

Born to Walk



The Transformative Power
of a Pedestrian Act

Dan Rubinstein

Born to Walk: The Transformative Power of a Pedestrian Act

Dan Rubinstein, Kevin Patterson (Foreword)

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The case for getting back on our feet

The humble act of putting one foot in front of the other transcends age, geography, culture, and class, and is one of the most economical and environmentally responsible modes of transit. Yet with our modern fixation on speed, this healthy pedestrian activity has been largely left behind.

At a personal and professional crossroads, writer, editor, and obsessive walker Dan Rubinstein travelled throughout the U.S., U.K., and Canada to walk with people who saw the act not only as a form of transportation and recreation, but also as a path to a better world. There are no magic-bullet solutions to modern epidemics like obesity, anxiety, alienation, and climate change. But what if there is a simple way to take a step in the right direction? Combining fascinating reportage, eye-opening research, and Rubinstein's own discoveries, *Born to Walk* explores how far this ancient habit can take us, how much repair is within range, and guarantees that you'll never again take walking for granted.

Born to Walk: The Transformative Power of a Pedestrian Act Details

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Cate says

3.5 stars, really. I've been so obsessed lately with walkability, walkscores, urban walkability, walking for health, step counting as a measure of health... This book focused a good bit on walking as it relates to class, which is something others seem to gloss over especially since we millennials are starting to demand walkability and better/more easily accessed public transportation.

Brian Gilchrist says

I like this book. I've been thinking more and more about simplifying, being more intentional, less rushed, more thoughtful. This book fits well into the genre and gives a lot of food for thought.

Paula says

-a few spelling mistakes (Botanic instead of Botanic)
-although segments are linked by topic, sometimes they jump dramatically in regard to subject

Christie Bane says

This book took almost three months to read NOT because it was slow (although it was, a little) but because it was my read-out-loud-in-the-car-to-my-boyfriend book, and we didn't take a trip of any length together between August and now.

Anyway! He loves to walk (thru-hiked the AT) and I enjoy it slightly less, but still walk 8-10 miles in an average day for my job. So we both know something about walking. I was expecting a more interesting book. There are two types of writing in the book: stories about other people who are into walking, and statistics about walking as it relates to health, the environment, urban development, and probably other things I have forgotten. The first type is way, way more interesting, though still not nearly as interesting as, say, Bill Bryson. (I have read two books by Bill Bryson that were mostly about walking and that were more interesting than this one: A Walk in the Woods, about the AT, and that one about Little Dribbling, about England. Okay, that book was not only about walking, but a lot of it was about walking. I have to say, I wish this author had taken more of a Bill Bryson approach to walking and less of an academic/scholarly one.)

Basically, walking is good for people and good for communities, and I just said in one sentence what it took the book 250 pages to say. No, not really; the book is not bad, except for the fact that the author never uses a short word when a long, fancy word is available. I mean never, in 250 pages. My favorite chapter was the one where he and his daughter got hit by a car. (They were fine.) My least favorite was the one about creativity, which described lots of things that I would not consider art, not that anyone asked me.

Do I have anything more to say about this book? No, I don't think I do. Oh yes, one more thing. THERE WERE ERRORS. I mean, little tiny errors, like with missing words or extra words that, dammit, an editor should have caught. There were probably 8-10 throughout the book, and every one was an interruption, because I had to point it out to my boyfriend. There is no excuse for that in a book that has supposedly been edited. I can't quite bring myself to drop it one whole star for that, but MAN was it annoying.

Matthew says

Audiobook wasn't as gripping as I had hoped. I don't know that I could advise the author, but the shift between sections didn't really grab me and hold me. I listened to the audiobook. It was good enough to stay with and finish, and it does motivate an ordinary soul to take to the byways by foot.

SR says

An excellent and concise summary of many sources of literature, scholarship and film centered around walking, with a focus on the spiritual goals of individual pedestrians. For anyone who enjoyed Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust* or the movie *The Way* with Martin Sheen, this book will provide additional context and background, interspersed with personal narratives.

Jay says

The author mentions in this book using Google to look things up. As I read through this book of walking and noticed the sections, including sections on the physical and mental benefits of walking, cops walking a beat, walking (more marching) in protest, and more, I found myself wondering if the author had just googled the term "walking" and categorized the results, writing parts of the book based on how popular the categories were. This is a broad overview of the term "walking", and the sections do not congeal. Perhaps "walking" is too loose a connection between these topics. I think a focus on walking as a method of civic transformation, like the subtitle hints at, would have been enough of a topic to make a fine book. This just reached a bit too far. I enjoyed the voice of the author, and would consider reading more of his work.

I listened to this in the Booktrack audio edition. In this version, the book narration was accompanied by light background music and occasional appropriate sound effects. For instance, when quoting cops walking a beat, car horns and other city traffic noises were mixed in. I had mixed feelings about this experience. I actually enjoyed the sound effects and most music. I felt it raised the feel of the performance to be similar to listening to a well done NPR radio story. However, I noticed a few times while listening in the car that the choice of music unexpectedly was more of a repetitive industrial noise than music, and more than once I thought I had brake problems, or was dragging a metallic object, because of that noise. I recommend the Booktrack folks consider where their listeners tend to be when listening, and try not to send the wrong message with their additions to the monologue. Safety first.

Brad says

I really enjoyed the first couple chapters. But then it turned into a bit of a grab bag of anecdotes -- definitely lots of great and interesting ideas, though. I'd recommend if you love walking/hiking.

Mia says

A wide-ranging look at many of the benefits of walking: health, social, environmental, etc. Rubinstein presents an interesting mix of science, personal experience and observation regarding the diminished role of walking in most of our lives and the improvements that follow from walking more.

On a personal note, witnessing the many-blocks-long line of cars outside our local elementary school at dismissal time each day, I had to wonder why no such line existed when I was in school. I live now, as I did then, in a stereotypically safe middle-class suburban neighborhood. I walked home from school as a kindergartener (.6 of a mile, thank you Google Maps!). I now live .7 mile from the elementary and zero children walk past my house when school gets out. Trader Joe's is .6 miles from my house, and one doesn't need to cross a single busy street to get there. Yet when I mention walking there or having my kids walk there, I'm met with astonishment.

Rubinstein dissects not only the health changes that result from all those schoolkids being driven back and forth to school, but the changes to the social fabric.

Jason Scott says

Audiobook. Good narration. I got an extra kick out of finding out the author is also from Ottawa. It was a great book to listen to while hiking through snowy Gatineaus or trying to make a trail through ice covered streets in my neighbourhood.

I especially liked the chapters about forest bathing (so that's why I always gravitate to woods) and I felt the end of the book was the kick in the ass I needed to try and get my kids walking to school at least one day a week.

It was -25C in Ottawa when I started listening to this book and it got me motivated to brave the weather and restart a habit I'd let fall to the wayside while recovering from surgery.

Jiny S says

If you enjoy walking, you'll probably enjoy this book.

For me, I like the idea of walking, but only for its pragmatic applications. I would much prefer a physical activity that would spike my adrenaline.

Sometimes we read books that confirms our beliefs so we can feel good about doing the things we already

do. I agree wholeheartedly with the author about the benefits of walking, and also concur that a more ambulatory infrastructure would benefit society as a whole.

This book felt like one big long walk. The author takes the readers with him on a walking journey, while talking about the various healthful benefits of bipedalism (a fancy sesquipedalianism for walking). This book is just the right combination of personal backstory, medical research, and theory.

At times I felt the story is a little dry, and the underlining message a bit repetitive. There are no surprises. Although I liked it, I had to struggle a bit to finish.

Maybe it would be a good idea to take the audio version of this book on a hike- listening to stories about walking and thinking about its benefits while taking a walk.

Paulcbry says

The author makes the case for walking proclaiming *sitting is the new smoking* . It does get a bit dry in parts especially when reporting on statistics. But overall the author makes a strong case for getting ambulatory. But I suspect that for those who take the time to read this book, he is preaching to the choir.

Kandise says

A dense read that doesn't invite binging, it's also really interesting and thorough. Nice change to have this kind of work written though a Canadian lens with many Canadian stories, as well as a greater worldview.

One of the best things I've ever done in my life is take up a regular walk, and this book really enumerates all the benefits of that choice.

Jason Crane says

Thoroughly enjoyable, and an excellent companion to Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust*. Where *Wanderlust* focuses on the historical and philosophical aspects of walking, *Born To Walk* looks at the social, physical and psychological impacts.

Jordana says

Braden Wright did a great job narrating (though there were a number of unnecessary and distracting accents inserted). A great reminder of the importance of walking!
