



## Cherelle Harding on the Finding Our Way podcast

**Content Alert:** In this episode Cherelle, a young woman of Black Caribbean ethnicity talks about racism, feeling safe in the countryside and her work to improve the representation and confidence of people from black, Asian and other minority ethnic communities, and barriers for people living in urban areas.

### #Intro music

**Mary-Ann** Finding Our Way is proudly sponsored by Berghaus, a team of people united by their passion for the outdoors, and who are working hard to create more diversity in the sports we love.

This episode involves a conversation about discrimination linked to racism. For more detailed information, have a look at the episode description.

**Mary-Ann** Hello and welcome to Finding Our Way, the new podcast from the British Mountaineering Council, aka the BMC. I'm Mary-Ann Ochota.

**Cress** And I'm Cress Allwood. This podcast is about diversifying the voices we normally hear talking about the outdoors. So in each episode, we'll be chatting to someone who's usually busy climbing, mountaineering or walking...

**Mary-Ann** ...and instead we're going to grill them about the highs, the lows and the most surprising things they've learnt from their adventures. Expect good memorable stories and hopefully bursts of inspiration from people who are making real change happen.

**Cress** So Mary-Ann, who's on today?

**Mary-Ann** Joining us today is a woman who's a youth worker by day and an evangelist for the power of the outdoors by night, in the evenings and on the weekends. She's a regional leader for Black Girls Hike and the founder of Steppers UK, a community walking group based in the Midlands. She says that Steppers UK is all about good views and good vibes. Connecting with us from Coventry. Welcome, Cherelle Harding!

**Cherelle** Hello. Thank you for that lovely intro.

**Mary-Ann** We're excited to have you on! So let's kick off. Tell us what is Steppers UK, what's it about? Why did you set it up?

**Cherelle** Yeah, so Steppers UK, we are a community interest organisation. And we focus on the outdoors and encouraging people specifically from Black, Asian and minority communities to get outdoors and develop positive relationships with the outdoors.

**Mary-Ann** What was it that inspired you to set it up in the first place? It's no small feat, is it, to set up a whole community interest company, to go, 'This is a thing that I want to actually change people's lives', and then invest all your spare time in!

**Cherelle** I think the inspiration came from seeing the lack of representation of people within the outdoors myself. I've kind of always been an adventurous person. I'd hop in my car on the weekend and just randomly go to locations. I'd sit on Google Maps and browse and see where's green on the map, and where can I explore this weekend? But wherever I went, I always found that there weren't people that looked like me. So Steppers was something I wanted to do to encourage more people to get outdoors and explore the profound benefits that I realised nature gives me.

**Cress** Some people have suggested that walking and other outdoor activities just aren't in the culture of Black, Asian or some other communities. Do you think that's true?

**Cherelle** I don't think that's true. I talk about this often, a lot of people from Black, Asian and minority communities often have history and culture within countries that are abundant in nature. For example, myself, my family's from the Caribbean, Jamaica and Barbados. And everyday life there is about, you know, being in nature. I do think there's been a disconnect when it comes to people within the diaspora, but I don't think it's not part of the culture, at all. I just think there's a disconnect and there are barriers in the way that unfortunately do stop people, specifically Black, Asian and people that live within cities from accessing it.

**Mary-Ann** What are the barriers, Cherelle, as you see them? Because this has come up so much, hasn't it, over the past nine months or so, since last summer about people saying, 'Hang on a minute, the countryside is free, anyone could go for a walk! What's everyone making a fuss about?!' And they kind of miss the point, right?

**Cherelle** Yeah, absolutely. We always say there are lots of different barriers. It's not just one thing that stops people. Black and Asian people aren't just one person. There's some barriers that affect people in general. But there are some more complex barriers that do affect those particular communities, such as lack of representation. The reality is, is that often enough, if you don't see someone that looks like you in something, it's harder for you to visualise yourself in those positions. There's also distance and transport. A lot of black and Asian people live within cities, so those locations are a little bit harder to get to. And you know what transport is like when it comes to the outdoors.

And some of the spaces historically were unsafe spaces, particularly for black people. And I feel like that may have been passed down through generations. So, for example, it wasn't a priority for my grandparents to go to the countryside because they came to the country to work and to make money, and going to places like the Lake District was just not something that was a priority to them. So I feel like that has just been passed down through generations.

**Cress** May I ask you a question that we touched on earlier on, actually, which is about role models?

**Cherelle** Sure.

**Cress** Can you tell us how important they are to you?

**Cherelle** I think role models are extremely important because, again, it goes back to representation. If you don't see someone that looks like you - and it's not for everybody, but for a lot of people - it makes it very difficult. And I think with things like the outdoor activities, sometimes they could be perceived as 'these are not things that Black people do', or 'these are not things that Asian people do'. So when you see someone that IS doing that, it definitely instills an element inside you that you can resonate with.

**Mary-Ann** Yeah, there's that line, isn't there, that 'you can't be what you can't see'.

**Cress** Who are your main role models, Cherelle?

**Cherelle** I'll tell you what's really interesting for me, actually. So when I think back about my outdoor experience, it kind of started at school and then I actually went back to the same location that I went to as a child. And that was the moment that I was like, wow, this hiking stuff is ok!

What really inspired me to connect with nature was actually reggae music and Rastafarianism. So when I was around 23, I started listening to a lot of reggae music. And all you've got to do is listen to a Bob Marley song to hear him talking about nature and his love and appreciation for it. And I think that resonated with me so much that it then made me...I feel like it awakened a level of consciousness in me that I don't think I had until I heard someone who was from the Caribbean, that looked like me, talking about those things.

So all of those things coupled together was definitely a massive inspiration for me to spend time in nature, listen to reggae music, and then I got an allotment and then I became a vegan! All these things that were connecting me with nature, a little bit more. And then fast forward, I started getting outdoors. So I definitely think that reggae has had a massive inspiration on me and my nature connection.

**Cress** There's a lovely clip [of a Steppers UK group walk] that you've got on Twitter, one of them where you have the music running, which really just adds to the fun and enjoyment.

**Cherelle** Yeah. And when we were recording that video, that's one of the things that I really wanted to highlight. I said to the guy that was recording, 'Just capture everyone, just naturally, enjoying nature'. I always feel like your inner child comes out when you're in the outdoors and everyone was just having so much fun. And it was amazing to capture that.

**Mary-Ann** I saw a hilarious little clip that you put on social of a fully grown man rolling down a hill! And it was hashtag, #FindYourInnerChild. And I was like, 'That's so cool!' I mean, you don't see that very much, but that absolutely captures the spirit of why you want to go outside, and go for a walk, and meet up with friends, and freshen your mind.

**Cherelle** That clip, it had me in stitches. I think the thing was the fact that, yeah, this is a grown man, but also a grown man who doesn't really go outdoors. And he actually took

part in our project that we did for British Science Week recently, which was about getting people in the city to explore more green spaces. And that was his first time coming on a Steppers walk. So to see that video, it definitely just made me smile so much. This is the wonder of the outdoors, you just feel so free sometimes.

**Cress** What I'm picking up here is a huge love and, you know, just the fun that can be had! I think sometimes potentially in the world of mountaineering, we're so...there's a lot of talk about the risks involved, understandably, on particular mountain ranges and regions. And the technical aspects that are involved. And it's as if we've almost forgotten how to talk about having fun closer to home, and all those benefits and enjoyments we can get from going for a walk. You know, whether it's on a local hill or through the parks, or in the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It's great that things seem to be opening up a bit more.

**Cherelle** Yeah, definitely. And this is why I use the term 'good views, good vibes', because the 'views' part is self-explanatory, and the 'vibes' is, 'Just come along, you can just be yourself, be free'. And I do think that that word 'fun' - I don't think we use it enough! People don't necessarily have fun enough. So that's one thing that we really want to push through Steppers!

**Cress** Some people are lucky enough to live with beautiful countryside on their doorstep in certain parts of the UK. And they haven't had it too bad during lockdown, one could argue. But as you've mentioned, many people in urban areas...how difficult has it been for people in those areas?

**Cherelle** Obviously, particularly the past year has really highlighted mental health and people have been finding themselves getting out a lot more. So obviously, if you live closer to the mountains, you're very lucky in that case. But I do think it's harder for people that live within cities because we're limited on the amount of green spaces that we can access and not only that, but the *quality* of those green spaces. So I do think it's been harder, but also when I think about myself, it's been a great opportunity to explore the beauty on my doorstep. And there's so many spaces that I had no idea - I've lived in Coventry for 31 years and some of the places that I've discovered, I'm just like, 'Wow, I did not even know that existed'. And even a few places that I've walked now, I didn't even know that the public could walk there. So it's been a nice opportunity to explore.

**Mary-Ann** How did you go about finding these local secrets?

**Cherelle** So there's been a few apps that I've been using and I've kind of been looking at other people's walks and where they are, and then I just like getting out. So there's been a few places that I've been to and then I would walk a little bit further and see where that might take me. And it's just opened my eyes up to so much more.

**Mary-Ann** Are there apps or resources online that you particularly direct people to who might be new to walking, or that you use yourself?

**Cherelle** There's two in particular that I use. One is Strava, which is really good for local walks and you can follow other people's walks and see what they're doing. But one app in particular that I've been using a lot more is OS Maps. I've got a bit of a map obsession recently! I thought I knew how to read maps, but I actually didn't. I thought I'd learned all that in school, but it wasn't until I started using OS Maps and I thought, 'I haven't got a clue!' I've been using that so much more now. And yeah, it's so fascinating.

**Cress** That sounds good. You said you learnt to read maps in school, which is great. And we hope that's true for many of our listeners, I guess. Have you done any walking qualifications? Are you interested in those? Can you tell us about that?

**Cherelle** So basic map reading I did in school, so I thought that I knew what I was doing. But it wasn't until I actually went on a training course with Black Girls Hike. And that's where I did a Map Skills Day. And it was in that moment I thought, 'Wow, I thought I knew what I was doing, but I actually don't'. So it kind of sparked an interest in map reading for me. Since then it's definitely become a bit of an obsession.

**Cress** Have you got plans to do any further training or qualifications?

**Cherelle** Absolutely. I really want to become a Mountain Leader and also put on some events for other people to also develop those skills, and get them interested in that. A lot of people might go out walking casually, but to be upskilled, to navigate those spaces more confidently, I think is definitely a great idea.

**Mary-Ann** There's real empowerment, isn't there, in not just going, 'Oh, I'm interested in walking. And there's this group walk that's organised and I'm going to sign up and go along and meet some like-minded people. And know that someone's got my back and that I'm not going to get lost, I'm not going to get left behind'.

There's something really empowering, when you reach that point where you can take out a map, understand what it's trying to tell you and then go under your own steam with your own confidence, knowing that you can navigate your way safely through the landscape. I loved that moment when I found it in my own hill walking.

**Cherelle** Yeah, absolutely. And when I reflect back on my earlier days of adventuring, I definitely remember there being this element of fear, of wanting to explore, but not wanting to go too far because I might get lost, whereas now I'm so much more confident going out knowing that, 'OK, if I take this route that I've never been on before, I can navigate myself back safely'.

**Cress** Yeah, it's like a spiral of positive success, I guess, isn't it? The more you do, the more confident you feel. And then it's as if the world opens up a little bit more.

**Cherelle** Definitely. One of our aims for Steppers is to upskill people ultimately, so that they can go on and make walking and hiking a recreational part of their life, and just do that casually.

**Cress** That sounds good. We'll definitely include information at the end for people to signpost them. Language is important to you and you often don't use the word "hiking", is that right?

**Cherelle** Yeah. More so now that I'm having these conversations, the word 'hiking' comes up a lot more through general conversation. But it's been something I've been really conscious of from the start. I feel like the word always seems a little bit American to me. And I always use the example of my mum and saying, 'Hey Mum, do you want to want to go for a hike?' And she'd be like, 'Huh!?' Whereas if I said to her, 'Do you want to just go out for a walk?'. Language is something to be mindful of, because not everybody knows perhaps what actually hiking is.

**Mary-Ann** It's really tricky, isn't it? Within the British Mountaineering Council, these conversations have come up. Partly because it's an institution called the 'British Mountaineering Council' - I'm not mountaineer, but I'm still an ambassador. I'm officially, I think, a 'hill walking ambassador'. But most of the walking that I do isn't mountainous, because I live in Hertfordshire. So there aren't that many mountains directly close to me! And so I was like, 'Well, should I be a 'hiking ambassador' or is that too American?' And does it actually resolve the issue, which is that people who aren't already in the club go, 'I'm not interested in rambling, hill walking or hiking', necessarily. It's really difficult. We need a national movement to get some unity around what it is that we're talking about!

**Cress** I think language can be quite off-putting. I've led expeditions all over the world, but I don't know that I'd call myself a mountaineer, because I don't do it full time, professionally. So even if you're in the game, so to speak, it can still have connotations as an individual. I guess we all interpret things differently.

**Cherelle** I think even the term 'hiker' - yes, I love climbing mountains and stuff. But I also like walking through country parks and, you know, places that don't necessarily have any incline or hills. So is that hiker? I don't know, someone that just likes to walk?!

**Cress** I guess at the end of the day, we just want to encourage as many people as possible to enjoy the landscape and the amazing benefits you can get from just putting one foot in front of the other.

**Cherelle** Absolutely.

**Mary-Ann** So tell us a bit more about Steppers and what you do within the group, online, what your plans are, and what projects you've got underway?

**Cherelle** At Steppers we've started a challenge which is called the AONB Challenge, and our plan is to visit all 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This was a personal challenge of mine that I started about two or three years ago. And when I started Steppers, I'd already visited about seven or eight of them. I thought this is a great opportunity for me to bring groups to those same locations that I was familiar with. And I thought, this is fantastic. If I can get a group to visit all 46 areas, and go to places that they may never have actually got to visit, this is a great starting point for a project. So far we've done 4, and there's 46, so there's lots of adventures ahead! I'm really looking forward to that.

We're also going to be starting some programmes which will be working with young people and hopefully working with schools, because I think that's where a lot of change takes place. And again, with a massive focus being on mental health, the outdoors provides a space where people can use it to look after their mental health and find therapy within the outdoors. And I'm really passionate about encouraging young people to use the outdoors more.

One of the things I'm thinking about is that my first outdoors experience came from when I was at school. But often enough they were just one-off experiences. They were residential trips that often happened once a year, a reward kind of trip. Then you'd come back and you'd just go back to normal life and you might get the chance to go again next year. And that's great, but sometimes it just paints an idea that outdoors is not something that you can actually do every single day.

So my idea would be to actually build off those one-off experiences - as a young person, [we can change the idea that] you've got to go away, you've got to rock climb or climb a mountain. How can we do that again within the next few months of you being back? And also getting young people to explore more of the local spaces to them. Because a lot of young people, they use parks anyway. But what about some of the other spaces that they may not even know that they can go to, or walk through?

We always have a laugh sometimes when walking because sometimes it feels like you're walking on private land, but there's actually a public right of way. And again, looking back on my own experiences, I didn't know that you could actually walk through some of those fields. So there's some education that can be done there.

**Cress** Do you envisage engaging with local school teachers?

**Cherelle** Yeah, absolutely. I think that's one of the things that I'm looking to do and also perhaps taking young people out, and [asking them] how can that benefit them during their school day? Whether that's just at the end of the day, or the start of the day,.

**Mary-Ann** That's so cool. So that you're embedding a nature experience, a connection with the outdoors into everyday life. It's not just this special thing that happens once a year when you go on a special holiday. Because that puts those outdoor places in a kind of...it's distant, isn't it? Emotionally and as well as geographically.

**Cherelle** Yeah. And for some people, especially living in the city, if you're living in a flat or a high rise, you only have access to perhaps the communal parks. So I think encouraging that into young people and children's everyday life just makes it a bit more habitual.

**Cress** I'm really hoping that there are lots of head teachers around the country listening to this, who will be very happy to look at their curriculum and their extracurricular activities and get you on board Cherelle! Wouldn't that be great?

**Mary-Ann** What has the response been like, Cherelle? Are people desperate to go, 'Yes, come in and do something with our kids!' Or are they going, 'Oh, gosh, we're busy and we've got all this Covid stuff to sort out, and how much will it cost us?' Where are the attitudes?

**Cherelle** Well, at the moment it's still in planning phases. But because I'm a youth worker by day, I do also have a bit of an insight into schools. And of course, with Covid precautions, there is that risk. So it's just planning at the moment. But once restrictions ease up and of course, with it being outdoors, it's a bit easier to manage Covid restrictions. We'll be in a place where the plan is a lot stronger, and then I can feed that to schools and hopefully there'll be interest in it.

**Mary-Ann** Yeah, it's so, so needed. One of the things that's been really clear to me in the way that this lockdown has played out, is just how unfair the impacts have been between people who might have a bit more space at home, might have green space - a garden or whatever - where they can spend time and invest their energies in. And then the people who just don't have that, are suffering.

**Cherelle** Yeah, I think about it a lot. And again, going back to the quality - you have parks in cities, but sometimes the quality of them is not amazing. That's something that needs a

lot of work, and more green spaces need to be created for people. Because what happens is people then end up congregating in the same spaces.

In Coventry, we have two parks. And whenever the sun is out, you know for a fact that these two parks are going to be absolutely heaving with people. And it's great that people want to go there, but it's also it's a little bit unfair, I guess, the fact that there's these limited spaces for people to go to.

**Mary-Ann** One of the things you said before, about not realising - or young people or groups that you're going out with - just don't realise... You feel like you're trespassing on private land, but actually, there's a right of way. It was something that came up in this government review called the Landscapes Review, which was particularly looking at National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. One of the things that the author said, was that people who are new to the countryside feel like there's this club, a sort of secret club, where people who are confident know these secret rules. And people who are just getting started are like, 'Well, how do you know where to go?', 'How am I not going to get shot by a farmer?', 'What on earth, how do I do this?!' 'What are the rules to operate in this new environment?' Does that resonate with you?

**Cherelle** Yeah, definitely. It's education, isn't it? If you're not familiar with the place, you haven't been told specifically in terms of how to follow a public footpath or what paths you're able to walk on, you're just not going to know. So I don't think that information is readily available to people that live in cities, often, so that when they do choose to go to the countryside or the Peak District, that they can be comfortable and familiar with the space.

**Mary-Ann** Whose responsibility is it for their education, because, I mean, if you're being provocative, you say, well, all the information's online, you just need to go look for it. But then it's a question of, well, I don't even know what it is that I'm looking for in order to find the answers to my questions?!

**Cherelle** I think responsibility has to come from both ways, really. I think spaces have to be welcoming for people that aren't used to it, and that information has to be readily available. But then also, likewise, if you go into somewhere new, of course, it makes sense for you to do research prior to that.

**Mary-Ann** So Steppers isn't just for people from black or Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, is that right? Anybody in the area, in the community, is welcome?

**Cherelle** Yes, we have an open approach, but we do have a focus on...I'd say it's a bit of an equity approach - the fact that we recognise that people from black, Asian and minority communities are underrepresented. So that's the focus. But we do welcome anybody to come along.

**Mary-Ann** What were your thoughts, Cherelle, on groups that are specifically for, say, 'women only' or 'black only'? Because sometimes there's that accusation and you often see it on social media - and I don't think it's particularly helpful - sort of saying, 'Oh, well, that's divisive. You're making tribes out of people and setting them against each other'. The flip side of that is people saying, 'No, you need more supportive safe spaces for the people who might otherwise be really, really in the minority if they went to a regular, "regular" - inverted commas - group'.



**Cherelle** Of course we would love to live in a society where everybody can mix together. But the reality is, is we're not there yet. We need to provide spaces for people, for them to feel safe and be in environments where they feel like they're not judged or misunderstood. So groups that are for specific people, I think are absolutely necessary.

At the end of the day, I feel like people are able to go to those groups, and upskill, and become more confident to be able to access the outdoors in a number of different ways. There's not just one way for you to enjoy the outdoors. And I think that's where those kind of comments come from, they come from people that either don't understand or don't want to understand the benefits of these groups.

**Cress** It would be great if we can have this conversation again in however many years time and look back, and notice how things have changed and how more inclusive the outdoors is. Wouldn't that be great?

**Cherelle** Yeah, it would be really interesting, actually, to see how things have changed from now.

**Mary-Ann** Do you think there's been so much more attention on diversity in the outdoors and brands and organisations putting out statements about anti-racism since the protests in the summer [of 2020]? Do you sometimes worry that it's all hot air and people jumping on the bandwagon, and actually the action, the real momentum for change, might not be behind it?

**Cherelle** I do sometimes, because I think definitely at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, specifically June, summertime last year all you'd have to do is go on someone's Instagram page and see a black square that they've posted for Black Out Day and then not see anything since, between now and then.

So there are companies and organisations out there that aren't doing the change that they said. But me personally, I try not to focus on what those other people are doing. I'm putting a lot of my energy into things like Steppers, because at the end of the day, I know my vision for Steppers. So I try and put all my energy there and focus it on there.

**Mary-Ann** Find the positive?

**Cherelle** Yeah absolutely.

**Cress** What's been the highlight for you so far?

**Cherelle** So starting the AONB Challenge has been a highlight, I think specifically visiting Malvern Hills, which is a quite a local place in Worcester. But I think that trip was a highlight for me because we had people visit from London, Wolverhampton, and it was just a moment that I had like, 'Wow, people really want this!' And I think that, for me, was a highlight because it made my vision a little bit clearer, actually, where I want to take Steppers.

**Mary-Ann** So of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or National Parks that you've been to, Cherelle, what are your highlights? Either with Steppers or just personally walking yourself?

**Cherelle** So these are two that I've actually done personally myself. I've visited Cheddar Gorge in the Mendip Hills, which was beautiful. It was the first time I went there. I went in the summer, so I had the most perfect weather. That was beautiful, so I can't wait to take the group.

And then also, two years ago I think it was, I actually went to the Isle of Wight and did a coastal walk. And that was the first time on the Isle of Wight as well. So there's so many places. I'm just really excited to take a group there. But also there's so many places in the UK that I'm still yet to explore. I can't wait to get to the Highlands - I've never been to Scotland before, so there's loads of adventures ahead!

**Cress** You'll love it.

**Cherelle** Can't wait. It's Number 1 on my bucket list - the UK bucket list - at the moment.

**Cress** Yeah, that's good.

**Mary-Ann** Do you reckon this summer will see you heading up there or are you planning for a bit further on?

**Cherelle** ASAP! As soon as I'm allowed, I'm getting there.

**Mary-Ann** When you are out with a group of people who don't normally go walking, might not have the kit, might be looking to you for all the advice, is it tricky? Is it scary? Do you feel massive responsibility or does it just work itself out?

**Cherelle** I think firstly, it's to ensure that if you wanted to lead a group, just to ensure that wherever you're going to, that you've been there first. And I always go to wherever I'm taking a group so that I can do a risk assessment or recce the route. Because then I'm confident with leading the group. And that means that before people actually sign up to come to the walks, I can put all that information out - about where we're going, how far the walk is, whether this walk is suitable for beginners or what the difficulty is, whether the walk can be done in trainers. So I think that's really important because it then allows people to make that decision and think, 'Ok, this is a walk that I think I can do' or 'I might wait for another one'. So that's really important.

**Mary-Ann** Have you ever had any moments where people have had a mind blown moment on the trail and just gone, 'Cherelle! This place is amazing!'

**Cherelle** Oh, Malvern Hills definitely. Of the places that we've been so far, of the AONBs, it's probably been the best place with views so far that we've been to. And again, the weather was great. So I think that was a moment for a lot of people. And they got to the highest point, even though it wasn't a mountain, it was more just hills. But that was definitely a moment for people like, 'Wow, this is amazing'. And it's also not far. From Birmingham it's about 45 minutes, from Coventry it's just under an hour. So I think it opens people's minds up to, 'Oh, this isn't too far either. And I got some feedback from that trip. I had three people that came up from London and they actually said that since then they've been out and explored some other places, since that trip. So it's always great to hear those stories after.

**Mary-Ann** Oh, that's so cool. Black Girls Hike have regional groups, don't they? And you're a regional walk leader for Black Girls Hike, is that the same model that you're planning for Steppers?

**Cherelle** Yeah. So at the moment I lead Midlands walks for Black Girls Hike and I'm looking to do a similar kind of model for Steppers as well. Hopefully this year we might have people down south and up north, so spreading out through the UK. I hope that increases. And on the interest that we've had so far, I'm confident that will happen.

**Cress** You work full time, so that makes you a very busy person?!

**Cherelle** Yeah, it's difficult at times, especially because obviously now with Steppers, it's not just getting out and walking. There's lots of organising and the admin and I guess the boring stuff behind the scenes that has to be done. But it's so exciting! I'm just really excited about it. So you don't mind doing the work when it's something that, you know, actually is going to pay off?

**Cress** That's lovely to hear.

**Mary-Ann** I want to come! I want good vibes and good views!

**Cherelle** And don't we need it?! Definitely.

**Mary-Ann** Oh, yeah. You're going to have to teach me about reggae.

**Cherelle** Oh, that's another thing. And do you know what? Sometimes, obviously depending on where we're going, I'll have a little speaker as well. So, yeah, the vibes are definitely always there!

**Cress** And what's next? What does the future look like?

**Cherelle** So we're definitely looking to explore more outdoor activities. And I think that's another key thing. Obviously we're doing lots of walking at the moment. But my idea is for Steppers to be outdoors focused, but not specifically about walking. I'm going to try different activities and upskilling people.

And also I want to tie in back to countries that my parents and grandparents came from and also other people within the group. So how can we connect people within the Caribbean, within India, for example, or those that are newly arrived into the UK and connecting them back with nature? So there's lots of ideas that I've got for that.

**Cress** That sounds really exciting.

**Cherelle** Yeah, I'm really excited about that because I know sometimes, you know, if you've come from a country that is abundant in nature and you come to the UK, you're not familiar with the Lake District or the Peak District. I've got a friend who's from St Lucia and he actually goes to the Lake District all the time because it reminds him of home. And I just think that's so beautiful.

**Mary-Ann** It's making those connections, isn't it? And making those landscapes relevant to people - or helping them see how they can be relevant? Giving them the opportunity, I guess.

**Cherelle** And I think it's that 'Wow' moment as well that really opens it up. I remember having it when I went to the same place I did as a child. And it was that moment of, 'Wow, this is amazing'. I feel like if everyone can have that experience, it just sparks something. Not only walking, but I think spending time in nature can spark an interest into wildlife and science, geography, geology. Now, I can go on a walk and I'll have an interest in a bird. If you'd asked me that two or three years ago, I probably wouldn't have even noticed the birds. So, yeah, it's a great journey.

**Cress** Yeah, that's good. When you do become a mountain leader - and watch this space for that, I'm sure it won't be too long - as you've indicated, there are a number of aspects. It's not just about reading a map, is it?

**Cherelle** Yeah, exactly. There's so many things that it's sparked interest for me. And I just hope that can be shared with other people.

**Mary-Ann** Amazing. Cherelle, you're awesome.

**Cress** So shall we move on to some final quickfire questions?

**Cherelle** Yeah, go on. Let's do it. Hit me.

**Mary-Ann** Cherelle Harding of Steppers UK, describe yourself in three words.

**Cherelle** Adventurous, courageous, fun.

**Cress** Favourite mountain snack?

**Cherelle** Chocolate flapjack

**Mary-Ann** Best mountain memory? Or hill or country park, whatever!

**Cherelle** Cheddar Gorge in Mendip Hills

**Cress** Bucket list destination?

**Cherelle** [Scottish] Highlands!! St. Lucia and Kilimanjaro.

**Mary-Ann** How often do you get lost?

**Cherelle** Most of the time when I'm by myself, deliberately, because I love just exploring new places.

**Cress** Cherelle, are you funny?!

**Cherelle** I think so! What do you think? Am I?!

**Mary-Ann** If you were an animal, what animal would you be?

**Cherelle** A lion

**Cress** One thing you always carry on the hill?

**Cherelle** Food.

**Mary-Ann** What does walking mean to you?

**Cherelle** Walking is freedom.

**Cress** And lastly, we want more of you. Where do we go? Tell us about your social media, website, et cetera.

**Cherelle** If you want to hear more from me and more about Steppers, you can find us on Instagram and Twitter. And that's @Steppers\_UK. We're also on Facebook, which is Steppers UK. And if you're interested in supporting our AONB challenge, we do have a GoFundMe, so you can also search that by just searching Steppers UK and AONB Challenge.

**Cress** Cherelle, thank you so much. It's been great talking to you.

**Cherelle** Thank you so much for having me.

**Mary-Ann** And thank *you* for listening. Let's grow this thing - Subscribe so you don't miss an episode of Finding Our Way. Share the podcast with friends, and let us know what you think. Use @TeamBMC on Instagram and Twitter and #FindingOurWay.

**Cress** See you on the next one!

#### **#Outro music**

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