

Putting the 'free' IN FREEDOM

WALKING IS FREE, YET THE REWARDS ARE RICH. **TRAIL** ASKED 14 OUTDOOR PROFESSIONALS WHY THE HILLS MAKE THEM FEEL ON TOP OF THE WORLD...

Words **Phoebe Smith**

A trusty waterproof or a pair of worn-in boots can be like old friends, and there are few things that can rival the excitement of finally owning a piece of kit we've lusted after for months. But while gear plays a huge part in going outdoors, let's not forget that the main reason we walk is to enjoy the UK's beautiful landscape and breathtaking hills – and that, after all, costs nothing. Here we asked those who work in the hills why they chose the outdoors as their office, and what it brings to their lives. And it wouldn't be the Gear Guide without hearing a bit about the kit that helps them do it...



JOE CORNISH
LANDSCAPE
PHOTOGRAPHER

"I love everything about the outdoors! The fresh air, the sounds, the smells, the feel and texture of the land under the hand and the feet. The space. The sense of freedom. The rhythm, effort and energy of walking. But ultimately I can't deny that I mostly go out because of my photography, for the sights and inspiration of the weather and the light, and the motivation and inspiration of the creative process that is photography. It all matters.

"Walking and photography go together naturally. For me the effort, endeavour and adventure of the walk make the photography seem much more worthwhile. Remaining physically fit is a big part of my underlying motivation. I actually consider being healthy and strong is an essential part of being human, whatever age you are. I feel I owe it to myself to put in the physical work to stay well. Since I have no desire to go to the gym, carrying a 15-20kg pack uphill makes a much more attractive alternative.

"Going outdoors is like therapy. My mind is free to wander around when I walk and that process – some might call it meditation – helps me become grounded, and realign my thoughts and feelings. I always feel better after a walk, with virtually no exceptions. As I feel the ground (or snow, or whatever) beneath my toes I genuinely rediscover connection. Holding rock as you traverse or ascend, or touching a tree, or smelling the meadow grass, or crossing a stream barefoot, or feeling the refrigerated air of a winter morning on your face; all these physical experiences educate the body about the reality of nature and the meaning of being alive. While we can write and talk about the process, I really think it is at least 90 per cent felt through the body, a physical, tactile, textural experience. I am safe in the mountains because my feet know what to do, from years and years of practice, just walking. That is connection."



I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my new Páramo Torres jacket, which I have hardly taken off this winter. Photographically I enjoy all my cameras, but I couldn't manage without one of my Gitzo carbon fibre tripods, which give me the confidence that my pictures will come out sharp."

JOE CORNISH



ALASTAIR LEE

**LEO HOULDING
CLIMBER**

"I go walking for the freedom, self-reliance and the opportunities for adventure. I love the beauty of both the vistas and the tiniest details in the landscape. Be it multi-day treks or after-dinner strolls, walking is the ultimate mode of transport and offers the easiest access to wild places. And I enjoy sharing the experience.

"You get so much from going outdoors! It will give you vitamin D from sunlight, which makes you happy. Fresh air, which helps your health. Intense sensations of fatigue, hunger, cold – opposed by adrenaline, inspiration and satisfaction. You can experience exposure, excitement, commitment, contemplation, majesty, exhaustion, exhilaration, fulfilment and most importantly – being alive."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my Berghaus Asgard Hybrid jacket, made to my specifications. It's a lightweight insulated jacket made from a combination of synthetic PrimaLoft and the new hydrophobic waterproof down! It's wicked.



**ED DOUGLAS
CO-AUTHOR OF THE BOARDMAN TASKER
PRIZE-WINNING BOOK ROCK ATHLETE**

"Being outdoors I experience pretty much every emotion except boredom. John Tyndall, the scientist who discovered greenhouse gases and almost beat Whymper to the Matterhorn, called mountains 'the well-springs of life and joy'. That seems about right.

"It's complicated to explain what draws me to it. But in one word – nature. To paraphrase Edward O Wilson, it's the matrix in which we evolved so we shouldn't be surprised if experiencing it leaves us more fulfilled. Keep discovering the world, and

you'll always be an explorer.

"I don't feel a need to get anything from walking. The outdoors isn't a resource like oil; it's just the pond I swim in. Fish me out and I start gasping."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

Gear rarely does it for me. People obsess about it too much. I've needed new walking boots for yonks but can't be bothered to go shopping. I also tend to lust after things I can't afford, like some new Charlet ice axes I've got my eye on. Shiny.



**PAUL MOSELEY
WILDERNESS THERAPIST**

"I walk to remind myself of what is real and important. It is all too easy to become cocooned in day-to-day life, perhaps forgetting the simple pleasures and the importance of having time to yourself. It is important to lift your gaze to the horizon and see life from a grander scale, which can reinvigorate a desire to live life.

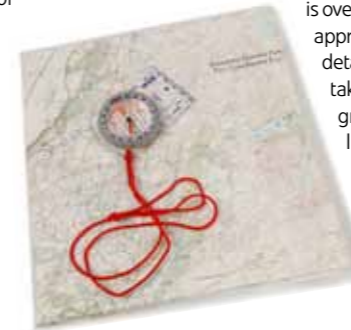
"I am captivated by the stoic patience of the landscape to be formed by the elements and the sheer beauty of our wildlife. It gives me a sense of freedom, of possibility. I feel in the 'now' and connected to myself and the world.

"The sheer wealth and breadth of experiences you can gain from being outside are incredible. The same piece of woodland or heathland can be an oasis of peace and serenity or an adventure. It's where I love to be, where I get my inspiration, where I work, where I want my children to experience adventure, wonder and beauty. It gives me a sense

of optimism that from within these times, beyond any literature or lecture, simply being a part of it, having a relationship with it and it having a relevance to our lives is the purest, most powerful argument for living sustainably. I hope to give the next generation these experiences as it's the surest way to look after nature, to have nature, nurtured."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my map and compass. The obvious is that it shows me the way, but also it shows me all possible ways.



The work the Ordnance Survey does is overwhelming and thoroughly appreciated. To have the level of detail that the maps do is breathtaking and not to be taken for granted I think. Many a time I have gone out for a gentle stroll that has turned into a full day's hike simply from finding interesting features on the ground I can see on the map.



**KAZ FRITH
MOUNTAIN RESCUE
VOLUNTEER
AND SARDA DOG HANDLER
(www.sardalakes.org.uk)**

"Grounding is what I get from the outdoors. It doesn't matter if it's a peak or just a stroll around the park – a walk can make you see things differently, change your mood and relax you. Out there you are able to just appreciate the simple things – small flowers clinging onto rocky outcrops, the changing colours of the seasons and the peace!

"I walk to maintain my sanity and to keep active – you just can't beat the freedom, the ability to take risks and make mistakes and learn from them."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my search dog Dottie. Besides being a fabulous searcher she acts as a navigator (I kid you not: in a complete white-out being able to use the command 'find the path' is great), she keeps me company and doesn't laugh at my singing and whistling, she keeps me warm when bivvying out and makes me see that sometimes the simplest things can be so fun – rolling in the snow, cooling feet in a beck!

Other than her, the thing I wouldn't be without is my ancient Silva compass – it's got me out of many a problem.



TOM BAILEY



ADELE PENNINGTON
HIGH-ALTITUDE MOUNTAINEER
AND EXPEDITION LEADER

"When I am indoors I have been likened to a cat on a hot tin roof! Outdoors I get a feeling of peacefulness. As soon as I am out in the hills nothing else really matters. I love the freedom, the space and the uncertainty of the outdoors. Every time you go out to the mountains there is something new or different and the weather adds to the whole experience.

"I enjoy going to new places and investigating the terrain and always end up searching out new locations to take other people. But I always like to

have an easy day out by walking over routes I have walked many times. It has been said that I have a love affair with Sharp Edge and Blencathra!

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my lunch box: cheese sandwiches and crisps! Though on a more serious note I would have to say my map and compass, as they give me the confidence to go off the beaten track and explore no matter what the weather is like.



JOHN BENNETT
HELVELLYN
FELLTOP
ASSESSOR

"I love everything about being outside! It's a very social thing – you get to meet new people and talk. I also love it because if you've got anything to think about you can go out walking on your own and it's your own thinking space where you can really clear your head. The main aspect is the pleasure that the simple act of walking can give you, just being away from our normal humdrum lives."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my Gore-Tex waterproof jacket – a must in my job. Whoever invented it should be knighted – I'm old enough to remember what jackets were like before it came out, when you'd get as wet inside as outside in a rainstorm. Thank goodness for breathable waterproofs! We use Patagonia [clothing] at work as they have an excellent recycling programme, so even when they're worn out you know they won't end up in landfill.



SEAN HUDSON

DR SEAN HUDSON
EXPEDITION
MEDIC

"I like to get away from it all and heading into the outdoors is what I call my utopian period. For me it's about getting away from everything. I like to go out fell running – every day if I can. I must have my daily dose of exercise at some point each day, being out in the fresh air, just so that I can keep functioning as a normal human being!

"Getting out there increases your fitness level, your wellbeing and gives you a greater understanding of the wider world – to know that there is more out there than just the space between you and your computer screen, or you and your office space, is very important. And you don't have to go anywhere far: just the other day I went on a fell run to Skiddaw – it was full-on winter there. We had to put on our crampons, it kept clagging out, it was glorious! It just shows you don't need to get to Chamonix or anywhere overseas to experience something like that – sometimes it can be a short distance away.

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my Leatherman Wave. It's got a screwdriver, knife, scissors, pliers and I take a firesteel so I can light a fire. It's helped me out on so many occasions. Fantastic!



TOM BAILEY

BEN MCNUTT
SURVIVAL INSTRUCTOR AND WILDERNESS
BUSHCRAFT EXPERT AT WOODSMOKE

"Our earliest hominid ancestor 'Lucy' stood up and started walking about three and a half million years ago, defining our species as bipedal apes, so surely each stride we make is simply the next progressive step on our journey.

"I'd have to say that I'm drawn to the outdoors by hard-coded genetic evolution! I predominately go outside to practise bushcraft skills, which for me is about knowing and experiencing, if only for just a little while, what it means to be a human being. It gives me a sense of place and connection, helping to develop an intrinsic bond with my environment.

It makes me happy. To break it down... 'happy' originating from the verb 'to happen': to be in the present and to be content with what is, not worrying over things that may never happen."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my Therm-a-Rest. My granny once told me to spend my money "on good boots and a good bed... because if you're not in one you're in the other!"

GEAR GUIDE WHY WALK?



NIGEL MARVEN WILDLIFE ADVENTURER

"You never know what you're going to see on a walk – it's different every time you go out, even if it's a walk you do all the time. You might see a rock kestrel hovering overhead or a sunbird feeding on flowers – you just don't know, and that's great."

"I also love that walking makes you puff and pant – especially on inclines, and that's a good feeling for everyone to have. You can slow down if it's hard but getting to the point where you know you're pushing yourself is always good and you do get used to that feeling and start to enjoy it."

"When you go outdoors I think you've always got to keep your eyes peeled – keep looking around you. From a wildlife adventurer's perspective I like to walk slowly so that I don't miss anything; sometimes it's good to just stop and take it all in."

"Being outside makes me smile, gives me a feeling of euphoria. It's also the time I use to solve problems without thinking about them. When you walk it's like your subconscious is solving them for you without you even realising it. Problems just seem to melt away."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my binoculars – with the best eyes in the world you just couldn't see the detail that they give you so I always take them when walking. I also love my Karrimor walking boots – they're always my most comfortable footwear no matter what I do.

» Nigel is currently working on *Untamed China* for Animal Planet when he goes walking with Asian elephants. For his latest projects see www.nigelmarven.com



IAIN STEWART GEOLOGIST AND PRESENTER OF BBC1'S MAKING SCOTLAND'S LANDSCAPES

"For me, the outdoors is the place where you can really see the history of the landscape right in front of you. As a geologist I teach in classrooms and through books, but getting out there is where you can really see the past unfold. Being able to look at the land and see how it fitted in the great evolution creates a sense of real excitement – it comes alive. The landscape for me is what geology has always really been about – not rocks and minerals; the landscape really is the bigger picture."

"Walking makes you feel free. Something I'm sure everybody can relate to is that liberating feeling you get as you leave the road and start climbing up into the mountains, then that slight feeling of depression when you have to get back into the car again."



"I think gaining a familiarity with the landscape is an amazing feeling – especially when you go back to a place you know well and see it in a different way. Of course you still get that great sense of excitement going somewhere new that you've never seen before. I think it's that combination of the familiar/unfamiliar that makes getting out there so special."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my compass-clino [a type of professional compass that comes with an attached mirror for precise directional measurements], no geologist could. But I'd have to also add my iPhone as now – connection required – you can download all the geology maps of the UK with the British Geological Survey app!



STEVE GASKELL NATIONAL PARK RANGER

"I go walking for a variety of reasons: to explore areas I haven't seen before, to allow my mind to rest from day-to-day chores, to exercise without really knowing it, to see wildlife, to be surrounded by beautiful landscapes and to socialise with friends. I love the feeling of space, the fresh air, the smells, the fantastic scenery, and the views that change with the seasons and the weather."

"For me being in the outdoors gives me a good recharge of the batteries,

a sense of place and a feeling that the natural environment is an awesome place more powerful than man!"

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my waterproof. It comes with me even on the finest of days...you just never know! I really rate my Montane Venture jacket and Berghaus Storm Overtrousers – I'd never go out without them with me!



MARION SHOARD ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST

"I am constantly dazzled by the shapes and colours of the world outside. The variety, unpredictability and sheer beauty of anything from the banding of rocks to the faces of fish never cease to amaze and intrigue me. I find virtually nothing in the outdoors ugly or repellent, and particularly like slugs and spiders."

"I go walking because I couldn't survive if I didn't. Exploring a stand of foxgloves in an out-of-the-way corner might prompt amazement at some aspect of the physiology of plants and awe at the mysteries of their world. Coming across beautiful places from which the public are barred makes me feel sorry for those forbidden to share their delights. Ruins on Highland pastures remind me of the banishment of ordinary

people from the land through the Clearances. Peaty pools on northern moors inspire in me feelings of mystery and other-worldliness."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my jeweller's magnifying glass. Binoculars are great, but they simply magnify. Lie on your stomach and peer through an eyeglass at a mat of moss or lichen or tiny creatures scabbling between grains of quartz on a dusty track, and you are drawn into a completely different universe."



JAMIE HAGEMAN MOUNTAIN ARTIST

"I love being surrounded by untamed wilderness. Ever since my first forays into the Welsh peaks as a child, the adventure of exploring the mountains has always been thrilling. Nothing can rival the exhilaration of cresting a pristine snow ridge into the first rays of the morning sun or the tears of joy upon reaching a summit or viewpoint that I've obsessed about for years."

"I go walking to see the mountains up close and personal. I'm constantly looking for new views and inspiration for my paintings. There's so much to see, but there's no hurry. I like to take my time and enjoy a sense of wonder at the scale and complexity of the mountain environment. The more time I spend outside, the clearer I see the natural world and the better I can paint it."

I COULDN'T WALK WITHOUT...

...my Rab Summit Extreme tent – it's quick to pitch and bombproof! I can spend a full day out in the hills, and know that I've got a comfortable night ahead whatever the conditions. Better still, it allows me to see the sun set and dawn break from the most out-of-the-way and spectacular locations. 