

Making Ripples

Walking to Make a Difference for Health, Charity, and Ecology

by Amanda Bancroft

Few will experience living without a car for many years. Driving is the standard transportation option, and alternatives are an inconvenience. They have downsides, like any form of transportation. But can something be *lost* by gaining a car after years of living without one? Yes.

To name a few things: mental health, awareness of nature, and ideal pant size. In our grand experiment to attempt to make a difference with every life choice including transportation, my husband Ryan and I lived without a car by choice from 2011 to 2015, and Ryan commuted to work without a car for over a decade. There were plenty of benefits and challenges with that life choice, many of which have already been detailed on our blog or in this column. Now, we are discovering the benefits and challenges of owning a car again.

The most obvious result of car ownership is spending a lot of money (a downside) and gaining conveniences (an upside). Yet there are also subtle changes that snuck their way into our new walking-light life. Back pain from sitting all day in a car and at a desk. Weight gain and snug pants that used to fit fine. Less mental focus and increased inattention. A loss of connection to daily and seasonal changes in nature, and less awareness of the vast ecological web around us. All of which, not surprisingly, lead to unhappiness and increased risk of disease.

To offset the downsides of owning a car, we now take hour-long evening walks as many days of the week as possible. We take the stairs, or stand during movies, or run errands on foot. Any additional form of exercise besides walking is embraced (after all, walking is just one method of accomplishing goals). And it feels great! We're increasing our knowledge of ecology and our physical and mental well-being.

Thanks to Pokémon Go, people are getting out of the house and walking, meeting other people and discovering things about their neighborhoods, communities, and local ecosystems. This is exceptionally good for children and gamers of all ages who have been tempted into thinking that virtual reality is the main purpose in life. Lake Fayetteville is packed with people who cannot help but see that gorgeous sunset or the wildlife while catching Pokémon.

Better still, people have embraced a win-win situation and now walk for their own health and to raise money for charity at the same time. Many causes have walk-a-thons throughout the year, and if you take issue with a particular organization, there are plenty of others that need moving feet. The Walk to End Alzheimer's, for example, is happening Saturday, September 10th at 10am for two miles beginning at the Northwest Arkansas Community College. Happy walking!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.