

You'll Never Walk Alone - Hiking communities across the UK receive mental health first aid training amid mental health crisis

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The Hike Society (<https://www.columbiasportswear.co.uk/l/hike-society>) by Columbia, an outdoor movement created to unite the next generation of hikers and outdoorspeople, is providing mental first aid training for hiking communities across the UK.

Over 20 community leaders from young, diverse outdoors communities are receiving training as a means to join the dots between the power of community, nature and mental health, ahead The Hike Society's Annual General Hike, a mass participation hiking event that mobilises influential outdoor communities across the UK over the weekend of 29-30 April.

The initiative aims to equip hiking groups with the tools and confidence to deal with mental health illnesses amongst its community, encourage early intervention and raise awareness of mental health. Through the project, safe spaces will be created via "walk and talk" hikes that facilitate conversation and the sharing of mental health experiences in a supportive environment.

The initiative comes amidst a mental health crisis in the UK. Recent research from Mind, the mental health charity, revealed almost 20 million adults never speak about mental health despite one in four (<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/adult-psychiatric-morbidity>) people experiencing a mental health problem of some kind each year and one in six (<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20180328140249/http://digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB21748>) report experiencing a common mental health problem, such as anxiety and depression, in any given week.

The Annual General Hike is on a mission to play its part in reversing the tide by connecting people to nature and the outdoors. Studies (<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/nature-how-connecting-nature-benefits-our-mental-health#:~:text=Nature>) shows that people who are more connected with nature and the outdoors are usually happier in life and more likely to report feeling their lives are worthwhile. Nature can generate many positive emotions, such as calmness, joy, and creativity and can facilitate concentration – and this connectedness is also associated with lower levels of poor mental health, particularly lower depression and anxiety.

Liam Furneux, co-founder of the outdoor community Advanced Rock (<https://www.instagram.com/advanced.rock/>), which is participating in the Annual General Hike, understands this from first-hand experience, "For the last 10 years I've had pretty heavy social and general anxiety - mostly in social situations or times when I feel like I can't escape from a situation if I start feeling anxious.

"The outdoors has helped so many times to process my thoughts and clear my head. I find when I'm rock climbing, running, hiking or cycling amongst nature my head feels clear without any anxious thoughts."

Eoin Treacy, marketing manager at Columbia said: "Through the power of community and the benefits of the natural environment we're aiming to facilitate important conversations around mental health. We hope

that the mental health first aid training and Annual General Hike's walk and talk initiative will lead to many positive outcomes that the communities really benefit from.”

There are 20 hiking communities expected to take to the hills, fells and coastlines, as part of the Annual General Hike by Columbia, with over 500 hikers expected to be in attendance. The event is free and tickets are available through The Hike Society hub (<https://www.columbiasportswear.co.uk/l/hike-society>).

COLUMBIA ANNUAL GENERAL HIKE GROUP ROSTER

- Each group is available for interview/experiential activity
- Written Q&A's available on request
- Imagery and video content available

Gorp Girls (<https://www.instagram.com/gorpgirls/>)

Gorp Girls, commandeered by Hannah Da Silva - a fashion college graduate and creative - has its sights set on encouraging women to experience the outdoors in a comfortable and safe environment.

As outdoor communities and platforms continue to pop up and flourish, it's important to ensure there is equal representation for all genders and ethnicities and not just those who have traditionally dominated the space. As a young woman consuming media in this space, Da Silva explains 'I noticed that there were not a lot of women showcasing the outdoors community', which isn't to say that women weren't partaking in outdoor activities, it was just grossly underrepresented at the time but the tide is starting to turn for the better.

Set up as an Instagram page, the platform sought to combine outdoor content with 'Gorpcore' style, a function-forward fashion trend recognised for its appropriation of technical silhouettes, fabrics and details. Beyond superficial clothing, Gorp Girls seeks to champion women in the outdoors by hosting activations such as community walks, climbing workshops and product field testing.

Common Ground (<https://www.instagram.com/cmn.ground/>)

Common Ground was established in January 2022 by a group of strangers dotted around the Midlands and Northern England. What started as an Instagram group chat and Discord channel off the back of an L.Holl post, has blossomed into a rising collective of like-minded individuals who are focused on bringing people together from all backgrounds with a shared interest in not just the outdoors, but cooking, nature, cars and photography. In a day and age where subcultures and online communes are becoming increasingly splintered, Common Ground does wonders in capturing the current attitudes towards escapism in an increasingly busy world.

During talks with members of Common Ground, they cite that two of their primary reasons for hosting both the community walks and their collective purpose for getting outside is to explore new areas and to improve their mental well-being. Rightfully so, mental health has become a prominent talking point throughout the media and society in general with countless outlets and individuals pointing to physical

activity as a tool to improve headspace.

All Terrain (<https://www.instagram.com/allterrain95/?hl=en>)

All Terrain 95 is a 10,000-person-strong outdoor community on Instagram that was started in 2020 by 22-year old, Kian Patel, as a means for him and his friends to escape the mundanity of lockdown life whilst discovering new places within reach of their homes. To be specific, the idea to start the page was conceived during a descent of Scafell Pike when the conversation came up surrounding outdoor-focused pages such as Advanced Rock and L.Holl that were sources of inspiration to Kian. From there, All Terrain 95 was set up with similar ambitions and to act as a place where fashion and outdoor content can seamlessly sit side-by-side.

In the time since, AT95 has become a growing platform dedicated to supplying outdoors, apparel, footwear and photography-related content to its yearning audience of similarly aged people. Despite not boasting a following of hundreds of thousands, its audience is highly engaged with the breadth of content which has in turn welcomed collaborations from the likes of Columbia.

Advanced Rock (<https://www.instagram.com/advanced.rock/>)

Having always been fascinated by the outdoors and all of the gear involved photographer Liam Furneaux would regularly post about this topic when he noticed the content start gain some exciting traction. From here Advanced Rock was born.

Focused on showcasing the best product in the market the outdoors has become much more than a testing ground for Furneaux. Having suffered heavy social and general anxiety for the last 10 years the outdoors has helped him numerous times to focus his thoughts and clear his head. His outdoor community is extremely understanding of his mental health and a huge support allowing him to open up and talk about his feelings.

For more information, please contact Brandnation at stephen@brandnation.co.uk

About Columbia

Columbia, the flagship brand of Portland, Oregon-based Columbia Sportswear Company, has been creating innovative apparel, footwear, accessories, and equipment for outdoor enthusiasts since 1938. Columbia has become a leading global brand by channeling the company's passion for the outdoors and innovative spirit into technologies and performance products that keep people warm, dry, cool, and protected year-round. To learn more, please visit the company's website at www.columbiasportswear.co.uk (<https://www.columbiasportswear.co.uk>)