



Walking kept me sane in 2020

Lucy Bartlett

I've always enjoyed walking, but it has been tricky fitting things in around work and hockey, my usual exercise of choice that takes up most weekends throughout the year. Walking was something reserved for occasional walking weekends or holidays, a way to explore distant destinations. 2020 started with a New Year's trip to north Wales for a few days walking with friends – we all remarked how much we loved walking, and that we should try and do more of it – a classic case of be careful what you wish for.

When the first lockdown started it was sudden, all the way back in March. For two months my walking was in local parks, nature reserves and footpaths within an hour on foot from home. It was essential for leaving the house, a break from the computer, getting some physical exercise and giving the days structure.

Hockey leagues, holidays, weddings, birthday celebrations and restaurant bookings were all cancelled, but it was OK, the weather was good, and I could take the opportunity to hone some id skills and look out for interesting wildlife on my daily walks – best finds were the bee-flies.

Once we could meet up with people and travel a little further, the walking that could be done in a day from Bath was phenomenal. For a couple of months walking was the only non-zoom socialising that was possible or desirable. A group of friends and I walked for miles – hardly seeing another person – we explored the whole of Somerset, Somer Valley, the Mendips, the Cotswolds and the countryside immediately round Bath.

We dusted off our map reading skills, googled walking routes, downloaded new apps (OS, Viewranger and AllTrails all have good features on the free versions, including ideas for routes and help with navigating once you're out) and used walking books - thanks Geoff Mullett. Some of the resources we used are here - www.bathscape.co.uk/explore/. We enjoyed a bit of mild peril in the form of detours, lost footpaths, being surrounded by cows and changeable weather. We experimented with different walking snacks to share. But mostly we nattered.

Some of the walking was to test Bathscape's new walking trails, with walks starting from Lansdown, Newbridge and Odd Down Park & Rides. Some familiar routes and some new ones, constantly experiencing the delight of walking to the top of a hill and being rewarded with a view.






Solo walking Lockdown 1. Bee-flies, Kelston Roundhill and Solsbury Hill.



Exploring and Julian House walk - no wrong weather, just layers of clothes



We signed up to do the Julian House Circuit of Bath walk – both for the challenge and because we were all very aware of the need for their crucial support to homeless people. Although I've worked for Bathscape for three years, I had never taken part, coming as it does at the end of the Bathscape Walking Festival, during which I normally do a lot of walking. Now our walking took on an element of practice and challenge. We gradually built up to 15 and then 20 miles – still experimenting with the best lightest most sustaining snacks (home-made sausage rolls). We broke in new walking boots and tried to keep our walking pace at under 15 minutes per kilometre - the curse of the fitbit – to ensure we could complete the route in daylight. A huge sense of achievement, and a thoroughly enjoyable day, seeing Bath from every angle and thinking about the Bathscape circular path. Julian House were overwhelmed with people wanting to take part, and had to close the bookings, so in 2021 they will be organising two.

Hockey returned and work felt relatively normal, Bathscape walking groups had been able to restart in limited ways with lower numbers during the late summer and autumn. But it was becoming clear that we were heading for a difficult winter, though fortunately walking and being outdoors was still considered safe and sensible.

November's lockdown and weekend walking continued, but now in twos, and a Friday after work walk in the dark became routine – we started exploring bits of the city again, looking at people's Christmas lights, anything to make sure we stretched our legs. Were we now addicted to walking? I was also able to start walking with one of our volunteers who uses a wheelchair – exploring different parts of Bath to research a leaflet, coming soon.

The Christmas break, which would normally be full of seeing friends and family, sitting in crowded pubs and houses, instead featured more walking. Walking for long enough gave us the time to talk about something other than the virus. We learnt to embrace the mud and warming soup became the snack of choice. A friend who has never walked much before got the walking bug too, as part of a new healthier lifestyle – a different type of walking with shorter, flatter routes, but walking is as much about the company and change of scene as it is about distance.

At the time of writing we are entering Lockdown 3. I know that walking will get me through, there will be less hiking through unknown valleys and woodlands and more walking very locally. It's still possible to find new routes or to see familiar places in a different season and to have the time to catch up with other people.

2021 will eventually bring more walking – a Bathscape monthly walk, Bathscape Walking Festival in September, two Julian House Circuit of Bath walks, Feelgood walks in Twerton, the restarting of weekly walking groups and an increase in our walking resources. We want to help and encourage people who don't normally walk to take their first steps.

www.bathscape.co.uk





Last group walk before Lockdown 3

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lucy Bartlett has been the Community Projects Officer for Bathscape since 2017. As part of that role she organises the Walking Festival and coordinates other walking resources and activities. She thinks she walked between 1500 and 2000km in 2020.