



Finding Our Way with Dwayne Fields - Young People, Urban Britain and Nature Connection

Full transcript

Mary-Ann Ochota

Hello, I'm Mary-Ann Ochota and welcome to Finding Our Way, the podcast that aims to diversify the voices we normally hear talking about the outdoors. It's brought to you by the British Mountaineering Council, a.k.a. the BMC. In each episode of Finding Our Way, we talk to someone who's usually busy climbing, mountaineering or walking. We want to know what they've learnt from their adventures. We want different perspectives. We want to challenge the norms and we want to celebrate the people who are making real change happen.

So joining us today is a mountaineer, expedition leader, and National Geographic explorer who says he wants to use his adventures to inspire others to explore a life outdoors. He was the first black Briton to walk to the North Pole, is a proud ambassador for the Scouts, and he's one of the stars of the BMC's Respect the Wild campaign showing people some of the things you need to know to Wild Camp responsibly. He's also one half of the leadership team of the We Two Foundation. Together with Phoebe Smith, later this year he'll lead a group of underprivileged young people from diverse backgrounds across the UK on a groundbreaking expedition in Antarctica. Connecting with us from London, welcome. Dwayne Fields! Hello.

Dwayne Fields Hello, Mary-Ann, how are you?

Mary-Ann I'm all right, thank you. I'm very excited to have you on Finding Our Way. We have a lot to talk about, I think Dwayne.

Dwayne Can I just say something?

Mary-Ann Yeah

Dwayne I am so nervous. I'm always nervous when I'm doing podcasts or any kind of interview. I'd rather be up a mountain or in a kayak. It's so much easier.

Mary-Ann Is it partly that 3 minutes of having to listen to someone else describe all your exploits and successes?

Dwayne Yeah, it's partly that, but also it's just, I've never liked the spotlight and I've never liked...I'm such a nervous, shy person that someone asking me about myself makes me think, Oh gosh, I feel awkward.

Mary-Ann Okay, well, let's start there then, because I mean, obviously the point at which you're the first black Briton to walk to the North Pole, you're doing something out of the ordinary. But then to translate that into a career inspiring young people to follow in your footsteps, to be encouraged, guided, inspired, aspire to be like you, that does require a certain degree of self-confidence, doesn't it, to kind of go, 'I have something to give here. I've got something valuable that I want to share'.

Dwayne I think there's like, you're right. Well, I feel like there's almost a divide or a separation. There's Dwayne Fields, this really shy person. And then there's the person who Dwayne Fields aspires to be. And I aspire to inspire people through my actions and through what I've done, what I've experienced, and to share in that. So there's... I think we all have two hats that we wear. Where you've got Beyonce and Sasha Fierce, you've got I don't know who else.

Every time I'm about to walk onto to stage, I take a moment, I take a few breaths, I'm like, 'Right, this is it. You're going into the belly of the beast now'. And for me, it really is the belly of the beast. Any time I'm going to do something that's meant to be scary, whether it's climb a mountain or get into a kayak in the middle of the North Sea or wherever is, yeah, there's some anxiety, but it's not the same.

Mary-Ann Oh, so this is it. Finding Our Way is your most challenging adventure to date! I'm going to take that. I'm going to take that as a compliment in some strange, strange way. Okay. So, Dwayne, tell us, how did you... You're going to have to give us, like, the potted history of Dwayne Fields. How did you get to this position? What ends up in a situation where you are trekking to the North Pole and getting that that world record.

Dwayne So I want you, and anyone listening to this, to just think back to when they were four years old or five years old or six years old. If it's a good memory that they want to recall. And I just want them to think about what they thought of the world at that time. Five, six, seven year old Dwayne Fields thought the world was this amazing place where underneath every rock was a whole new world. And underneath every log and behind every tree, it was magical. We didn't know what to expect. And I was just I was in love with the outdoors. I loved every single aspect of it. I remember being in Jamaica, climbing trees and picking a fruit. That was food. That's what nature was to me. It was I was very much part of it.

Mary-Ann So you grew up as a kid in Jamaica?

Dwayne Yes. So I left Jamaica just before seven. And like I said, I remember just the outdoors being as much a part of my life as most kids' bedrooms are. I was outside more than I was indoors. And that's the honest truth. I was I would sleep inside and that was it. The rest of my time, I was outside, in a tree, in the woods, in the forest, you know, walking in and out the streams in my house, climbing for food, climbing for fun, climbing to challenge myself. And it was the most natural thing to do.

You've seen kids in the playground. If you let them run, they will just play and climb and lift and dig and do. And that was me. And fast forward a little bit now and then I moved to London. So my mum lived in London, my great grandma who raised me from birth until I was almost seven years old. She got really old really quickly and I was sent to live with my mum. And I remember Day 1 actually, the world changed for me the moment I stepped off the plane. I remember looking up in the sky was grey and I was thinking, 'Gosh, it's grey. Okay. That's alright. It'll change soon'. It's just that childlike mentality where you think everyone in the world is exactly where you come from.

And, you know, 3 hours later, we're on our way home and we get to the place that we'll be living at for a little while. And I'm looking up and it's still grey. 'Gosh, when's it going to change?' And the one memory that kind of stands out aside from that one, is the fact that I didn't see any fields or forests on the way home. I don't remember seeing any large clump or wooded areas on the way home. And I remember thinking, 'Gosh, you know, if the whole world is like where I come from - which it must be, because where I come from was the best place in the world - There must be trees somewhere. And there weren't any trees.

And I remember running through the house when I first got to London thinking, 'Right, the trees are going to be in the back'. And I ran through the house and I opened the curtains out the back and

there was a brick wall and a concrete ground floor. And I was like, 'No, this isn't right'. And instantly it was like, 'Gosh'. Childhood depression kicking in.

Mary-Ann Wow. Did your mum have that same experience of dislocation and you know, feeling lost in this grey jungle, concrete jungle? Did you ever talk to her about it? I mean, did she have that same kind of sense of loss?

Dwayne So it's hard to say because my mum was actually born in London.

Mary-Ann Okay. Right.

Dwayne So her first experiences were here in London where on the contrast that to mine, which were Blue Skies, Jamaica, Woodlands, Forest, I was basically a feral child. I'd come home because I knew where my home was. And, you know, if you didn't catch me outside messing around the dogs and the cats and the pigs and whatever else. I'd be I'd be deep in the forest somewhere. So there was no there was no, you know, Dwayne the calm version who sits home and reads or anything like that. It really wasn't my portion. So just going back to your point, yeah, my mum was completely different. She didn't particularly like the rural setting. She preferred the comforts of home or town when she was in Jamaica.

Mary-Ann so that must have been a huge cultural, psychological, emotional shock for you. Not only have you moved home, you've moved country. You're just in a place that doesn't feel right.

Dwayne Nobody says to you, 'Oh, Mary-Ann, you're going to this new country'. As a kid they definitely don't say, 'You're going to this new country. These are the things to look out for'. It's kind of like, 'You're going there and that's it'. And you kind of have to figure it out on your own. And I struggled with a lot. I'm not going to lie. I struggled a lot when I first came to London.

One of the biggest struggles for me was just making friends about kids my age. If you think about the experiences I had and you think about the experiences they had, it was completely different. I was this wild kid that spent 90% of my time outdoors and many of them were kids who knew every TV character they could read and they'd read magazines and they read comic books and they did all these things that... They had toys and and different toys that knew how to play computer games. I didn't even have electricity running in my house in Jamaica, so I didn't know how to have - or even start - a dialogue with these kids. Most of the time you go up to a child in school and say, 'Hey, this TV character is better than that one', or 'Who's your favourite?' And where where did my skillset come into that? It really didn't. I knew how to make toys out of wood and string and make a swing from ropes and make pushcarts and hand-carts. And that was just not a skill, those weren't skills that were exchangeable.

Mary-Ann Is it too strong to say that that's a traumatic experience, that that was a traumatising event in your life?

Dwayne So I think there's stages. I think trauma is on a scale and I think this is definitely on the scale there. This was a memorable experience for all the wrong reasons, is what I'm going to say. I've got some really positive memories in there as well. But for me, a lot of it left me really anxious, especially as a seven, eight, nine year old kid.

I'd walk into the lunch hall, Mary-Ann and I didn't recognise any of the foods. I've never seen a burger before in my life. Do I pick that? Is it ready to eat? Is that how you eat it? Do I need to add something to it? Or take something away? I've never seen, I don't know, baked beans before. There were just things like that that most people transitioning from one culture to another wouldn't really pay attention to. Especially when you're a kid and you don't know that the world is different in other places.

Now, my ignorance wasn't my fault, it was just naivety. But I'd go into the lunch hall and just pick what the kid in front of me picked, or ask my one friend in school who happened to be the same kid that the teacher put me next to and said, 'You show Dwayne the ropes' kind of thing. I would just pick what he picked and hope it was a good choice he's making that day. it made a tough move that much

tougher.

Mary-Ann Do you think if you had opportunity to continue that connection with nature, to have that opportunity to be outdoors, to be in the fresh air, to kind of explore the natural aspects of your surroundings - even if you were in the city - I mean, it's a hypothetical question, of course, but how much of a difference do you think that might have made for you?

Dwayne I'll give you a quick anecdote. I went to scouts and cubs as a kid. I went there purely by accident. My friend, the one same friend that the teacher put me next to, his mum was dropping him off the scouts one day and I happened to be at his house. She said, Look, I'll drop him off, then I'll take you home afterwards. And I show up at Scouts, bear in mind I still have no friends in school. I still don't know how things work properly. I'm still quite new to the UK and the Scout Leader says, 'Do you know what? Come inside, there's no point you waiting around, come inside and take part. And for the first time since arriving in the UK, I remember exactly what we did that day. We were making bridges out of benches and out planks of wood and ropes and I thought, well, actually this is one of my skills. This is something that's transferable. And for the first time, I felt like I had a place within a group. And so to answer your question, if I had more access to the outdoors sooner, would it have made a difference to me? It would have made the transition easier. It would have, I would have dipped my toe into life in the UK without just severing all ties to what I knew or thought I knew about the world from Jamaica. And again, my mum was the kind of mum that didn't necessarily want you playing outside, didn't want you going too far. And that's so abstract when you think about where I was coming from. In Jamaica, everyone's like, 'Get out, get out, get out now. Whereas here it was, 'Stay in the house, go in the back if you want to go anywhere, but stay in the house'. So it was a real shift. But Scouts gave me just that little taste of what I'd left behind. Just a little, I don't know, experience of what I left behind by allowing me just to be myself for an hour and a half. Once a week for. For a couple of months.

Mary-Ann Moving forwards to your adventures now, preparing for the big expeditions that you undertake for for TV and other purposes. How have the UK hills and mountains how have the UK's countryside areas helped you prepare, helped you build that skill set?

Dwayne We are so lucky here in the UK. I can't. I've been to so many countries and I can't think of a country where we have so many woodlands, forest, lowlands, highlands, mountainous areas, in such close proximity to so many people. Most of my training, most of my preparation, where I've built my confidence, where I've built up my strength, my legs and everything else, it's been done here in the UK. It's been done in the mountains, whether it's the mountains in North Wales or Wales generally, because I'm all over the place there. Or the [Scottish] Highlands or the Peaks [District] or wherever it is, I genuinely think I wouldn't be where I am today if I didn't get the opportunity to climb mountains here in the UK.

In fact, my first expedition, if you want to call it that, took place right here in the UK and it was the Three Peaks. So I think, if nothing else, you can say that was either fuel to the fire or that's what reignited my love of the outdoors. We did it to raise money for for a charity in the Midlands somewhere. I can't remember the name of the charity. I know we raised the money. And I know I did it within the 24 hours allowed. I remember it being agonising, bellyaching and cussing and feeling pains and finding new muscles and getting cramps when you're driving from one to the other and being knackered and feeling so fatigued. But I remember I enjoyed every single step of it because it was so far from what I'd become accustomed to and so close to who I am, if that makes any sense.

Mary-Ann Do you think there's something specific, something special about undertaking that kind of personal, physical, psychological challenge in the hills that has some kind of, I don't know, some magic, some transformative power? Because so many people say, 'I did that thing and it changed me'.

Dwayne I love magic, first of all. And I know it sounds really cheesy but I do think there is something in what you just said. And I think it's doing something you didn't necessarily know you could do and the power you receive from achieving it. Where there's doubt previously, and you've done it - you've climbed mountain! - You stood on top of the highest point here in mainland Britain or the highest point

locally. Or even if it's not, you've just done something that you wasn't sure you could do. And now there's no going back. And I think the amount confidence and self-belief you get from that...you couldn't pay for it. You couldn't buy it. And I think that's the magic. If you want to call it magic, call it that. But I think it's just this powerful thing that just, it sparks something inside you, which leads you to question. Well, actually, if I can do that, what else can I do?

Mary-Ann And what about those challenges out in the wild, you know, out on remote, rugged landscapes rather than, I don't know, like a 24-hour rowing machine challenge in the local gym. Is there something sort of existentially different, for you? Because you've seen - not only you've had that experience yourself - but also I'm assuming that you've seen other youngsters come through and have those sorts of experiences.

Dwayne Yeah. So I think what it is we over the last hundred and 50 or so years, we as a species have started to gravitate towards and live in cities. And I think we've almost forgotten that we're part of the landscape, we're part of nature. And I think when you spend any amount of time out there and you know, you're challenging yourself to do something and you overcome that thing or you achieve that thing, it's a reminder that you're part of this massive, bigger machine. You're a tiny part, but you are part of it nonetheless. And I think there's power in that as well. And equally, I think when you're out there, as scary as you thought it would be, when you arrive and you're sat there and it's one o'clock in the morning and all the scary things that happen at night in your mind...don't come to fruition. It's like, 'Well, actually, maybe I was wrong about that. Well, those stars are quite nice. Oh, look at the moon. That looks really nice'. And we start appreciating the beauty because you're now out there, you're not looking at it from the protected space of a room or a computer screen or a book. You are out there, you're in the element, you're in the raw of it. And actually it's not so bad. Yeah, it's raining, but my skin's waterproof. It's cold, but if I move a bit faster I can warm up. And I've got a spare layer in my bag. So all these horrible, scary things and, you know, 'bears are going to get me!' and all these kind of things - my team-mate Phoebe tells it so well, that she had all these images of, you know, murderers and bears and animals that don't even live in our environment, getting when you're out there. And it never happened.

Mary-Ann I had exactly the same experience when I first went wild camping and I told a friend that I was going to go as I'm going to, and she was like, 'Well, where are you going to sleep?' And I had a bivvy bag rather than a tent. And I was like, 'Well, I've got my bivvy bag, so if it rains...' And she's like, 'No, never mind the rain. What about the murderers and the rapists?!' And I was like, right. well, to be fair, a tent isn't going to protect me from someone who really wants to murder me. I just won't see them coming as quickly.' The point then I lived in London. I said, 'the reality is that me walking back from the tube station late at night is the time where I'm far more likely to have some kind of interaction with someone who wishes me ill. When I'm in Dartmoor, unless it's a killer sheep or I fall off something myself or do something really stupid, nothing's going to get me'. And it's funny, isn't it? We're kind of just, it's scary. But I think it is, like you say, those kind of, the monsters under the bed become the monsters out there in the dark. And you want to shut the curtains close and check your iPhone and then watch some Netflix.

Dwayne Like I've been doing this for a while now and nothing bad has happened to me. Touch wood it doesn't. The most has happened is I've had a stumble, scraped a knee, scraped a shin.

All the horrible things that's happened to me in my life have happened to me in inner city areas. I walked to the pole dreading the thought of, what everyone said to me was, 'Oh gosh, you're going to lose bits'. 'You're going to lose, you know, come back less of a man!' And, 'you're going to be eaten by a polar bear'. It's like, okay, I went out there anxious. And by day two, I realised that actually these polar bears aren't generally interested in me. And if they are, you know what? I'm probably a faster runner than my two team-mates!

Mary-Ann So you mentioned just then horrible things happening to you in cities. I've heard of your experiences when you were an older teenager and your early twenties. Just for our listeners who don't know about that aspect of your your story, just tell us what happened. What was that, sort of, defining moment for you?

Dwayne So there's been a couple of moments where it should have been defining, but I think sometimes the camel's back can take more. And there's going to be something that's going to break it but the earlier incidents didn't.

I remember being robbed on my way to school and I'd walk into class and, you know, the teachers say, 'What's wrong with you? Fix your face'. And I just couldn't explain to them that, 'I've just been robbed. My lunch money and bus pass are gone. So I'm going to walk home. And I live in Stoke Newington and my school's all the way in Arnos Grove. So what are you going to do with that, Sir?'.

I have two stab wounds on my body while I was stabbed. I don't carry a knife. I've never carried a knife in, you know, anger or even in self-defence. It's always been as a tool to use when I go out. I've never carried a gun. But the incident that I think you're referring to is the one where I had a gun pulled on me because I did... You know, I kind of blame myself for the incident, and I'll tell you why. I built a moped from absolute scratch. I went to a scrapyard and bought some parts. I went to another scrap yard and dug out parts, spent half a day digging parts out from under, you know, tetanus-covered, rusty metal. And I built this moped from scratch. I spent three and a half months, four months, in the shed during winter building this thing. I test drove it, I turned left, it went right, I fell down the middle. I rebuilt it. I sent my younger brother out this time to test drive it. And some boys in another estate pushed him off the bike and took it. And I remember when he came back, he was so, he was just upset and crying, 'Oh, they pushed me off the bike and took it.

And I was so angry that I did the stupidest thing..I didn't even think, I just marched onto this estate. And you know how everyone knows where stolen goods go in certain areas? I walked exactly to the point where I thought they would be. And sure enough, there were eight or nine boys just tearing this bike apart. And I just saw red and I remember tunnel vision - I just wanted my bike back. I wanted every single part of my bike back. And I remember walking straight through and just grabbing the bike, saying 'I'm taking my bike. It's mine'. And for the most part they said, 'Okay, whatever, take it. We didn't want it anyway'.

And at this point, any sensible person would have turned and left because I've walked onto another estate, I've taken my property back from a group of guys. And I haven't been beaten up or anything. I should have left, but I didn't. I turned around and I saw one guy holding a little panel. I can't even tell you the colour now, I think it was like red or blue. Again, I did the stupidest thing that you could do without thinking. I walked over to him and snatched it out of his hands and said, 'I'm taking that as well'. And I remember, I turned to walk back. Whether it was naive, whether I thought I was lucky enough to get away with it. I don't know what it was, but I wasn't thinking properly. And he pushed me. And again, instantly I turned around. Stupidest thing you can do. I should have just swallowed it, taken the push. I turned around and pushed him back. And I don't know whether it's pride, embarrassment, I showed him up in front of his friends. He walked away and I thought that was the end of it. And I bent down and I was picking up all the bits that they were tearing off this bike. And my younger brother was also picking up bits and pieces.

And I remember this guy walking back up. And as he got closer, he just raised his hand and I just saw this dark coloured gun in his hand. And instantly I stood up and I pushed my brother to the side. And before I could put my hands up...I got my hands up and before I could say, 'You don't have to do this', I literally just heard a click and he cocked the weapon and I saw a bullet come out and he just did it again and I heard a click again. I genuinely thought that click was the sound of a bullet coming at me. And I remember before he could - he was wrestling with it - before he could do it a third time some of the boys that were there kind of just grabbed him and said, you know, 'Go on, it's not worth it. Go away'. And they walked him off.

And at this point, we just got what we could and just left. And I remember stopping a few times on the way home. It was about a ten minute walk. And I just stopped a few times and just patted myself down and lifted my shirt. And I almost felt tension to the point, almost pain, in the places that I thought he was pointing the gun at. it's the weirdest feeling.

I remember getting home and just looking at my phone and seeing a few texts. There wasn't WhatsApp at the time, it was just text messages saying, 'We heard what happened, what are you

going to do?' And I remember this world of pressure felt like it fell on my shoulders, where everyone was expecting me to go and get this guy. And I was happy enough just to be all right. I was happy enough to...I got my bike back. I was okay. And more important, my brother was okay. And I just switched my phone, I switched it off and I stayed home for the next week or so, just over a week. And I didn't do it because I wanted to rest, I did it because I was genuinely afraid that the pressure would make me go out and do something.

And I think that's where that's one of the times in my life where I've looked back and said, 'Gosh, you know, you should've been more confident and just told everyone, 'I don't want to'.' But if I'm honest, I was afraid that the pressure might, I might buckle under the pressure and take the steps that people were suggesting to go and get this guy, or try and get this guy. But it would only have ended in one of three ways: He'd be dead, I'd be in jail; I'd be dead, he'd be in jail; or I'd be on the run. And none of those options are appealing to me. So I, I stayed home and just decided to re-evaluate exactly who I was, what I wanted to do. Well, and in doing that, I decided that, you know, if you're going to be yourself, you're going to have to be your true self. And that's that little six year old kid in a woodland, in a field in Jamaica who loves the outdoors and everything that comes with it.

Mary-Ann So what is the step between sitting at home because you're scared of something terrible happening or another terrible thing happening, and going and being the person to walk to the magnetic North Pole, or now being a National Geographic Explorer? Like what is that next step? So at the end of that week where you're like, 'I'm coming up for air', what did you do? What was that thing you did?

Dwayne I love how you say that because it felt like I was suffocating. In my thoughts, and it felt like I was suffocating in how I was feeling. And the moment I kind of decided, 'Dwayne, just be yourself'. I actually signed up to do a half marathon. I thought, 'Look, just do something'. And I wanted to do something to raise money for charities that were against violence, or for youth projects. And I remember I raised some money for this this group called 'Mothers Against Violence' or 'Mothers Against Guns', and it just felt so good to raise that money for a good cause.

And then a mate of mine, her partner was doing the Three Peaks, and she said, 'Oh, why don't you do it with him?' And I went off and I did it. And it was the most, it was just liberating, just being at the top of the mountain. We started off in Ben Nevis, being at the top of the mountain. It's 10:00 at night. The moon was up, sorry the sun was up. You could still see sunlight, basically. It just felt magical. You use that word early and I liked it. It felt magical. It just felt like something I'd never seen before. I was looking out over it all and, you know, it just felt so right. It felt like I was doing what I was supposed to do.

So from there, it was like, 'What's next?' And I decided to do - so after the Three Peaks I did a few more things. I started spending more time in woodlands, like Hackney Marshes and Epping Forest. I started to volunteer teach, and I thought, 'Well, actually I can do more'. And from there it was like, right. I heard Ben Fogle and James Cracknell speaking about rowing across the Atlantic. And in the next breath, they said they were looking for a third member to join their team to Antarctica.

Now, interestingly. Where the guy pulled the gun on me, 20 metres away from that, a friend of mine was shot and killed. And it happened around the time that Ben Fogle and James Cracknell were talking about going across Antarctica. And I remember thinking, 'I need to do something about this level of violence and I don't want to be shot and I don't want anyone else to be shot and killed'. And I thought I would use that as a way to convey a message saying, 'Look, guys, we are not restricted to this postcode. We are not restricted to 'Stokey'. We're not restricted to Hackney. We're not even restricted to London or the UK. The world is huge'. And I thought by going all the way to Antarctica, I could do that. But I was rejected because by the time I picked up the courage to send an application in, they said, 'Ooh selections have started. It would be unfair to let you in the process now. Would you consider going to the Arctic instead?'

Mary-Ann [Laughs]. As you do!

Dwayne That's how it happened. That's what happened. I literally had an email, looked at the email,

and I did all the research I could on the Arctic, which amounted to about five or 10 minutes on Google. And I decided that, yeah, I'm going to do it because I saw one name, I saw a man's name. His name's Matthew Henson, and I would have actually arrived at the Pole within a week of him doing it 100 years earlier.

Mary-Ann And who is Matthew Henson?

Dwayne So just a quick brief on him. Matthew Henson is an American. He's a black man. And in 1909, he and Robert Peary, Captain Robert Peary, arrived at the magnetic North Pole. There was some controversy about who got there first, but it's now decided, it's now been accepted, that he did arrive there first, based on the logs and based on diary accounts and write ups. He arrived there before Robert Peary. He led the expedition there. And Peary actually failed four times, I think, prior to Matthew Henson coming on. So for me, it was like, 'Wow, this guy's awesome. He's an inspiration to me. I wonder if I can be that to somebody else?'

Mary-Ann What was it like, briefly, trekking to the North Pole? White? Cold?

Dwayne It was cold, it was white. It was barren. It was tough. It was, it was hard. I loved it. I hated every step. I loved my team-mates to bits. I still love them to bits. It taught me a lot about myself. It gave me almost a platform. And it gave me energy, it gave me the energy to step up. And actually, if I can do this, there's other things I can do which may not be as extreme, but I can do them anyway.

Mary-Ann That's cool.

Dwayne Yeah. And also it was like, 'Look, you knew nothing about the Pole before you did this, but you took it on and you did it just through grit and, you know, learning on the job'. And I think sometimes people can be put off thinking they don't have the skills, they don't have the knowledge, they don't have the experience they don't have the equipment and what I'd say is, 'Learn what you can and don't go too hard. Take it in baby steps. I didn't do it and I was lucky enough to achieve my goal. But I'd advise anyone - take it in baby steps.'

Mary-Ann So this leads us to the essence, I think, of why you and Phoebe Smith - for those of you who don't know Phoebe, she's a travel writer, she's a wild camping enthusiast, she's author of Extreme Sleeps, where she slept in all sorts of remote and rugged places

You two got together to kind of address this issue of diversity and people feeling like they have access or permission to be in the outdoors, would you say?

Dwayne Absolutely.

Mary-Ann And you know, neither of you were represented by mainstream adventure. Explain that to me more.

Dwayne Out of hundred people, roughly 26 or so will be women and possibly two may be from an ethnic minority community. of 100 people in the world of adventure. There are stats that are very similar. But the one that I remember now is purely it's just purely anecdotal.

Mary-Ann So 26% women, 2% people who aren't white.

Dwayne Who are non-white, and the other 72 or 73% or so will be majority white, middle-aged, middle-class male. Now, there is nothing wrong with every single middle class, middle aged, white male going out into the outdoors whatsoever. In fact, many of my friends in the outdoors are white, middle class, middle aged white men. The trouble is, there are so many people who feel underrepresented and those statistics speak for themselves.

The truth is, I'd hear things. I'd go and do a talk to people, you know, and people would come up and say, 'Well, actually, women have it hard as well in the outdoors'. And I thought, 'Well, actually, you're right'. And Phoebe would go to a talk and she'd hear, 'Well, what about people from ethnic minority

communities?' So we thought, well, let's just address both of those things in one go by standing side by side on the same stage and saying, 'This was my experience and this is what I think'. And she would do the same.

But equally, we both reached a point where we heard certain things said to us, like, 'Shouldn't you just accept what you've achieved so far and call it a day?' And these are words that I'm speaking from hearing people say this to us. We were both sat at the same table when those words were said to us, 'Shouldn't you both just accept what you've done, based on where you're coming from and just call it a day?'

Mary-Ann As in, 'You've made some strides, you've inspired a few people, but you haven't achieved equity, but, you know, shut up and get back in your place?'

Dwayne Exactly.

Mary-Ann That's insane!

Dwayne We sat there. And in fact, Phoebe came off a flight to make that meeting. She'd come off a flight, came to the meeting and then gone home. And I called her the next day, no, I messaged her the next morning said, 'Are you okay? That was a bit out of order. I'm sorry you had to hear that'. And she's like, 'No, really, I was a bit jetlagged and I wasn't sure I heard it. But that's out of order'. And I said, 'Well, I've heard it before. I've never been in a room where somebody else beside me had to hear the same thing'.

And we realised that for different reasons, we'd come to a point in our careers where we were being told to accept where you are by some people. Others were fully behind us. And we thought, 'Well, sod that, we're going to, we're going to push through that and, you know, go as far as we can and inspire as many people as we can and make a difference as well'.

Because the outdoors...We're in this place at the moment when it comes to environmental challenges, where we can't rely on one particular type of person to offset the carbon produced by everybody. And unless we get everybody, or as many people as possible, to get outdoors and spend as much time outdoors as possible, they will feel that they're not connected to it. They'll feel like it's not their problem. They're not benefiting from it. 'I don't know what the outdoors is. It's over there. It's Over There's problem'. So we decided that the best way to solve this is get as many people behind outdoor initiatives as possible. And by doing so, they will love it. I don't know a single person that's been outside and thought, 'Oh, I hate, I'll never go back'. So they will love it and they'll work to protect it. So in a way, in a full circle, by doing this, I'm securing the outdoors for me when I'm eighty years old.

Mary-Ann Nice. Obviously, you are a very selfish person. That has come across very strongly. Yes.

Dwayne Guilty.

Mary-Ann But I think you're right, isn't it? Because you can't really care about something you don't understand?

Dwayne Yes, that's true. We when we spoke to young people and we were saying, look, we're going on this massive expedition, we're going to take a group. When we spoke to young people separately, they'd say things like, Yeah, but is it even a problem? What if some of the ice melts? Where is Antarctica? Why should I care? What does it mean? It doesn't make a difference to me. What's two degrees? And that's the problem. It's this faraway place that they only hear about on the news or read about in a magazine.

And by bringing it home, by bringing someone from these communities to Antarctica, it becomes a real thing that Jane or Julie or John or whoever down the road went there and they said, 'This is what they saw and experienced'. And we think that people will respond better to their peers than to my voice or someone else's voice on a TV saying, 'This is why we should care'.

Mary-Ann Okay, so what is it that you're doing? What is this expedition that the We Two Foundation are undertaking?

Dwayne So the Foundation, Phoebe and myself, are taking ten lucky young people from across the United Kingdom. We travelled from as far as Northern Ireland to northern Scotland, way up in the north, all the way to the tip of Devon and wherever else, to find the ten lucky young people from deprived backgrounds.

Now, what does a deprived background look like? If you have to worry about where your next meal is coming from, you're deprived. If you're worried about going out into the streets and being stabbed or killed, or you're worried about the fact that you have no shoes to wear to school, or you're worried about the meal you're going to eat at school, you don't have the energy because you haven't eaten enough. You're deprived. If you're coming from an area where crime is high and support is low, you're potentially deprived.

So we're looking for young people, it doesn't matter what colour, class, creed, religion, background they are, if you're from one of these poorer areas, you're someone we're looking for. We're going to take you on a once-in-a-lifetime expedition. Well, hopefully it won't be once in a lifetime, but maybe once in a lifetime expedition of its kind, because it's the first ever carbon negative expedition of its kind all the way from here to Antarctica on an expedition cruise ship where we're going to be doing real life citizen science, which is going to make a real difference.

They're going to be doing things like phytoplankton samples, bird observation, whale observations, taking samples from the ground itself when Antarctica, when they land. These young people get to set foot in Antarctica. And if you if you think, wow, that's amazing. Well, these young people would never have even thought about going on holiday, let alone going on a, you know, once in a lifetime two week work venture to Antarctica.

And they're going to feed that back to their communities as well. They have to do a project here in the UK, before going. So we've got young people creating, building, making seed bombs and rewilding areas of riverbanks. We've got young people reducing food miles by getting their schools to grow all the plants they eat, plant food they eat. We've got young people trying to get their schools green flag rated, green flag status. So, you know, all these kind of things to offset the carbon because this is going to be a carbon negative expedition. We're planting a We Two forest. Just to give you an idea of what we're doing to offset the carbon that we create throughout our lives.

Mary-Ann That's very cool. Now, I don't know if this is a fair question - is it even a question? - But have some people said, Well, the best way to offset the carbon is to not go to Antarctica in the first place?'

Dwayne That's a good that's a good point. The best way to offset the carbon is actually not to turn on anything in your house and live like we did 100 years ago. In truth, people will create carbon. There's just no way around it. This ship is going to Antarctica with or without us. So why not make it benefit us, our communities, our young people here in Britain and the world?

Because we're going to be doing talks from the expedition cruise ship to communities around the world and connecting people. So why not make the most of it that we can while we can?

Mary-Ann Yes. And I guess you plant a seed with that one youngster who's on the expedition. But from that, they have a network of influence with their peers, they have the opportunity to to shape a different future for themselves and for their communities, I guess.

Dwayne Well, yeah. I love the 'plant a seed' thing because our motto is 'We're planting seeds, not flags'. And that's the seed of an idea. So figuratively and literally. We had 700 young people nominated for this expedition up and down this country. Many of them have already done projects within their communities just because of the idea of Team We Two doing an expedition like this, and to give themselves a better chance on the next one that we do. Now, you think about this: Many of

these young people will be overlooked for jobs or they don't have the confidence to even go for certain jobs or they don't believe in themselves, they don't have the self-confidence to aim higher.

Going on an expedition like this means they'll have a feather in their cap that they can always say, 'Well, actually, I went to Antarctica. This is what I saw. This is what I did there. Here's the research I was part of.' And they can carry that everywhere with them for the rest of their lives. Imagine them walking into an interview and saying, 'Well, I've never worked before. I don't come from a wealthy area. My parents, you know, I'm a single parent household. I was very poor as a kid. But here's what I've done. This is the time where I worked as part of a team, has a time where I stepped outside my comfort zone'. It will answer all those questions for them.

Mary-Ann What have you learnt from working with the Scouts, working with the youngsters on this expedition? What are the things that make the biggest difference in terms of supporting youngsters as they're taking on those challenges?

Dwayne I've learnt the lesson I've learnt and it was reinforced yesterday. This is a lesson. Don't underestimate a young person. If you give them a chance, they will impress you. And you know, there's always going to be that old one person that says, 'Well, I gave a young person a chance. They let me down'. Well, you can't legislate for every single thing that might go wrong, but give them as many chances as you can and they will impress you.

Yesterday I spent the day out in the south east and I was with a group at the Agoonoree camp, which is a scout camp for scouts with special needs. And the things that the scouts were doing, they had a variety of needs. Some of them were nonverbal, some of them had mobility issues. And you give them a paddle and they will paddle. You give them an opportunity and they will take it and have fun and learn and share what they've learnt as well. And they will grow in confidence and in personality and that's when you see someone really come alive when you've given them a chance to be themselves.

Mary-Ann Dwayne, you, I think, have the authenticity of being able to speak to youngsters from urban backgrounds, from impoverished backgrounds and saying, 'I know how it is for you because it was the same for me'. How do leaders in the outdoors who are from those probably white, probably middle class backgrounds who haven't had to worry about the pair of shoes, haven't had to worry about the next meal, or haven't had to worry about whether the waterproof jacket is Gore-Tex or not, or whether this year they're going skiing in Chamonix or somewhere else...How do those people do their bit in terms of diversifying the outdoors, addressing those equity imbalances? Because I've had conversations with people where they've said, 'I just don't know what to do. I want to be an ally, I want to be part of the solution. But if I walk into a youth group or I walk into a school or do some kind of outreach, they're just going to look at me and go, 'Who are you?'

Dwayne Yes. So I think it's something I understand a lot because I've had a lot of people tell me this. A few years ago when I did my Mountain Leader qualification, it was the exact same thing we were speaking about. How do you reach these people? And I'd say this Just keep putting the message out there and just keep welcoming people and offering people in. And if you do go to a local school, go to a local school. Don't be afraid to ask questions. And one of the things that I'm conscious of at the moment is that many of my friends, especially white friends, are very cautious about asking certain questions.

Now, I believe there should be a safe space where if you come into an issue or a challenge with an intention to learn or to improve that situation, you shouldn't be afraid and you shouldn't be berated for asking a difficult question or awkward question or asking a question in an awkward way. If you don't know, you don't know. So I'd say this reach out to organisations that are doing it anyway. Reach out. If you see someone on Instagram or social media that's doing it. Start a dialogue.

Mary-Ann And do you have advice for people who are apprehensive about being in the minority in the outdoors?

Dwayne So, I mean, I've been doing this. I've been spending time in the outdoors for years now, and

I've had at most, you know, a couple of odd looks from a couple of prats. But the vast majority, and I'm saying this for anybody who is coming from a non-white, non middle class, non-middle age background. And I keep saying those three things because that's the best way I know to describe it, but please, if you are in that class, don't be offended. I'm not out to offend anyone.

But if you're outside of that group, go into the outdoors. Go and spend time on the moors. Go into the hills. 99.99% of the people you come across to give you a friendly smile, and a wave. So don't be afraid. Don't be apprehensive. The wildlife aren't going to take you down. If you can survive in urban Britain - inner city Birmingham, Manchester, London, whatever else. If you can survive in these built up areas, you can survive in the outdoors. Just bring a warm hoody and a waterproof. It doesn't have to be Gore-Tex. Just go out there and try it. I promise you, you will love it.

And if you are worried, there are tons of Mountain Leaders out there who are itching to take you or a group out for a day out. They've got lots of knowledge to share. They've got the experience and they'll keep you safe. So just go out there. Perfect thing to do is check on the BMC website. There are tons of mountain leaders out there who are just itching to take you out and it doesn't matter what your background is. I know so many of them and they are the nicest people you will ever come across.

Mary-Ann Awesome. Good plug for the BMC there, much appreciated. Okay, Dwayne, we're running out of time. But the last thing that I want to talk to you about is the Respect the Wild campaign. So this was launched last summer - I'm talking about Don't Trash Your Room, how to wild camp respectfully and responsibly, how to poo like a pro, how to do good Van Camping etiquette.

Every season it looks like more people are getting outdoors. There's more pressure, particularly on those honeypot areas in the National Parks. There is concern, isn't there, that these basically like fragile upland places and small rural communities are getting hammered. There's bad behaviour, there's littering, there's fly camping. There's people using disposable barbecues and setting fire to hillsides. How do we get those important messages to the people who need to hear them in a way that isn't preachy, in a way that empowers folk, in a way that doesn't make them feel like they're just being told not to come to the countryside, or that if they do, they're doing it wrong?

Dwayne We all love a three word slogan. I think my favourite go-to three word slogan is Leave No Trace. And if we can get more people like you, more people like -Phoebe's awesome, she's got a massive following - if we can get just more people sharing that message. Because I think most young people now, there's a stat that came out recently, most young people now get their news and their information online. Most people get their information from their devices now, whether it's online or through their smart TVs, whatever else. Just keep hammering that message home. I think if you start preaching to people, you either put them off or frustrate them into doing it anyway. I think if we just keep doing what we do best, which is showing them how to do it and talking about it and telling people how great it is and how best to protect it, we'll get more and more people picking up that message and we get more and more people coming out here and doing it responsibly. We just have to keep protecting these spaces, these 14 national parks, until they do until we do get everyone on board.

Mary-Ann I sometimes worry that some of the hysteria, shall we say, was unfairly focussed on 'These newcomers! These townies who just don't know'. And I worried that it became possibly a little bit racist, possibly a little bit classist, and it was definitely a sort of act of gatekeeping saying, 'Well, we Outdoors People already know how to do these things. And so we're not the problem. It's all these new people who've discovered the countryside but are doing it inappropriately'. And I thought, 'Oh, this is, we need to be quite careful about what it is that we're actually saying and what kind of prejudices are being brought into the conversation, either intentionally or unintentionally'.

Dwayne Yeah, you're right. So I obviously follow lots of different groups and social media, and I pick up a lot of things and I don't always comment, but I remember reading, Oh, I think it was a Muslim group and there were people shouting about the rubbish left behind. I thought to myself, 'Every time there's a big group of people, there's going to be litter left behind' I understand that every single group, every time you have a large party of people, a large gathering of people, there's going to be

litter blown away. And all we can do is just keep trying to educate everyone, just like say, 'Look, guys, we're all out here for the exact same reason because we want freedom and we want some space. We want to be in a natural environment. And if I knew better, I would do better. So why don't you just tell me what I need to do and I'll do it? Or why don't you show me so I'm educated for the next time? I think one of the things I do every single time I go out is I guarantee you I'll come back with a pocket full of rubbish. I don't see who drops it, I don't care who drops it, I just wish they wouldn't. But I know if we educated those people to the point where they saw the result of littering, they wouldn't do it. So I'm all for just educating everyone and anyone. If you know not to do it, it's your responsibility to educate somebody else, even if it's just one person. So don't get upset if you see rubbish dropped and you haven't done anything to try and prevent it.

Mary-Ann Ah. There you go. And I guess actually it's a really positive, quite affirmative thing to demonstrate, if you're the one picking up the piece of litter and pocketing it, someone else will spot you doing that and go, 'Oh actually, that's part of the behaviour I need to practise when I'm out here'. And then we're all litter pickers are not litter droppers.

Dwayne Excellent. Excellent point.

Mary-Ann Love it. Come on, The Litter Pickers! All right. Okay. Dwayne, what is next for you? I know you've got a big TV show in the pipeline? You've got this big Antarctica expedition? Give us some dates, give us some things to look out for.

Dwayne So one of the great things is I'm literally in the middle of shooting in a series for Nat Geo. It's called Seven Toughest Days, and it does exactly what it says on the tin. I take the few skills that I have and I go to some of the toughest environments on the planet at the toughest times of year. And I try and apply the skills I have to get into a particular location or exiting these environments and just taking people on a journey through it. And it's a very personal journey, but an adventurous one. My focus for the next couple of months is that alongside November, when I take the young people to Antarctica, which is going to be awesome. I've met them, Phoebe and I have met them, we've spoken to them, we know how enthused they are. How excited they are. Our partners, Hurtigruten, BA [British Airways], Craghoppers, Scouts, the Vasey Family Trust, all these really cool guys. They're right behind us because they can see the good that it's doing. And we're now, we're actually in talks of planning the next one.

Mary-Ann Wow, that's cool. So if you know a young person, or you are a young person, who might be a good candidate for a We Two Expedition, then do they keep an eye on the website? Links will be in the show notes.

Dwayne Yeah, absolutely. So watch our socials. It's just Team We Two and the website is teamWeTwo.com. So check it out below us, see what we're doing and we will let you know when you can start nominating or self-nominating.

Mary-Ann Exciting. All right. This is very exciting. Obviously, Finding Our Way has been your biggest adventure to date, this is how we started. This is the final hurdle. These are the final hundred yards to the summit before, you know, summit selfies and sandwiches. We've got our quickfire questions. Ten questions we ask all our guests on Finding Our Way. Dwayne Fields, are you ready?

Dwayne I'm ready.

Mary-Ann Describe yourself in three words.

Dwayne Adventurous, a bit silly and inquisitive.

Mary-Ann Favourite mountain or expedition snack?

Dwayne Ah! Frozen ketchup.

Mary-Ann Frozen ketchup?!

Dwayne No. It was a packet of ketchup I found in my pocket in the Arctic. That was the best meal ever.

Mary-Ann Okay. Best expedition memory.

Dwayne Making a young kid from Stokie, where I grew up, cry at the base of Ben Nevis.

Mary-Ann Bucket list destination.

Dwayne Oh, gosh, Everywhere on the planet! Gobi Desert.

Mary-Ann How often do you get lost?

Dwayne As often as I can.

Mary-Ann Your dream expedition or walking partner.

Dwayne My great grandma, who - she isn't here - but if she could be my expedition partner, I'd love it. My great grandma.

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

Dwayne I would be a peregrine falcon. That's my favourite bird.

Mary-Ann Oh, nice. One thing that you always carry with you on an expedition. Or a day in the hills.

Dwayne A small knife.

Mary-Ann That's very Scouts! Very Baden-Powell.

Dwayne It is, i know, but I can't think of anything else that I normally carry! .

Mary-Ann What does mountaineering and adventuring mean to you?

Dwayne It means everything to me. It means I get to feel free. It brings me back to my youth, where I was happiest. It means I feel like I can...it gives me something that I feel I can share with others.

Mary-Ann And lastly, we want more of you. Where do we go?

Dwayne @DwayneFields on all the socials.

Mary-Ann Boom! There we go. Thank you so much, Dwayne.

And because of the passage of time, Dwayne is actually heading out on expedition with Phoebe Smith next week! So follow their progress live at teamwetwo.com and on instagram @teamwetwo.

Well, I hope you enjoyed this episode. If you did, why not check out last week's ep with Ed Jackson and Leo Houlding. Let us know what you think. Use @TeamBMC on Instagram and Twitter and the hashtag. #FindingOurWay. I will see you next week.

Finding Our Way is brought to you by the British Mountaineering Council and is kindly supported by Berghaus. This episode was hosted and recorded by me Mary-Ann Ochota, edited by Chris Stone, and show notes and transcript were produced by Tom Bennett.