the day. And there was one the day after we finished the West Highland Way, we started hiking about four o'clock. So we had the morning and a lot of the afternoon casually resting. And then we just set off for a short hike afterwards and then camped up by a loch.

V So you can actually ask you about that. So on the days where you weren't having a specific rest day, where do you stay? Because I'm kind of imagining you in a bivvy bag next to the A5, but you must have needed proper accommodations sometimes. Where did you stay normally on your hike?

BB Well, the thing is, I mean, we took tents with us. We took a whole raft of camping equipment with us. And our idea was to camp out wild camp as much as possible. I calculated that we actually ended up wild camping 15 times together. Becky did a couple more when I wasn't, but we'll come on to that in a minute. Interestingly, six of the last seven nights were wild campings. Those 15 nights included, we camped by a marsh in Norfolk. We camped on the side of a couple of hills. We camped in a woodland a couple of times. We camped by the side of lochs. At one point we also camped on the side of a hill.

V So there was no sort of having to stay in a supermarket car park or anything like that, then?

BB No, although one of the nights that Becky camped and I didn't was just outside Peterborough, where she basically camped in a bush.

V Well, usually you do travel alone. We've spoken about that on spaces before. So what made you decide to do this particular hike with somebody else?

BB Accountability, I think, mainly, partly because I think I thought she might actually want to because she's quite an avid hiker. She's always climbing mountains. And that's probably what she's doing right now, actually, climbing a mountain. And the secondary reason that it thought it might actually be useful to take along someone that kind of knew what they were doing.

V And so was this your first long hike, then.

BB It was my first long hike. It's not necessarily hers, but it was certainly the first time I'd done any kind of big multi-day hiking. But I also wanted to also have to have near me, someone that was actually good at organising because if there's one thing I'm not it's organised.

V Yeah, we have spoken a little bit about that as well before, haven't we? The organisation is a bit difficult for you. Did it not drive you crazy, though, because you're quite a spontaneous person and it sounds like Becky's quite an organised planner? How did your two travel styles mesh together?

BB Yeah, because although Becky's more organised than me, the thing about hiking a lot is that you don't necessarily know where you're going to end up because you don't know how long you're going to be hiking for. So a couple of the nights in Norfolk, for instance, we cut short our hike because she was having problems with her shoes, actually. So one of the days we only did nine miles and we wandered into a village, which I think was Happisburgh and went to the pub, obviously, after about nine miles and just to try and decide what to do next. And then we ended up chatting to someone and we ended up camping in their garden that night. Was it that night or was it the next night when we ended up camping in the garden of a dementia care home? Again, after a conversation in a pub. So although it's organised, although we had kind of we knew where we were going, we were also flexible enough to go, well, we don't actually know where we're going to be spending the night, but we're going to be spending it in roughly this area.

V Yeah, so you're two different camping styles and hiking travel styles sort of balanced each other out in the end.

BB Yes, yes. A lot of some of the times it was a case of we'll just get to somewhere and decide this is a good place to camp. That's how we ended up camping on a beach because we'd got there about half past six in the evening, maybe seven o'clock. And it was still light enough to go on for a couple

more hours. But we weren't sure that we'd find a decent place to camp. So we were on the beach, thought this will do. So we camped up just because we were there and it made perfect sense. As it turned out, we were right and the path later on was very hilly. And that next morning, we didn't really see a flat area that we could have camped in, so we got that one right. Very strange beach, actually. It was partly full of Ministry of Defence debris, and the sand made noises when you walked on it.

V What kind of noises?

BB Well, I mean, it's called the Singing Sand Beach, but it was kind of squeaky.

V Oh, that sounds like a bit of a sensory nightmare to me, to be honest.

BB It was also full of jellyfish.

V Oh, that's even scarier. Jellyfish is scarier than sting. And you said a second ago that you've never done a hike quite this long before. Did you have to like train to do this? Did you spend any time training or did you just rock up and think, ah, it's just walking?

BB I mean, basically, I rocked up. All I'd done previously were a couple of two day, two night hikes in places like Vanuatu, and that was very different anyway, because that was slow, that was methodical, I had a guide, so I wasn't in charge or anything. I just followed. To prepare for this hike, all I did was spend one night wild-camping alone in the Peak District on Kinder Scout, which, I went in April. I'd never used that tent before, so it went about as well as you can imagine.

V Is that the one where your tent essentially collapsed in the night?

BB It's not so much that it collapsed in the night, just I couldn't put it up properly in the first place. My hands were too cold. It was not a pleasant night and there's a video of it on my YouTube channel. It's one of the few videos I have on my YouTube channel.

V So that's probably a top camping and hiking tip is to have a go at your equipment while you're warm and comfortable at home before you start.

BB Yep, that was basically my take out from that entire video clip. That was kind of one of my rules of hiking and camping. Always make sure you know how your equipment works. There were other issues with that hike as well, because I well, I've taken a camping stove and I've taken camping gas and I've taken food to eat, but I was too cold to eat it, which was just as well. Because what I didn't take was anything to light the gas with.

V Oh, no.

BB Anyway, and my electrics died overnight. So, you know, it was all quite a good, quite a good little trek, that one.

V also go ahead with the big one.

BB Well, bloody mindfulness. At that point, I was already committed. We also did, me and Becky, a couple of day hikes together, including again, one in the Peak District on Kinder Scout. And this was notable because it was during a named storm. We had snow, we had gusts of wind of 50 miles an hour plus. And I'm 100 percent convinced I got a flu like bug from that weekend away that we had that stopped me going to Japan a couple of weeks later.

V Oh, no. But I suppose that if you were going in nice weather, that's actually really good training, because if you can handle hiking through that, you can handle anything, right?

BB Yes.

V So, against your nature, but you must have had to pre-plan your route a little bit, because as we discussed, you can't just draw a straight line across the map and go for it, there's stuff in the way. So was your route sort of all on public footpaths or did you find any of your routes blocked by public land, private land, sorry, or unexpected obstructions on your route that weren't on your map or anything like that?

BB Well, that's one of the only things we did actually plan, and that was the route. We wanted to make sure that we could do the entire thing as much as possible on public footpaths, because when we get on a lot of people do things like the land centre, they always walk on the roads and roads are boring and roads aren't very pleasant to walk along and they're noisy and they're polluted. Whereas what we

wanted to do was go along as many public footpaths as we could, which is one reason why the journey was 952 miles. And we could have done it shorter if we would stick to the roads.

V But that would have been harder on your bodies as well, though, wouldn't it, walking on concrete all the time and things like that?

BB Yes, yes.

V I mean, did you do this one barefoot as well or?

BB Well, yeah, I mean, we'll we'll come on to that in a minute.

V I'll come back to that later. And I didn't want to ask you that.

BB I wanted to talk about public footpaths.

V Yeah, I was going to ask you some more about that, because then we've got some weird trespass laws in Great Britain as well. And so sticking to the public footpaths is kind of quite important. And did that did those sorts of laws make it a lot more difficult for you to hike and wild camp in Britain?

BB It there laws are slightly different in Scotland, but in England, you're not really supposed to wild camp anywhere. Bear in mind that we are two middle class, middle aged white people. We could probably get away with it all. But but but regardless of that, we still tried to make sure that we were as hidden as possible. So we wild camped a couple of times in Norfolk. Like once was there were both actually effectively on the marshes just next to small farm type lanes, like two or three miles from the nearest nearest village. I mean, we still got birdwatchers and dog walkers and joggers passing by, but they didn't seem to myther us. We didn't myther them.

V I'd be worried about sinking in the marsh.

BB Yeah, that was one of my worries, but hey we're still alive. What, the only things that I can see above in terms of blockages were cows, because we neither of us like cows. Also, we also had a huge metal gate on a country lane in Norfolk that was just in the way and we had to climb over it, which is not very pleasant for someone like me.

V Yeah, it must make climbing over gates quite difficult, especially if the weather isn't great.

BB Well, the weather was actually pretty good on that day and it was bright sunshine, it was quite warm. It was just that the gate was about a meter taller than me. It was one of those, you know, like wall bar type gates that you would climb as a kid.

V The ones on railway tracks and things like that?

BB Yeah, that sort of thing, except this was in the middle of the road on a bridge and we couldn't cross the bridge by going into the river because the banks were too steep. So, yes, so that was fun. It was also a, we took a footpath that may not have been a footpath. It was a dead railway line and we got to a river and there was no bridge. So we had to backtrack for a mile or so. And then what else did we have? As I say, we had a couple of, we went through a couple of fields in Leicestershire because there were animals in the way of the footpath that we didn't want to cross. But in Scotland, there's the right to roam is a bit more free. So although we stuck to footpaths most of the time, there were a couple of instances, especially towards the end in the Ardnamurchan peninsula where there may have been a footpath, but it was quite theoretical. And I'm not sure the last time someone took it. There is there is a picture that I took of Becky where she's walking through some ferns on the footpath where the ferns are about as high as her backpack is.

V No, so you must have been quite worried about getting lost then.

BB We had maps, not paper maps, granted, we had digital maps, but we also had like two or three phones between us. So we both had that technical that technical ability to see where we were. And obviously we had GPS and stuff like that. And also the thing about the UK is that you never actually that far from civilization.

V Yeah, well, I was going to ask you mentioned hiking in Vanuatu a minute ago when I asked if you've done a big hike before. How does hiking in the UK compared to hiking somewhere like that? Is it wildly different?

BB Vanuatu is warmer.

- V I don't know that is better or worse because it is warm here today. And I would hate to be hiking in it. I think I'd rather drizzle.
- BB Well, it was drizzle here and it's not particularly warm here. So joy of Scotland. It's slightly different because the thing with my hikes in Vanuatu is that they were very much more I was I was hiking with people who lived locally. So they knew where they were going. They knew what they were doing. And I didn't have a map. So I was entirely in their hands for that.
- V So that sounds quite scary. But I would imagine it's also quite scary being fully in charge of those things. And if you get lost, it's your own fault and you've got to get yourself out of it. So.
- BB Yes. Yeah. I mean, the thing with Vanuatu, Vanuatu, that's where I've done a couple of hikes. I hiked across two islands. But the thing is the islands aren't very big. There are just a bit. Well, one was full of rainforest. And the thing with rainforest is that it kind of looks the same wherever you are. So you need to be with a guide to make sure you don't get lost in the rainforest. And the other one was over an island that was basically two volcanoes. So again, it's the situation of you could get lost and end up falling down one.
- V Yeah, that's that's mildly terrifying. But I suppose in the UK when you're hiking, like you're never too far away from a town or a village. Or something like that, never too far away from medical attention and you're never encountering like big hazards from nature. I mean, cows notwithstanding.
- BB Yeah, I mean, cows are one thing. Sheer cliffs, I mean, that's the biggest danger. The biggest danger is falling off of which there were quite a few on the hike.
- V I would imagine that you would have avoided cliff sides as much as possible because of your dyspraxia.
- BB I did. That involved me walking on the other side of Becky.
- V At least you got a nice [something] if you fall, it's fine.
- BB Yes. The only other thing is the weather. The weather is the biggest issue I think that we had on the hike because British summertime is not particularly summery sometimes, especially when they're in the mountains.
- V And of course, you never quite know what you're going to get in terms of British summertime. Is it going to hail and thunder all day? Is it going to bake your skin off? Nobody knows.
- BB No, and, I mean, on and on the hike we had, I mean, the first week was during a heat wave. So we were walking along the Norfolk Coast path, which is a very easy path, actually, because it's basically it's flat. And it was a good introduction to the hike. So there's us starting anew with big, heavy backpacks, not really being fit enough to do this. And our first hike was along basically 60 odd miles of very flat countryside.
- V Yeah, that's a good warm up to start your hike, isn't it?
- BB Absolutely. Absolutely. It was, I mean, that week was a heat wave, but that was quite good in a way because it just meant we got used to it and we were enjoying it. We were enjoying the weather.
- V So I suppose, though, you do have to take a lot of stuff like in case it rains, in case it's really hot, you want sunscreen, you want rain macs. But you've got other stuff that you need as well. You've got your food to drink, your tents, your I know you said you had digital maps, but you and Becky are both travel bloggers as well. So you must have needed like cameras or something like that as well. Like, how do you carry all of that stuff?
- BB Well, I mean, I think I weighed my back. After the event, I weighed my backpack and it came out at about 19 to 20 kilograms. So we were carrying quite a lot of stuff. There's a couple of things to bear in mind. One is that obviously in the UK, if we run out of things, it's easy to get. So we were carrying food with us, but we always knew that we could restock at various points along the route, so we didn't have to carry; it's not like we're hiking in the Appalachian Trail in the USA, where we basically have to carry everything for like three weeks or have you. We tried to carry about six or seven days worth of food, but we knew that we could just top up whenever we needed to. So it never became a problem. Same with water, we had water bottles, but filling up with water was easy. The other thing to bear in mind is that when you're hiking 57 miles, it doesn't matter what you're wearing, because whatever you're wearing is going to end up smelling and dirty. So our way around that was just not to wear very

many clothes. I'm not I don't mean that we are hiking naked. What I mean is we didn't have many spare pairs of clothes. So we didn't; we didn't have a lot of weight in the backpacks that were clothing related. Whereas when I go travelling and backpacking, you know, around the world and staying in B&Bs and hostels and what have you, then I'll take like four or five days worth of clothing. I took more clothing to my recent trip to France than I did on the 57 day hike.

V Mm hmm. Oh, yeah, I suppose, like you say, after a while you don't smell yourself anyway, and if it's just the two of you out there hiking away, it's not really going to matter that much. And how did you decide like what you absolutely had to take versus what you could just rough it without?

BB Yeah, I mean, we made a list of things that we needed to take, but a lot of those things were practical rather than luxurious.

V Yeah, but how did you do things that keep your phones charged for your digital maps and your photography and stuff like that?

BB We both had power banks, but also we made ample and copious use of things like pubs and campsites. So after about nine miles of hiking, we'd stop for lunch in a pub and we'd take the opportunity to charge our phones.

V That must have got quite expensive, though, lunching in pubs and stuff like that. Did you ever cost out what the trip cost you?

BB I think Becky did. I certainly didn't, but I think Becky may have done. You've got to bear in mind that that's balanced by the fact that our accommodation costs were quite low.

V Yeah, yeah, I suppose if you were sleeping in a bush, then.

BB Absolutely. Yeah, so even when we were staying in campsites, those campsites weren't more than about six or seven pound a night.

V Yeah.

BB That's a lot less than obviously it would be if we were staying in B&Bs all the time. So relatively speaking, we had more budget that we could spend on food and drink. And we didn't push it. So we would normally just have, you know, like I would have one beer and Becky would have a, you know, a soda water or something. It wouldn't be terribly expensive. It would just be enough to charge our phones, give us a bit of rest after nine miles and it was always nine miles. We worked it out. We had we had a session on sort of midway on the Pennine Way, where literally we would be walking for nine miles and then stop for lunch. We didn't plan it that way. That was just how it turned out. It was always nine miles.

V You came into a rhythm, I suppose. And I guess as well, the expense is worth it because you kind of do need the extra calories that you get from a decent hot meal when you're walking for 57 days.

BB We calculated how many calories we would need on a daily basis.

V Oh, really? When you say we, do you mean Becky?

BB I mean, that Becky calculated it for both of us. Yes. I can't remember how many she needed, but she said that I would need five thousand five hundred calories a day to maintain my weight.

V Oof. That would mean that you'd have to eat pretty much constantly, surely. Grazing along.

BB Well, I mean, I never made it. And at one point I did actually have to get new trousers because my old trousers were quite loose. But what you've got to remember about hiking is that because you've got a restricted amount of stuff you can carry, what you carry matters. And a lot of hiking food is very calorie intensive. So stuff that we were taking to eat were things like energy bars and cereal bars. They were things like chocolate, but not chocolate bars, sort of things like M&Ms and peanuts covered chocolate. That sort of thing. What I was eating as well was things like couscous, because couscous is really easy to cook. Becky tended to go more for the pasta and sauce options. You know, those packets. We also both had, I don't know if there's a name for them. There's like these camping meals that you can buy from camping shops and outdoor stores that you find.

V Those are MREs, aren't they?

BB I don't know. You either fill them with boiling water and then shake them around a bit or you put

them in boiling water and let them boil. But they're quite, they have things like chicken tikka and spaghetti bolognese and chocolate cake. Bizarrely.

V Like dehydrated food, almost.

BB Yeah, essentially, yeah, it's what they're always advertised on the on the front package pictures as being what you take when you're hiking a mountain. And they're quite calorie intensive as well. And they're also very easy to carry. So that's like, yeah. So when I on the days, for instance, I in my backpack, I had pockets kind of on the bottom strap that went over to the front. So I could easily just unzip the side pocket and pull out, you know, something like a cereal bar or beef jerky. Beef jerky was quite popular for me. I went through quite a few packets of beef jerky because it's it's easy to eat. It's something to eat and it's energy food.

V Yeah, calorie dense and just there and ready for you whenever. And quite light as well. All of the foods that you've said are foods that are dehydrated really and quite light and easy to carry. So

BB and then that's important when you've got a heavy backpack.

V Yeah.

BB And also, none of it also, none of it needs refrigerating and none of it goes off and none of it is...

V And so we said we'd cycle back to this later. So I'll cycle back now. You often run and travel barefoot. Did you do that for this hike?

BB It's quite funny, actually, because everyone assumed that I was going to. It was like when I raised the question, I didn't even raise the question with Becky, Becky just assumed that I would. It was just a given. No, I think I worked out I did it about about a quarter of it barefoot.

V That's very off-brand for you.

BB And there's a reason for that; we are in this country very fond of gravel, and I don't like gravel. I don't like gravel at the best of times. I certainly don't like gravel when I'm walking with a 20 kilogram backpack. So, yes. So while I was barefoot where I could be, and one thing that Becky did say is that I was happier; I seemed happier and I seemed more joyful when I was barefoot and able to be barefoot, but for a fair amount of the hike, I couldn't be because the terrain itself did not lend itself well to being barefoot.

V If your feet are not used to being in shoes, though, did that mean that you were more prone to blisters when you were wearing shoes?

BB Oh, no, because most of the time I was wearing footwear, I was wearing minimalist sandals, which I would normally wear anyway. So it was it was fine. The only time when I had to wear closed shoes was for a bit of the Pennine Way. And that was for reasons that we've discussed on previous Spaces that are really quite icky.

V Well, I was going to say, did you injure your feet at all on this hike?

BB Maybe. Maybe there was the, yeah, the one takeout of hiking barefoot is don't run. Especially when you're dyspraxic, because then you you you scrape your top of your foot on the pavement because you because you just don't can't really judge where the pavement is and and hey, press the end of one toenail less.

V How did you carry on with walking after you'd hurt your feet, though? That must have been really difficult for you, because it wasn't near the end of the hike either, was it?

BB It was it wasn't even part was just before halfway. It was about a third of the way through. It was conveniently close to where I lived.

V So it would have been very easy to just give up then.

BB Yeah, Becky assumed that I was going to. It was just before we started the Pennine Way. So we were walking through Derbyshire. It happened in a village called Long Eaton, which is direct bus from my house. Not Long Eaton, Little Eaton rather. So I then went home just to rest it and patch it up. Becky continued along the day and heritage path. And when she got to Edale, she just assumed that she would just carry on. She met a couple of friends in Edale anyway, and she was going to do the next day or two with them, regardless of whether I was there or not, but she assumed I wouldn't turn up. And

then I turned up. It was annoying. It didn't hurt. It was just annoying.

V I can remember seeing it on Instagram at the time and thinking that it looked very painful. I think you might be being a bit brave there.

BB I don't remember it hurting. I remember being grumpy about it, because I thought it was going to get infected and I would die. But I don't remember it actually hurting.

V Yeah, that would make you a bit grumpy, wouldn't it?

BB So, yeah, what was quite amusing about that is that my friend Sarah, who is in my house, gave me some tips and advice about it. One of the tips was keep it dry.

V Yeah.

BB We then ended up on the Pennine Way. At lunchtime on the Pennine Way, it started raining. That was the Monday. It stopped raining on the Friday.

V So, bet you did really well at keeping it dry then.

BB I kept it really dry for the first 10 minutes of every day. And then it kind of, I might as well have just stayed in sandals.

V But you managed to get away without dying of a toe infection.

BB I managed to get away without dying of toe infection. I managed to get away without dying of a finger infection when I sliced it open on a knife while we were cooking in an, in an ... it wasn't even an Airbnb It was a future Airbnb We were hiking in Scotland and we were just resting a while. And this we ended up chatting to this lady who passed us by and said, we didn't have any way to sleep tonight. She said, well, my friend is about to open an Airbnb Do you want to test it for us? So we said ...

V Oh that was handy.

BB It was handy. It was it was it did not go well.

V Oh. I was about to say it sounds like the kindness of strangers did you quite well over the course of your trip!

BB Everything that happened, well, two incidents happened, neither of which were either their fault or our fault. It was just one of them was that they had really sharp and new knives. And I we were cooking. I think we were cooking a bolognese and I was cutting the onions and the peppers. And I said, this is a really sharp knife. I'm going to do myself an injury. And Becky said, no, you're not. Don't be silly. I don't know. And an onion later, it stopped bleeding after six hours. The the other incident that night was it was a really weird setup in the sense that the living room was a separate door to the to the bedrooms. So you had a door, then you had a stairs up to the bedrooms, then you had another door downstairs that went into the living and kitchen area, which was lockable and we we went to bed and we locked. Well, the door shut and locked and we thought that was fine until we realized the key was inside.

V Oh, no.

BB Fortunately, we managed to get around that by the people that owned it basically living next door. And it was about eleven o'clock in the evening and they were still working. So we said, we've got a problem here. And the only way they could resolve the problem was by breaking one of the windows in the door.

V Oh, no. I bet they were so glad that they had offered you a place for the night.

BB Yes, yes.

V Well, bleed for six hours all over the furniture and now this.

BB In actual, I mean, they actually said it was it was good that we'd done that because it meant that they realized that they needed to cut new keys.

V Yeah,

BB Which they wouldn't which they wouldn't have thought before. And so that was that was a good outcome on all sides for that.

- V And so we've mentioned getting lost. We've briefly mentioned getting lost.
- BB We were, the thing about getting lost is that we didn't get lost that much.
- V Yeah.
- BB We can just about read maps between us. The only problem that we have on that, the only problem that I had at one point, the thing with the British summer and as I say, there was about four and a half days where it basically rained constantly on the Pennine Way. And the thing with hiking in the countryside along footpaths is that they're not necessarily paved.
- V Yeah.
- BB And when it's been raining for that length of time, you get a lot of mud, gets very boggy. And and you asked about hiking barefoot. That was actually better to hike barefoot along some of that because then you don't get the instance of the mud sucking your shoes off.
- V Yeah, or sticking to your shoes and like weighing them down as well.
- BB And it makes it easier to wash them afterwards. But where was I going with this? Oh, yes, the thing with mud is that sometimes it hides the path quite well. And there was an incident later on on the Pennine Way where Becky and the people that we were hiking with at the time were about three hours ahead of me for reasons. And I was going over this muddy field and they'd warned me in advance that it was a muddy field. They'd sent me a message saying, just make sure that, you know, you find the path. And the trouble is I couldn't find the path and then my GPS stopped working very well. So I know I need to get to this hill with a cairn on the top. But which hill is it? And why am I pointing this way, does it does my GPS insist that I'm facing Southwest, when I'm clearly not. So that was a bit of a fraught time when I was basically lost on a moorland.
- V I can imagine. So between that and broken windows and injuries and all that, what was your lowest, like emotional and attitudinal point of your trip?
- BB That would have been on those early days of the Pennine Way, because it was raining constantly. I was wearing shoes, which I didn't like because toenail incident. I was carrying a heavy backpack. And the thing about those early days on the Pennine Way is that and this may surprise people listening, the footpaths that we took were generally through quite pretty scenery and, you know, close to civilization. That bit of the Pennine Way was the most remote bit of the entire hike. And the reason it was remote was because, although, you know, technically speaking, if you stand on one of the moorlands, you could you could see Manchester, you can see Sheffield, you can see Leeds and Huddersfield. You could see them all. So they were just there. But you couldn't because you got on top of the moorland and all you could see was well, you could see your foot because it was basically three days of cloud, mist, fog. It was just constant. And even if we could see that part of that part of the Peak District, that part of the the the low Pennines, there's nothing there. It's bleak. It's it's it's empty. It's it's it's for those of you looking on a map. We're talking Black Hill in the Northern Peak District. We're talking Marsden Moor and we're talking Saddleworth Moor. And then we're talking Blackstone Edge. And there is literally there's nothing there. It's just shrubland. It's just endless moorland. You can't see anything. There's nothing to look at. Everything is grey. Everything is boggy, especially when it's been raining. You're just plodding along, squelch, plod, plod, plod, squelch. You can't see where you're going. It's just the path curves, the path bends around and it's just slightly soul-destroying. There's there's one point. What the hell is it? I can't remember. I can't remember what it's called. But there's a tower just outside Hebden Bridge and it's huge. It's about 120 meters high and we couldn't see it. There was that much fog. We could not see the tower even when we got there and walked up the tower. All we could see was the bottom of the tower. It's a ridiculous weather. That that was the most that was the lowest point. That was the most soul-destroying point, just those couple of days. Once we go out of the Peak District area and out of the Lower Pennines and into more like the Yorkshire Dales, the weather slightly improved. Although we then did have a day on at climbing up Pen-y-Gent, one of the mountains in Yorkshire, where it was so wet that on the trig point at the top of Pen-y-Gent, we could not see anything other than the trig point and we were hiking with several people, quite a few of Becky's friends joined us at that point and one of them, their phone died because it was so wet. The phone just got drenched. Yes.
- V So how do you motivate yourself then to get up and keep plodding and squelching through grey fog where you can't see anything day after day with a heavy backpack and you're just not feeling it

anymore? Like, how did you make yourself keep going?

BB I mean, partly through accountability. I've said I'm going to do this, therefore I'm going to do this. Partly it's the feeling that it's not going to get any worse than this. And partly it's also the knowledge that I can quit at any point. I'm just no, I'm not going to. So it's it's kind of like that. It would be very easy to quit now. It would be very easy to stop. Therefore, I'm going to carry on until I've absolutely got no choice because I will always have an option. It's not like I'm, you know, I'm going down a path where there is only one exit for three days. It's like literally we would be crossing a very bleak, but still a main road every couple of hours. So we knew we could always stop. And we didn't. Because we had a mission to do. We set out to do this hike, and we damn well made sure we were going to do it.

V And you think you're having someone else with you to do it as well? Like an accountability partner?

BB Oh, absolutely. It helps that we were sort of effectively encouraging each other to go on.

V The digital lows happen to coincide with each other's or where you like a little emotional see-saw in that way, in that you were having an up day when they were having a down day.

BB Honestly, I'm not sure I asked. And also, I'm not that convinced that I said that I was having a down day that often. We did, at the very start of the hike, we did both say that we were not exactly the most mentally stable of people and that we would have down days.

V Yeah.

BB So we were both aware of each other's mental health and we also made each other aware that we didn't have to ... I know this is going to sound like a strange thing to say, but we didn't have to hike together. So if one of us felt like we needed to go off somewhere on our own, then it was quite fine that we would just go off somewhere on our own. There was no there was no hassle about that. There was no bad vibes about that. In fact, there were just positively good vibes about that. And we did that. And there were a couple of times when I stayed in a B&B rather than camped because I was, I needed the, I needed to be on my own and I need to be somewhere that was comfortable. But most of the time, it was definitely a case that we were encouraging each other on. She kept singing to herself, which was helpful.

V I don't know if it was a sarcastic helpful or not, but I think that's cute. But I think after these seven days, I might not find it cute anymore.

BB No, it was cool because it was her way of dealing with things. It was her way of pushing herself on. If she sung to herself, then she could block out all of the bad stuff that was she was the only bad stuff that was happening. And the more that she sang to herself, the more she was walking and the more she was walking, the more she was going somewhere nicer.

V Yeah. And so following on from that bit, what was the absolute best bit of your hike then? What was your high point?

BB I mean, I could say the end, but that would be really trite and metaphorical. I would say there's two things and they're both both things that happened on the Pennine Way. The best day of the hike was, actually it was a pretty long day. It was about a 21 mile hike in the Yorkshire, Cumbria area from Middleton in Teesdale to Dufton. But although it was a long day, we walked past some very absolutely stunning scenery of the kind that I wasn't actually aware existed up there. So we passed three waterfalls, Low Force, High Force, Cauldron Snout. And the latter of the waterfalls required scrambling up rocks by the side of it that, you know, a couple of years ago, I wouldn't have done. Let alone do it with a heavy backpack. So, you know, it's good for my own personal improvement. And then the end of it was a place called High Cup Nick, which is this rounded valley that's, looks out over towards the Lake District and the Irish Sea. And because the sun sinks in the West, what we've got at the end, sort of late on in the day is a bright sky, clear blue sky, a couple of clouds, the sun shining just in the right place that lits up the entire valley. And you could just see a massive green and blue just going straight down towards the sea. It's quite an impressive vista, yeah. So that was the prettiest of days. Probably the the most positive day was the last day on the Pennine Way. So the second to last day was a really long day. It was a 20-odd miler. It was a little slog over the Cheviot Hills. So it was drizzly, it was foggy, it was cold. We overnighted in a bothy or a mountain rescue hut, basically, that was on the England-Scotland border. A couple of things broke in my backpack. And there were four of us. So there was me, there was Becky, and there was two other Pennine Way hikers called Simon that we'd met early

on and we ended up kind of hiking with.

V They were both called Simon.

BB They were both called Simon. We call one of them Simon one and the other one Simon two. Because of when we met them.

V I was going to say, did they argue over who got to be Simon number two?

BB Simon was always Simon. And then when we met the other Simon, Simon became Simon one and the new Simon became Simon two. So we were in this, we were in this hut, we were actually in this hut as well with two race marshals. At the same time as we were finishing the Pennine Way, there was the ultramarathon Spine Race taking place where people decide to run the entire length of the Pennine Way. Yeah, but it's 250-odd miles and they do it in less than four days. Yes, sir. We did it in 15 or 16. Because, you know, nothing says, wouldn't it be fun to see what happens? Like running that length of time and not sleeping. Anyway, they were actually the race marshals were telling us about that that once, because they do it every year, they marshal every year at that point. And once there was this chap that was so dehydrated and so hallucinating so much that despite that hut being seven miles from the end of a 250 mile race, they pulled him out of the race.

V Oh, that would be devastating. Can you imagine?

BB The impression that I get is that he was so bad that he didn't realise.

V Oh, God.

BB You don't. Safety. I mean, that's the thing you've got. I mean, it's bad enough hiking it, making sure that you're you're safe and comfortable. But having run it.

V I wouldn't want to drive that far, to be honest. Maybe I'm lazy.

BB But yeah, so we were in that hut and then the next morning, it was still foggy, it was still cloudy and we set off down the hill towards the end or towards Kirk Yetholm, and about 200 meters down the hill from the Bothy, the skies cleared. The sun started shining. It got warm. The air was dry and it was almost as if like the whole of the Pennine Way was going, all right, I've thrown everything at you that I can and you're still here. Well done. You've won. And although I never felt that any point that we wouldn't complete the hike, that was the point that I realized that we would.

V Yeah.

BB Because having got that far, we've got two thirds of the way through the journey. All we had left to do was the whole of Scotland. And having done the most difficult bit, we felt, OK, I'm not saying it's going to be easy from here on in, but we didn't see any reason why we wouldn't be able to finish from here.

V Yeah. So is there anything that you wish you had known before you set out or anything that you would do differently in hindsight now that you've done it?

BB Yeah, don't run barefoot with a backpack on. I don't know because I don't think we knew what to expect. So I didn't really have expectations. So I think if I set out to do things differently, it would have been a different hike with different experiences, different highs and different lows. So I don't think so. I think we did the route pretty much as we intended to do.

V Yeah.

BB I don't think there's anything that we got. I'm not saying we've got anything right or got anything wrong, but I don't think I don't think there's much that we would do differently. I think we packed correctly. I think our logic was sound, our reasoning was sound. I mean, there's little things that we could have changed, but I don't think they matter.

V Yeah. So how did it feel to finish it then? Was it all worth it in the end?

BB I thought it was a bit of an anti-climax, in all honesty.

V Really?

BB Yeah, it was like, you know, a couple of miles from the finish, we saw the lighthouse that we were aiming for. All right, so we were there. We've seen it and even for a few miles before that, I was doing things like, OK, so we've only got 10 miles to go. You know, I run that on a regular basis. OK, there's

only five kilometres to go. That's a park run. We're only a park run away from finishing. So I was in my head, I was constantly saying how further, how much distance we had to go. And then we got to the road that the lighthouse was on and we walked up the road. And then we got to the lighthouse and we touched the lighthouse and then we walked beyond it to the very edge of the land. And we looked out to sea and then we walked back a bit. We camped up near the lighthouse, had a small glass of port that I bought in Fort William three days earlier and just camped out for one last night. And then the next day we just went on our merry way to separately to different places. It didn't feel big. I think part of the reason why it didn't feel big was because Ardnamurchan lighthouse isn't anywhere in particular. There's nothing around, literally there's nothing. There's villages seven miles away. And also because we were on our own. So there was no welcoming committee.

V There was no-one to celebrate with you.

BB There was no celebrations. There was no party. All right, we've done it now.

V Yeah, I suppose as well, 57 days is a really long time. And so it must have taken you quite a long while to sort of process everything that you'd gone through on that hike together, and let it sink in.

BB I don't know if we did because the day after we finished, Becky disappeared off to hike some Mountains in Fort William with a couple of friends of hers, and then I went further west. So I then took a week and a bit travelling around the outer Hebrides, backpacking, but of camping.

V You can't understand the concept of rest, do you?

BB No. I had a rest. I had one day in Oban in between times where I did nothing. But then I just carried on because I was in the area. I thought, might as well just go out and explore more of Scotland that I'd never been to. So we kind of got back home about two weeks later. By which time, two weeks had passed. So it wasn't directly in our mindset.

V Yeah. And so am I right in thinking that you basically decided to do the big east to west coast hike on a bit of a whim after a chat in the pub?

BB Oh, kind of.

V Can you see yourself doing something similar in the future? Have you got another big hike or physical challenge in mind or?

BB The thing with this challenge was that it was it's been it had been in my head for a while. I've kind of always want to do something like it. And I figured that Land's End to John O'Groats is, you know, old hat and boring. And everyone does it. And also Land's End to John O'Groats isn't anything special. It's going from somewhere that isn't the most southerly or westerly point of Great Britain to somewhere that isn't the most northerly or easterly point of Great Britain. So in a sense, it's kind of pointless. It's kind of one of those things that people do for no apparent reason.

V Those were the most southern and northern parts of. Are they not?

BB No.

V Why does everybody do that hike then?

BB I have genuinely no idea. The most southerly point is Lizard Point, which isn't that far from Land's End, but still significantly far enough. And the most northerly point is, I believe, Dunnet Head, which is about 10 miles from John O'Groats.

V Yeah. Been conned. You know, I feel cheated by that, to be honest. And so you're not in a big hurry to do another message.

BB Well, the thing is, I'd always wanted to do something like that that meant something. And then I went to the the Yes Tribe's Yestival Festival back in October 2018, full of very, you know, motivational people doing things exactly like this. So I said, I'm going to do this now. So when I came back from Yestival, I met up with Becky in a pub and said, basically, have you ever wanted to do a long distance hike? And then Becky said, I've always wanted to do Land's End to John O'Groats. And then I said, hold that thought, got a better idea. And then by the end of that evening in the pub, which was the Station Hotel in Hucknall for the record, we had pretty much planned out a basic concept, a basic route plan, basic principles like we need we have to walk the Pennine Way. We have to walk West Highland way. These are non-negotiables and things like that. So from that early stage, it was very

much where we designed it in a pub. And then when we came to plan things a bit more, it was always in a pub because they're just convenient places to set out and do stuff.

V Yeah. And good places to sort of break up your big hikes as well.

BB So. Yes, absolutely. You asked if I could see myself doing something similar. Probably nothing on that scale. But I mean, long distance hikes intrigue me. While the footpaths we trundled along in Scotland for a bit was the Southern Upland Way across the Scottish lowlands. We only did it for about, we wild camped on a hill somewhere on that. But we're only on the path throughout two days. But the whole path is about two hundred and fifteen, two hundred and twenty miles long, but it's also not that strenuous because a lot of it is over old cattle driving roads. So unlike the Pennine Way, which goes, oh, there's a hill there, let's climb to the top of it. The Southern Upland Way and related roads just go, oh, there's a hill there. Let's go round it because it's easier for the cattle. You know, it's a sensible footpath. And so that'd be quite fun and quite. I think I'd quite like to do that. Other things. The idea of an ultramarathon does intrigue me. Not the Spine Race, because I'm not insane. No, it's like a 50 miler or something would be quite cool. One of the people I follow on Instagram recently broke a couple of world records. One of them was for the longest distance run barefoot in 24 hours. And the other one was for the most consecutive barefoot marathon, half marathons, rather.

V You might be into the idea of doing some barefoot record breaking.

BB It's very niche. We'll see. I think they've they've kind of got that it's sewn up at the moment. But it's amazing what there are world records for. But I mean, ultramarathons, the idea intrigues me because what I didn't realize about ultramarathons, and I suppose this makes perfect sense, and one of the one of the podcasts I used to listen to was all about, you know, sort of hiking and ultramarathons and things like that, and one of the things I didn't realize was that you don't run them.

V Yeah, they mostly run walk, run walk type things rather than. Yeah, you couldn't run for 24 hours, surely.

BB Yeah, so I mean, this thing when when the winner of the Spine Rave past us, in fact, all the Spine Race passed us, she was basically it looked like she was just out for a casual jog. She wasn't going that quickly. And we worked out that her average speed was in like three miles an hour.

V Yeah, I mean, you'd have to walk to conserve your energy, wouldn't you?

BB I mean, I can walk three miles an hour quite comfortably for a while, not to that extent, but I can certainly walk three miles an hour for a, you know, I could probably. I don't know if I could, but I'd like to think that I could probably do at least a 30 mile at that pace, now.

V And do you think what drives you to give these sorts of things ago is just the wanting to see if you can?

BB Yes, very much so. Because I find it interesting what I'm capable of. Probably more than I think.

V Yeah, almost definitely. And Becky did end up raising a few hundred quid, actually, for MIND, the mental health charity during your hike. And is that something that you like contacted them about in advance and let them know that you're doing? Or do you just sort of donate that to them when you're finished? Like if somebody else was planning on doing something similar, is that something that you have to prearrange with them?

BB We did. I mean, I would say we prearranged it, but let's face it, Becky prearranged and actually handled all of that. We, I mean, MIND actually gave us t-shirts. So on the Norfolk coast path at the very start, we wore them. And one of the reasons for that was so that we could gather in, I was going to say, contributions, contributions is the wrong word. Donations, that's the right word. So we could gather in donations as we passed, because then people would see us with MIND t-shirts on, they'd see us with, Becky created a kind of almost like a tea towel thing that basically said that what we were doing, we were hiking across Great Britain. So that means that people could stop us. We'd have a chat and then they'd donate to us. And then we would give that money to MIND eventually. I think we raised about 1200 quid in total. But the thing about the Norfolk coast path was that it's warm. So there were a lot of people around and it was close to civilization. So we passed through a couple of towns. So it was easy to have those conversations. It was easy to get donations. Once we'd left King's Lynn and headed inland, we were on footpaths going through the middle of nowhere. Basically from Peterborough to Galashiels, which is about 235 miles or 380 kilometres. Apart from Nottingham, we didn't pass through any town of any significance whatsoever. Everything we passed through was literally

a village. So there was no one to get the money from. So we kind of stopped wearing the t-shirts because they were just, they were getting too sweaty. But yeah, we we we we yeah, we raised money for mind and we arranged it beforehand and we told them what we were doing. And they were quite happy to work with us.

V Oh, fantastic. So if I if I was planning some kind of big hike, if I weren't so lazy, I should probably contact the charity that I wanted it for in advance, because they might be able to help me raise more for them.

BB Yes, absolutely. And the reason we chose MIND was fairly obviously, really, because both of us do not have the best of mental health. And one of the ways that we both handle our mental health issues is by hiking. You know, getting outside is is often how we feel better in ourselves.

V You've spoken about that quite a lot on your blog, haven't you about getting out for your mental health and dealing day to day with things like dyspraxia and stuff like that?

BB Yes, and it's also one of the reasons why I like to hike barefoot as well, because it as I say, Becky did even notice that improvement in my mentality when I was and I could be because it helps me relax.

V Yeah, you're more yourself when you're barefoot.

BB Yes.

V And I've actually I have run out of questions for you. And can you think of anything that I haven't asked you that you wanted to talk about about your East to West hike?

BB I can't think of anything. I'm sure there are probably things that are very important that I haven't mentioned, but I can't for the life of me remember what they are.

V we will make a note of them and we'll come back to this topic again when we've exhausted all of our other spaces topics.

BB Yes, what is the next topic for our next Space? Do we know?

V I was just about to say our previous Space for those who have missed it was on hiking in general, and that will be up on barefoot-backpacker.com soonish. If it might have just disappeared from Twitter, but our next Space should be in about two weeks. And that one will sort of follow on from this one in that it's all about hometown travel and local travel, which I'm quite interested in, because I would like to know how to treat my local city as if I'm travelling to it. That's interesting to me. But in the meantime, over the next ... you know where I live. That's why you're laughing.

BB I know where you live. And I've been to places that you don't know exist in your city.

V Well, exactly. Yes, you know my city better than I do now that you've explored it from a travel perspective.

BB It didn't take much exploring.

V I mean, at least it is difficult to get lost. I live in Milton Keynes. It's on a grid system. That's meant to make it difficult to get lost. I get lost very, very easily. But in the meantime, over the next two weeks, if you miss us terribly, you can follow the Barefoot Backpacker on their website, which is barefoot-backpacker.com. And you can also find their podcast there or on your podcast aggregator of choice, which is Travel Tales Beyond the Brochure. Barefoot Backpacker is also on Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook and here on Twitter where they are RTWBarefoot. And if you have a look in their bio, you will see a little link to their linktree page and that has everywhere that you can follow them online. You can sign up to their newsletter as well, where you can have their latest blog post and podcast episode and Spaces Broadcast sent directly to your inbox. And that'll also tell you how you can get involved with the podcast yourself as well.

BB Yes.

V I always feel like I've missed something out there, but I don't think I have.

BB I mean, at some point I will start getting into things like YouTube, but not yet.

V But there is actually a link to your YouTube up on your linktree page as well for anybody that wants to go and see your very early days YouTube videos. But we'll be relaunching that one soon as well.

BB Yeah, at some point when I feel comfortable in front of a camera.

V We will get you there. So after all this time, I still don't know how to end Spaces. So I'll just go wish you a very good evening. Thank you everybody for listening and we will see you in about two weeks.

BB Go away.

V OK. I'm pretty sure that was directed at someone else.

BB Someone just texted me.

V Oh, that happened to us before as well, didn't it? But yeah, we're just back to the end now anyway, so we will see you again in another two weeks.

BB Groovy. See you later.

V Bye bye.

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

{Outro voiceover:

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