Staycation: All I Ever Wanted

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Ariana Brocious: Okay, I've got my shoes and my hat, and I'm heading out the door. This is Climate One, and I'm Ariana Brocious, and I'm on a walk in my neighborhood. Today's episode is all about micro adventures. Finding excitement, wildness, and new experiences close to home. And as I walk around I think about how There is a lot of wildness right here in my own neighborhood. I just saw a bird flit by on its way to land in a big, huge mesquite tree. We often have hummingbirds in our backyard, drawn by the plants we purposefully put there.

And though I'm really in part of the center of the city where I live, There's lots of plants, lots of trees, flowers. And even in this residential area, we frequently see coyotes and javelinas, owls at night, bats. There's a lot, there's a lot just in this little corner.

Greg Dalton: I'm Greg Dalton in my closet studio in San Francisco. Welcome back Arianna. How was your walk in suburban Arizona?

Ariana Brocious: It was lovely. I go for walks in my neighborhood a lot, but usually I'm kind of stuck in my head thinking about whatever's on my mind, whatever I have to do, and this time I really just slowed down and paid attention, and it was much more rewarding, and I felt a lot more connected to the place I live.

Greg Dalton: It's so rare that our minds and bodies are actually in the same place, and vacations are one of the few times many of us commit to slowing down and just being in the moment. And you managed to do that without even going on vacation, which also means you did it without the financial and environmental costs of traveling. I have to admit, whenever I travel by plane, I feel guilty.

Ariana Brocious: I do too. And you know, there are some services that claim to offset your carbon pollution for a price, though I'm pretty skeptical of that. And so I think it's probably just better not to

produce the pollution in the first place.

Greg Dalton: Right. And that means staying closer to home. But can you really have an adventure without going somewhere far away or exotic?

Ariana Brocious: Well, I think it depends what adventure means to you and what kinds of things you seek out when you travel, whether it's new people or new languages, maybe interesting food or new museums. And I think for many of us, the answer can often be yes.

Greg Dalton: Right. It's about applying a tourist mindset to your own hometown. We're so good at taking our own neighborhoods for granted, that it takes some effort to see it with fresh eyes.

Ariana Brocious: And to be real, I don't think that taking a walk around the block will ever completely satisfy my desire to go to some new and far off place. But I do think it's possible to find that feeling of discovery right here at home by exploring new things. For example, the other day I had to go to a different part of the city than I've ever been before, and I discovered this little artist colony. It was really neat. And I had no idea it existed.

Greg Dalton: Right. And there's so much around me that I haven't really explored. For example, Pinnacles National Monument. It's a spectacular landscape. People come from all over to go there. I've lived here for decades and I've never been there.

Ariana Brocious: And you taking a trip to Pinnacle National Monument is what we would call a micro adventure. That's a term coined by an author and National Geographic adventurer named Alastair Humphreys. This is a guy who's rowed across the Atlantic Ocean and hiked across the world's largest sand desert.

Greg Dalton: Wow. That's wild.

Ariana Brocious: It's incredible, and it takes a lot of resources and planning and time, but his most recent book is basically the opposite of all that. It's called Local, and it's about how he spent a year discovering the wildness springing up between cracks of cement near his suburban home.

Alastair Humphreys: I live in a fairly ordinary bit of England, just outside London. and for me being born and bred and raised in England, it feels extremely familiar to the point of really being quite boring and average. And as someone who has spent years of my life, either dreaming of world travel or actually world traveling, filled with wanderlust, filled with excitement about foreign and different and exciting places, I tended to find where I live extremely claustrophobic and dull. And I didn't really like that I had that attitude to it. So, um, but that was certainly my starting point of, wow, this place is really boring and average. And so I think generally it's probably a bit like how most people think about where they live, unless you're lucky enough to be living in Boulder, Colorado or somewhere, it's probably like most people think about where they live. There's a bit of countryside, there's some big highways and freeways, some shopping malls, some railway lines, some cities nearby. It's just a bit average, really.

Ariana Brocious: Sure. Well, That's a good starting point, as you say, for a lot of us listening. So we'll get into all these adventures you've taken to explore where you live. But how do you see it now, after having done all of that?

Alastair Humphreys: So after spending a year diligently going out to pay attention to my neighborhood every week. I have come to really appreciate it a lot more. I realized that there's more wildness and beauty around where I live than I'd imagined. The aeroplanes still roar overhead every five minutes, and there are no mountains or rushing rivers and, you know, but there is more

wildness and beauty than I'd given it credit for beforehand.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, and, in some places, unexpected how much the wild can coexist, right? With some of our urban

Alastair Humphreys: Yeah, I think I'd made a preconception most of my life that you either have urban parts of your landscape or you have countryside, nature, wild parts of your environment. I hadn't really given much thought to the possibilities that they could overlap. And actually what I found to be the wildest and most biodiverse and most nature filled parts of my local map were the sort of industrial, but forgotten, fallen down, broken, ruined bits where nobody goes anymore. And the concrete is starting to break up and the trees and saplings and roots are starting to push through the concrete and flowers are starting to grow again and birds come and bats and bees. And there's a lot more nature in some of these semi urban edgeland landscapes than there are in the so-called countryside, which where I live is very industrially farmed, fluorescent green fertilizer, zero nature, sort of countryside.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, that's interesting. I spent several years living in Nebraska and that, that is true that in spite of it being farmland, it can be really devoid of a lot of the biodiversity that exists, because of exactly that, the monocropping, pesticide use and so on. So you coined the term microadventures more than a decade ago. How do you define that term? And for you, how do you separate or distinguish a microadventure from a grand adventure?

Alastair Humphreys: Well I think this is all just a sliding scale of perception. So, I think the best way to explain it is that I started off by doing really big adventures. I spent four years going around the world on a bicycle. I've rowed across oceans and crossed deserts and walked across India and really big journey. So they were my benchmark for what adventures were, but I realized that not everyone can be cycling across continents all the time. Real life gets in the way. So how could I get some of those, all the things that you love about wild places and adventure and shrink it down into something compatible with your busy schedule, where you happen to live, that maybe you can do at the weekend around your family commitments. So a micro adventure then is, is just an adventure, but on a short, simple, affordable, achievable scale. And I can't really be any more specific than that, because what might seem to me like a tiny little thing to somebody else might seem like a big adventure or a micro adventure. So if it feels like an adventure to you, then it is. I think it's really important not to make this a comparative sort of measure, you know, to think, Oh, if I don't match up to Bear Grylls, then what I'm doing this weekend is pointless. If it feels, if it feels a little bit wild and adventurous to you, then it's a micro adventure.

Ariana Brocious: We'll hear a lot more from Alastair Humphreys about his micro-adventures later in the show.

As the Climate One team prepared this episode, we set ourselves a challenge… to go on our own microadventures. So we put a couple parameters on the assignment: it had to be something you hadn't done before. Within 10 miles or accessible by public transportation. And cost less than 30 bucks

We're going to hear from producers on different sides of the country. First up: Here's Megan Biscieglia, our producer and production manager in the Bay Area.

Megan Biscieglia: While I struggle with the climate impacts of flying, the guilt hasn't necessarily stopped me from traveling. I'll admit that just A few months ago, I flew more than 5,000 miles from Oakland to Tokyo. It was an amazing and unforgettable experience.

So when I was tasked with going on a micro adventure, a staycation, if you will, to see if I could reproduce some of the magic that comes from traveling here, where I live in Oakland. I had some reservations. Skeptical as I was, I accepted the challenge. I'd been to Lake Merritt, an urban natural habitat in the center of Oakland, a million times, and had passed by the Bonsai Garden, but had never actually taken the time to go in.

It was on my mind when this challenge came up, maybe because I had just been in Japan, and this seemed like a good opportunity to finally check it out. So, me, my partner, and our four month old puppy, Sonny, boarded a bus and set off… 35 minutes later, we arrive.

Megan: Yeah, it's just around the lake.

To find the Bonsai Garden, we circle the lake, passing bright patches of blooming orange California poppies and groups of friends and families picnicking and partying in the sun. Everyone comes to Lake Merritt. It’s not called the jewel of Oakland for nothing. And yes, it’s incredible for the people watching.

[bikes]

Megan Biscieglia: It’s not a trip to Lake Merritt if you don’t cross paths with a bunch of dudes riding dirt bikes on the street…

Megan: Alright, this way to the Bonsai Garden.

Megan Biscieglia: We enter through the classic wooden Japanese Gate and suddenly everything around us is just a bit quieter. I notice the sound of running water from a nearby fountain. Ahead, small trees meticulously arranged in traditional ceramic pots atop wooden stands line the circular pathway.

It’s green and calm.

The shade from the lush canopy and slated wooden structure overhead filters the afternoon sunlight. We move in closer..

Megan: Oh wow, what are these little tiny ones?

Megan Biscieglia: Common olive. Trident. Maple. Ginkgo. Pomegranate. Japanese black pine. Japanese quince. Monterey cypress. Redwood. There are over 100 bonsai trees on display for public view. They look like regular trees, but mini.

Rob: They keep them that way, though. If you put that in the earth and let it go, it'd be, you know, it'd grow massive.

Megan Biscieglia: That's Rob. It's his first time in the garden, too.

Rob: It's a testament to Just an unbelievable art form to me.

Megan Biscieglia: The garden is 100 percent run by volunteers. Sherry Tucker is a docent who's volunteered at the garden for years.

Sherry Tucker: So one definition of bonsai is tree in a pot, but that doesn't capture the idea of a natural bonsai, maybe something growing on a cliff that's kept small by maybe wind ripping branches off, just having only a little bit of soil there, maybe flash floods if it's a juniper and the

arroyos and stuff.

Megan Biscieglia: Baseline understanding of what a bonsai actually is, check. There are about ten other people wandering through the garden grounds, walking slowly, spending time with each tree before moving on to the next. They're here for different reasons. Earl and Stephanie are here because…

Stephanie: Oh, it's my birthday

Earl: Yeah, It's her birthday.

Stephanie: So when I came here, I was like, wow.

Earl: Yeah, I didn't expect any bonsai trees like to be in Oakland. So, I'm surprised.

Megan Biscieglia: And there's Jackie and Luke.

Jackie and Luke: So we live down towards Newark, Fremont area, but we come up here for church and

Luke: Mom, can I have a snack?

Jackie: No. And we decided to come check this out.

Megan Biscieglia: And Georgia and JD.

Georgia: I actually grew up in Berkeley. Went away for college, but came back. And I didn't even know about the Lake Merritt Botanical Garden until a year ago. So, it's pretty amazing. Also because bonsai trees are like our favorite nature thing. It's just a hidden gem.

JD: There's a lot of beauty in this area if you just like walk around and kind of just be present, you know.

Megan Biscieglia: It's true. Even though we're in the center of the city, it really does feel like we're far away.

Jackie: This is a really wonderful example of the diversity and beauty. There's nature, there's art in Oakland, and I think people, you know, watch the news and think of all the bad things. It shows the embracing of so many different cultures, right? Um, and I think that's really special. And I think bonsai is an interesting thing. I think it's like a collaboration, like God and man, right? It's nature, but it's kind of manicured patiently in a way that is special, right? And so it's a little bit of a collaboration in that way, but I think it's cool. Like, yeah, it's just, I'm Japanese American. I just think it's a really wonderful, wonderful thing to see.

Megan Biscieglia: As my partner, puppy, and I leave the bonsais, we pass a grove of redwoods, a patch of rhododendrons, orchids, ferns, and a row of Japanese pagoda lanterns. For me, exploring Oakland is in a different category than traveling abroad, but today proved that there are hidden gems all over, we just need to take the time to discover them.

For Climate One, I'm Megan Biscieglia.

Greg Dalton:Coming up, how to slow down and find beauty no matter where you are.

Alastair Humphreys: Whereas this was all about. Everything you see now is relevant. That pile of

garbage is just as relevant as the little yellow flower growing over there.

Greg Dalton: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Ariana Brocious: Please help us get people talking more about climate by sharing this episode with a friend. And we'd love to know what you think of the show. Please give us a rating or review. You can do it right now on your device – and it really helps people find the show. Thanks!

This is Climate One. I'm Ariana Brocious.

Let's get back to my conversation with author and adventurer Alastair Humphreys. For his first microadventure, he spent a week backpacking an unconventional trail: he hiked around the M25.

Alastair Humphreys: I live just outside London and, um, London, huge city, is surrounded by a huge freeway. It's like a, well, huge by British standards. Four, three or four lanes going all the way around in a big circle or 120 miles around London. And the M25 is famous in Britain for being the road to hell, the worst possible place, the most awful congestion. Everybody hates it. And it's surrounded, as these suburban things tend to be, with towns that are synonymous with being really quite boring. So, uh, I wouldn't insult their names by now, but if you name to peep British people, the towns around them, 25, Oh man, they're really boring commuter boring. It's ugly. It's boring. but it's also the juncture is the boundary really between the city of London hemmed in by this big freeway and then the countryside. So it's, in that sense, it's a bit of a liminal, potentially interesting edge land. And I live near there and the road is busy 24 hours a day. And I just got curious where are all these people coming from and where are they going 24 hours a day? And my curiosity as a adventure made me think, wow, I wonder what's over the horizon. Well, Let's go find out. Let's walk a lap of this road around my city, which I spend a lot of time sitting in traffic jams on getting angry. So it took a week to walk around. I did it with a friend. We didn't take a map. You don't really need to take a map. If you're following a giant freeway, you just keep it on your right hand side. And off we went cross country is quite a bit of gentle trespassing through, um, um, countryside, maybe the old golf course through towns, just following our nose and. It was a silly idea. You know, if you explain that to someone in Britain, they'll laugh and think, ha ha, that's a crazy idea. And it was, so it was a bit silly. It was a bit fun, but a couple of things really started to strike me. One was the realization that it certainly wasn't like going around the whole world, but it was very similar. Every day I was going to new places, which is part of the appeal of being a traveler. Every day, I was meeting new people and having little conversations with them. And they were nearly all good kinds of people like they are when you're off traveling around the world. And really importantly, I was discovering for the first time that between all of these boring commuter towns were tiny little pockets of wildness. So I did it in the winter. There was snow on the ground and I'd camp out in the woods and you'd wake up in the morning, see footprints where rabbits or foxes had been running through the snow. Wow. That is actually wildness even near London. So I realized that this genuinely was an adventure, but a really small one. And that was when I came up with the phrase microadventure,

Ariana Brocious: So you decided to spend a year adventuring within your area on a local map measuring just 20 kilometers across. Tell us a bit about how you got to that idea, what, you know, putting these parameters kind of around an area.

Alastair Humphreys: So there were a few, a few factors led to me deciding to spend a year exploring close to home. The first was that whilst I loved traveling in all sorts of places, the world flying off to all these exotic places. I started to nag at me that the fact that I love the wild places, but I was damaging them a lot by flying around the world, did I love them enough to not visit those places? The next aspect was that whilst I've been championing microadventures and encouraging

people to go camping and bike riding and, um, things like that. At the weekends, I was really aware that that still assumes a level of expertise and owning of equipment and access to beautiful landscapes that isn't, uh, valid for so many people. So I wanted to try and go even smaller to try and see if it was possible to look for nearby nature and wildness everywhere for everyone, every day. And so to do that, I decided to go really small and in the UK, the whole county's divided up into maps, the sort of detailed maps that you'd use to go hiking, they're equivalent to the US, uh, 7.5 minute Topo series. So the same sort of mapping thing exists wherever you happen to live in the world. The ones in Britain just happened to measure roughly 20 kilometers by 20 kilometers, about 12 miles by 12 miles, divided up into Individual grid squares marked in faint blue line of one kilometer grid square. And my idea was to spend a whole year exploring the map. Now, the trouble I have is I, I'm really good at coming up with ideas and I'm really good at being massively excited and enthusiastic for about one week. And then I have another really good idea and change and go and do that. So in order for me to make this a long thing, I needed to schedule it once a week. For a whole year, rain or shine, spring, summer, fall, winter, seal the seasons, and to just go to one kilometer grid square once a week and try and see everything within that one kilometer area. And a one kilometer square is tiny. It's less than a mile across. It's a tiny, tiny area. You drive across it in less than a minute. You could run across it in a few minutes. You could easily walk around it with your dog in a morning dog walk. But what if you go slower than that. What if you really pay attention? What if you spend a few hours there trying to see every single footpath, every single street, if it's in a town that week, and really try and see everything to really pay attention. And be astonished and then tell people what you found.

Ariana Brocious: I think there's a runner who has done a project like this, Ricky Gates, I think, who has done something called like the Every Street Project, where he's trying to run literally every street in a certain quadrant in a city, which is a really cool way to explore a city similar to what you're describing. So give us some examples of what you discovered on these very, very micro, you know, day trips really right?

Alastair Humphreys: Yeah. So I think it's, it's interesting you mentioned Ricky Gates running around San Francisco, because I think during lockdown, quite a lot of people started doing this sort of thing. There's a guy here in London is trying to walk every single street. in London. There's someone in America who once walked all the way across America. That's about a 3000 mile journey, but he's now spending many years trying to walk every street in New York city. That's 10,000 miles of exploration. So one thing that this connection that I think to that with what I was doing is that. I mentioned at the start that I really didn't like where I lived, that it was boring, a bit ugly, a bit average, and I kind of wish that my map, my backyard were the beautiful mountains of Scotland, for example, and if they were, then I'd love to go out every week, but where I was is a bit boring. It's like some small towns, maybe a industrial unit, maybe a bit of farmland. It didn't seem that interesting, but I thought if I could choose to be interested in whatever I found, then it might become more interesting to me. So what I would do each week is go out with a notebook and the camera, so not, not the camera on my phone, an actual camera. And the reason I did that was carrying that around this little one kilometer area would force me to remember to stay slow. I'm quite a hyperactive person. I like running. I like cycling. Normally I go places fast. Whereas this was all about everything you see now is relevant. That pile of garbage is just as relevant as the little yellow flower growing over there. They're both relevant to the story of where you live and what's going on in our planet.

Greg Dalton: We'll hear from Alastair Humphreys again in a bit. Microadventures don't just have to be about discovering local nature. The idea is to rekindle that sense of discovery, that sense of joy and awe we get from travel – wherever you are. Climate One Producer Austin Colón lives in one of the most action-packed cities in the country – in the world! And his take on the microadventure… was big.

Austin Colón: Here in New York City, there are almost endless options for micro adventures. But there was one that really intrigued me,

Austin: I think I'd like to walk the entire length of Manhattan.

Jesse: The whole Island of Manhattan.

Austin Colón: That's my partner, Jesse, who I convinced to join me.

Jesse: Mmm, I don't see you doing that. Pfft.

Austin: Ouch.

Austin Colón: Okay. While that stung a little, I knew he was right,

Jesse: I like the energy of it. What about a big section of it? What if we did like a hundred blocks?

Austin: You know, when I lived, uh, in Harlem, I lived right next to the house where Alexander Hamilton lived.

Jesse: Oh, I didn't know that was up there.

Austin: Yeah. And I bet that's probably about a hundred blocks from where the theater that Hamilton plays out on Broadway is

Jesse: from Harlem to Like Times Square?

Austin: Basically, yeah.

Austin Colón: So we agreed that would be our plan, from Hamilton Grange on 141st Street to the Richard Rogers Theater, home to the musical Hamilton. When the day arrived for our little adventure, I got up early, made some coffee, which is always a must for me, and we set out.

Austin: So we're on the ferry to, from Greenpoint to the east side.

Austin Colón: We were across the river and off into Manhattan. In order to make our way uptown to Hamilton Grange, we had to get on the subway at Grand Central Station.

[nat cellist]

Austin Colón: And while we were looking for the train, Jesse spotted something interesting on the ceiling.

Jesse: Have you ever heard of the single dirty tile?

Austin: No.

Jesse: You see up in that corner, see that single dirty tile? (AC laugh) When they cleaned the ceiling back in whenever it was. They left one dirty tile, so you can kind of compare, that's how dirty the entire ceiling was, from people smoking. So that way you can always look at that and see, that's how dirty it was.

Austin: That's kind of amazing.

Jesse: Yeah. And I love that they did that. Anyway. Where's our train? We're looking for the 7.

Subway Announcer: This is a 34th Street, Hudson Yards bound 7 train. The next stop is

Austin Colón: After one subway line change, we were uptown and technically still at the beginning of our adventure.

Austin: Okay. So we finally got to Hamilton Grange, which is where Alexander Hamilton lived uptown in what's now Harlem on the hundred, what is this? 141st? There's no skyscrapers here, but there are, you know, seven, eight story apartment buildings.

Jesse: Yeah, it's still dense.

Austin: Dense and, you know, and everything is, it's pretty much concrete, brick, asphalt. And yet here at Hamilton Grange, there's just this old colonial mansion in the middle of Harlem where there's angles you can stand where you just wouldn't even notice. that this is New York City. Like, there's a beautiful walkway that leads to a garden. You think that up here, in what many call the concrete jungle, there's just this like little oasis that they've preserved.

Austin Colón: Then, Jesse and I head towards the other end of Manhattan. We walk down broadway – we pass through Hamilton Heights and Columbia University… and we even spotted that Restaurant from Seinfeld. And pretty soon, we traveled 25 blocks south…

Austin: passing 73rd and Central Park West. What was that? I wish I had my camera out.

Jesse:.He had a bag full of balloons on a bike. Balloon delivery.

Austin Colón: At the corner of 72 and the park, we find a towering landmark with some incredible history …

Austin: And here is the Dakota. Which for anybody who doesn't know, is the building that John Lennon lived in and was also shot in front of. And wow, it is like, Victorian, the architecture. Like I could almost see I can almost imagine, like, gas lamps in the windows.

Jesse: It's a lot smaller than I thought it was.

Austin: Should we go take a closer look?

Jesse: Yeah.

Austin Colón: Jesse and I are both musicians – and this is a place we'd read a ton about, but never visited. It's both beautiful… and eerie.

Austin: Yeah, look, even this little fence that guards the Dakota has, like, gargoyles on it. Oh. Lookit, Jesse, I wasn't that far off. Gas lamps. Oh, wow, yeah. The gas lamps on each side of the archway that leads into the Dakota. Wow. So it was, I think it was right there. Yeah.

Austin Colón: We kept heading south alongside a big open lawn. There were hundreds of people playing games, laying on blankets, reading books, having picnics, and yet one family really caught my eye.

Austin: Look at that. Look at those two little kids. Those two little kids who couldn't be more than, I don't know, like, four years old, five years old? Yeah. Playing soccer with their dad. Mom's laughing

at all, because none of them are particularly great at kicking the ball, but they're having such a good time. It's funny how, like, for all, you know, the, the, grand ideas of building this park. I mean, that's, that's the essence of this space is a place for that.

Austin Colón: But I couldn't linger on that thought for too long. It was 6 o'clock. We had a goal and I wasn't going to hold us up. Well…

Austin: Okay. Another update. We stopped and got coffee because I demanded that happen. And so we're about what 10 blocks away from the finish line.

Austin Colón:We pass by the famous Ed Sullivan Theater where Stephen Colbert hosts the Late Show and the giant M&M store… and Now, we were about to enter Times Square, which is just a few blocks from so many Broadway theaters and our destination. But of course, walking through the crowd of people wasn't going to be easy.

Austin: Alright, we're about to walk into Times Square. Which, if you've never been to Times Square, just imagine all the video stuff from Blade Runner. But instead of whatever they had, it's all just cheesy ads. That's Times Square. Okay, we're crossing the street on the 46th. And we're almost there. We're in the last stretch. And it's just chaos here.

Austin Colón: Walking through that crowd of people, or a brief moment, I remember what it was like to be a tourist here. The bright lights, the crowds, the street performers. It's so intense. And often mesmerizing.

Austin: Oh, I can see the theater. Wow, okay, we're almost there. We turned right.

Austin Colón: We turn the corner and head it down the street where the name Hamilton was lit up like a Christmas tree.

Austin: From 145th Hamilton Grange, ended up being over, or, actually, yeah, just about, almost exactly 100 blocks.

Jesse: 99,I feel like we have to walk one more block.

Austin: Well we do to the subway. But here we are. Here we are at the Hamilton, we did it! We did it! Ah, 100 blocks. Manhattan on a muggy overcast day, but we made it from Alexander Hamilton's house to his home on Broadway.

Austin Colón: And this is Climate One micro adventurer Austin Colon, signing off.

Greg Dalton:Today we're talking about feeding our wanderlust while staying close to home. Coming up, microadventures aren't just good for the climate… they're truly special experiences.

Alastair Humphreys: I think, of everyone going to Venice, Venice is ruined, type thing I think that's a really, really good demonstration for why it's fantastic just to concoct your own adventures.

Greg Dalton: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Ariana Brocious: This is Climate One, I'm AB.

I want to return one more time to my conversation with microadventurer Alastair Humphreys. After a couple decades crisscrossing the globe just about every way imaginable, he decided to stay local and find adventure near where he lives in suburban London. I asked him to share his most amazing

local discovery.

Alastair Humphreys: Well, I can't honestly pretend anything was amazing. And, you know, maybe that was a little bit of the point. I've camped on top of the great wall of China. I've seen Victoria Falls in Africa. They were amazing. Where I live isn't amazing. It was smaller than that. The rewards were gentle and little drips of curiosity and wonder, but it was small things like, so for example, just this week now, um, I've noticed that the swifts have returned to the English skies after being away in Africa for years. And for, for a lot of my life, I wouldn't have really noticed that. And I certainly wouldn't have appreciated it. Whereas now I think, wow, these cool little birds have flown thousands of miles to be here. And now they're hammering around the skies above my, my home shrieking as they hunt for little insects. And I also know that as I get old, at some point, my hearing I will no longer be able to hear those swifts. They'll go out of my hearing range. And so, wow, I have to really treasure this summer arrival of the swifts. So it's more tiny little bits of awe and wonder that rather than the great wall of China or the Grand Canyon.

Ariana Brocious: I think we all have that way of ranking things though, right? And we assume that some of these places are just more special because they have inherent value, whether it's, you know, dramatic landscapes or unusual features or things like that. But if you think about the experience that you've had, perhaps it is something much more humble, right? You can have a quality experience pretty much anywhere. You said, you cycled around the world, rowed across oceans. What do you miss about the kind of adventure travel that requires getting on airplanes and going to far flung places?

Alastair Humphreys: Yeah, I feel a bit torn because I'm really championing how. Refreshing and rewarding it was to really commit to being curious and enjoying my, my neighborhood. I really think that a lot of adventure is not about the geography of the places you go, but the mindset with which you approach it. You know, if I flew to your town now and I went to the supermarket, I'd be so interested. I'd be like, wow, look in America, they, they put the broccoli in a different shelf to the way in the UK. This is so interesting. Everything fascinates me. Whereas when I'm in the supermarket here in London, like a boring broccoli, who cares? And so I have a much more curious, adventurous mindset when I'm traveling. And that's what I've been trying to do close to home. And that's been great. But I do have to say, if ever you get the chance to do something big, to strap a tent to the back of your bicycle and pedal away from your front door and cycle across a continent, then wow, that is a wonderful way to learn about the world and yourself. And to answer your question specifically, I would say that there are so many ways you can travel, explore, have huge adventures without needing to go on planes. I mean, particularly, for example, if you live in the States, wow, I could spend my entire life having fantastic, huge adventures around America. But, equally, I'm also aware that I've been on loads of flights to loads of great places. So I don't want to sort of flight shame young people into never doing anything interesting. I just would urge people to really weigh up the carbon benefits of what you're doing. You know, maybe don't fly to Las Vegas for a weekend stag party, but maybe do fly to China if you're going to spend two months trekking through inner Mongolia and have a life changing experience. So I think just think a bit more deeply about it, but also do not underestimate the potential of just peddling away from your front door. That's the greatest adventure of my life by a very long way.

Ariana Brocious: hmm. Well, I think you're talking about different kinds of adventure a little bit too, because there is something about the inherent novelty of going to a different country, where they speak a different language, have different customs, all of that, you are sort of perpetually surprised and intrigued and you know, Oh, this is interesting. This is something different. And that that's just the experience that I think many of us do seek when we travel internationally, is to have that overwhelming flood of new experience. But as you say, there can be different kinds of things that are, maybe it's not as shocking, and, provoking in that way, but you can still discover lots of

things just by staying close, close to your home. So there's a debate among environmentalists, whether we should encourage people to get out and experience the natural world so that they develop this deep appreciation for what could be lost, what's already being lost. And then those who say no, travel, even environmentally conscious, you know, so called eco travel is still too damaging because of the carbon impact of flying, because of having too many people crowded in places. They think of cities like Venice that are overrun. So how do you think about weighing that balance of the value an individual gets from exploration and the impact that they have while doing it?

Alastair Humphreys: Wow. Um, I feel like there's about 10 hours worth of questions in that there. So a few, there's a few things. One, I don't think that those of us who care about the world can save the world for want of a better phrase, we can't save the world by just sitting under a rock and eating celery and therefore having zero carbon emissions. That is not going to fix the world. If we want to fix it, we've got to be out there making change happen. And in order to make change happen, we have to be passionate and we have to have interesting stories to tell. so that's, there's that one part of it. Uh, the sort of honeypotting side of it, I think, of everyone going to Venice, Venice is ruined, um, type thing, or everyone going to certain national parks and, uh, and then wrecking it. I think that's a really, really good demonstration for why it's fantastic just to concoct your own adventures. One of my favorite things about planning adventures is the, is the, all the preparation of getting out a map and looking for places that look interesting and thought provoking and, and original. And to then go there and to have that to myself. I much, much prefer those experiences to just trying to tick off the latest Instagram hotspots. So I feel really strongly about that aspect of it as well. Um, there you are. That's 10 hours of answers in a couple of minutes.

Ariana Brocious: Excellent. Thank you.

Alastair Humphreys: I think mostly I stopped talking cause I couldn't remember the other bits of your question.

Ariana Brocious: That's okay. If they come to you, let me know. One thing that struck me in reading your book was that you, you know, you started trying to take a couple of these adventures via car, maybe just the first one, quickly found that that presented its own difficulties, had to get your car towed out of a ditch. So you switched to, to biking mostly, right? And being on foot and that shift in and of itself, in our cities can be pretty profound. You know, I like riding my bike because I just experience the world differently than when I'm in the closed vacuum of my car. So I'm curious just if you could expand a bit on that idea of, um, some of those other changes, it's mindset, it's maybe mode of transport, what other things can help you do that?

Alastair Humphreys: One of my constant struggles in life is trying to rush like a lunatic the entire time. And even though this was a really enjoyable experience of once a week, I'd get to spend a few hours exploring a local bit of landscape, part of me would be thinking, Oh, I need to hurry up and do this quickly so that I can get home and send more emails and do more Zoom calls, which of course is ridiculous, but nonetheless, my urge to rush meant that at the start, I thought what I'll do is I'll just drive to the grid square and then I'll go and do the exploring. And as you say, the first week I accidentally drove into a ditch and had to be rescued. I was like, what am I doing? I'm supposed to be smelling the roses here. Let's just chill a little bit and get on my bike and cycle to where I'm going. You know, the whole map was only 20 kilometers, 12 miles across. It's not a big bike ride for me to anywhere on the map. I'll cycle there. That can be part of the journey, part of the enjoyment. And when I get there, I'll lock up my bike and then I'll walk around the one kilometer square for the day and take my photos and explore. So just slow down and appreciate this thing. When I'm an old man, I'm really not going to be looking back thinking, Oh, I'm glad I did more zoom meetings. No offense to you, Ariana now on our zoom meeting, I'm enjoying this one. Um, yeah, just slow down and appreciate it. And, and you know, what I, what I also really enjoyed was quite a lot of the days

then I'd be cycling off to my grid square, usually quite early in the morning, sort of rush hour time going through towns. And on my bike, I'm just zooming past all the traffic. Everyone's in their cars, queuing away frustrated. And I'm just zooming along on my bike, feeling smug and great and winning, winning the day and winning at life. So yeah, slow down and ride your bike more.

Ariana Brocious: From your travels, what are some of the most striking examples you've seen of how climate change is impacting different environments and communities around the globe?

Alastair Humphreys: So my answer to this, it fills me with a great deal of shame to say really, but when I look back on my years of traveling the globe, I didn't really pay attention to anything like this. And I think there's a few reasons for it. Partly I forgive myself, perhaps just the sort of exuberance of youth. So maybe I wasn't as noticing of the world and also climate change and environment wasn't such a topic. So I'll give myself that on the credit side, but, but also I think part of the thing is when you just go to a place, you go there, you visit it. That's just what it is. It looks completely normal to you. And something that I learned about during this year is called shifting baseline syndrome, which is the way things gradually change and deteriorate and you don't really notice. So, you know, if I flew out to the Grand Canyon today and I love it, like, wow, look at these beautiful flowers. Someone who's lived there for all their life might notice that the wildflowers are all disappearing because of climate change. I wouldn't have noticed that. So there's that aspect of it, uh, to a little degree. So shifting baseline syndrome is vital, but I think the biggest thing really Is Is that I didn't particularly notice climate change in the world, but I did notice it tremendously right here in my little average patch of land, because I can get a much greater understanding of the issues that affect the communities and the industries and the cultures where I happen to live and see how nature's changing. And so, my year exploring close to home taught me more about nature and climate change and gave me more passion for conservation than, uh, rowing across oceans or visiting the Serengeti or all sorts of other wonderful things that I've very much loved doing, but didn't really educate me and activate me and motivate me in the way that just paying attention really closely once a year to what's happening close to home did for me.

Ariana Brocious: Yeah, I think the shifting baseline syndrome is such a profound concept because the way to counter it is basically, as you say, like paying attention to where you are, to being in one place, to knowing what it's like. And so you can actually observe those changes as opposed to dipping in and out and missing them. Is it worth people traveling to visit melting glaciers? You don't necessarily need to see that, though it might be striking. As an individual, knowing it's happening maybe is enough, and finding those, those climate impacts in your own neck of the woods might be equally striking.

Alastair Humphreys: Yeah, This is one of those things that I think you can argue in lots of different ways and certainly argue to meet your own desires. And David Attenborough talks about, um, we can only love that, which we know. And that's a very good argument, of course, for visiting lots of places, but I think David Attenborough has done a great job of showing us that. The glaciers are all melting and the polar bears are all dying. So I don't think I need to fly to the Arctic to stand on a melting glacier and take a photograph of myself, Instagram and say, Hey, the glaciers are melting guys. So, um, I'm hesitant about that sort of self indulgent side of doing it. Um, and yeah, we know the glaciers are melting. What are we going to do about it? One of my challenges for this year was, um, I've been to the Arctic. I've been, I've been on glaciers. I cross glaciers. I love glaciers. Do I love glaciers enough to stop going to them? And personally, I found that deeply, selfishly, painfully hard to do. Um, but it felt like the right thing to do. I don't need to go to a glacier to see that it's melting.

So I want to point out something that, you know, uh, to people who are just listening and not seeing.

You're a white man, who. undoubtedly has some privilege by living in England, as am I, a white

woman living in the United States. And so as someone who's undertaken a lot of this travel alone, I'd like to ask about, what you've learned about what you're allowed to do that might be harder for a person of color, someone with lower income, someone who's not in a position to be able to take off in the middle of the day and go explore, and how still somebody could expand their own local horizons in the way that you have.

Alastair Humphreys: Yeah this is a big, long lasting thing in my life. So I set off when I was 24 years old to bicycle around the planet. And. For the next four years, then I was mostly cycling through most of the time I was in really poor parts of the world and constantly I was meeting fantastic, motivated, brilliant people in all these parts of the world who I was just really conscious. Wow, these guys will never get to do the things that I've done just because I've got a British passport, a college degree and a few thousand pounds in my pocket. Wow, I am winning at life. I must not waste that opportunity. So, yeah, that has been very apparent to me from traveling to, um, harsh parts of the world. Moving forwards to more, more recently, I was really struck traveling around my local map. There's, there's sort of issues with land access of where you're allowed to go in the UK. And we have similar, but slightly different issues with the U S you know, you guys have got more space, but you've got a slightly fiercer approach to private property than we do. Uh, plus guns. So it's just sort of the similarities and differences. But the essence is that some parts of the countryside you're allowed to go through and a lot, you're not. And, um, there's quite a big debate in the UK the right to roam. Should we increase access in order to try and get more people more emotionally connected to nature so that they will take more steps to care for it better and therefore a positive feedback loop can grow. And I've always been fairly casual about ignoring keep out signs in Britain and just wandering around through the woods wherever I want, because I know that if anyone, if any farmer catches me, then, which they never do because they're just out, I'm out in the countryside. But if for example, they did, then I'm a sort of cheerful, jolly chap. I'll probably have a friendly chat with them and we'll probably be friends in a few minutes. If we're not, then at least I'm a six foot tall white man and I'm quite fast at running so I could just run away and I'll be fine. And so what really sank into me this year was how much easier it is for me to access even the very tame, gentle British countryside than it is for almost any other sector of society. And that really has really strengthened in me a motivation that it's really important in Britain that we. increase our access laws, increase the right to roam and make more of the countryside more accessible to more people more often. And then the final little thing I'll say on that, as you mentioned in your just examples in your question about the time privileges that I have to be able to do this. I mean, geez, I'm so lucky this isn't my job. Now I get, I earn my living by just riding my bike around and, uh, Writing about it. So I'm so lucky there. But one of the real points I was trying to make about Local is that you can find a little bit of nature, whoever you are, wherever you are, in whatever tiny bit of space of time, and you have, and the challenge is to look for the opportunities you have, not all of the barriers in your, in your life.

Ariana Brocious: Alistair Humphreys is an adventurer and author of Local, A Search for Nearby Nature and Wildness.

Ariana Brocious: Thank you so much for joining us on Climate One. This was a real pleasure.

Alastair Humphreys: Thank you for having me.

Ariana Brocious: And that’s our show. Thanks for listening. Talking about climate can be hard, and exciting and interesting -- AND it’s critical to address the transitions we need to make in all parts of society. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review. You can do it right now on your device. Or consider joining us on Patreon and supporting the show that way. In Arizona, I’m Ariana Brocious…

Greg Dalton: …And from my backyard in the Bay Area, I'm Greg Dalton. Brad Marshland is our senior producer; Our managing director is Jenny Park. Ariana Brocious is co-host, editor and producer. Austin Colón is producer and editor. Megan Biscieglia is producer and production manager. Wency Shaida is our development manager, Ben Testani is our communications manager. Jenny Lawton is consulting producer. Our theme music was composed by George Young. Gloria Duffy and Philip Yun are co-CEOs of The Commonwealth Club World Affairs, the nonprofit and nonpartisan forum where our program originates. Thanks for listening.