

HIKING

A stroll in the country – that’s all hiking is, right? Beauty writer **Jessica Tibbits** discovers a workout that might even boost your social life

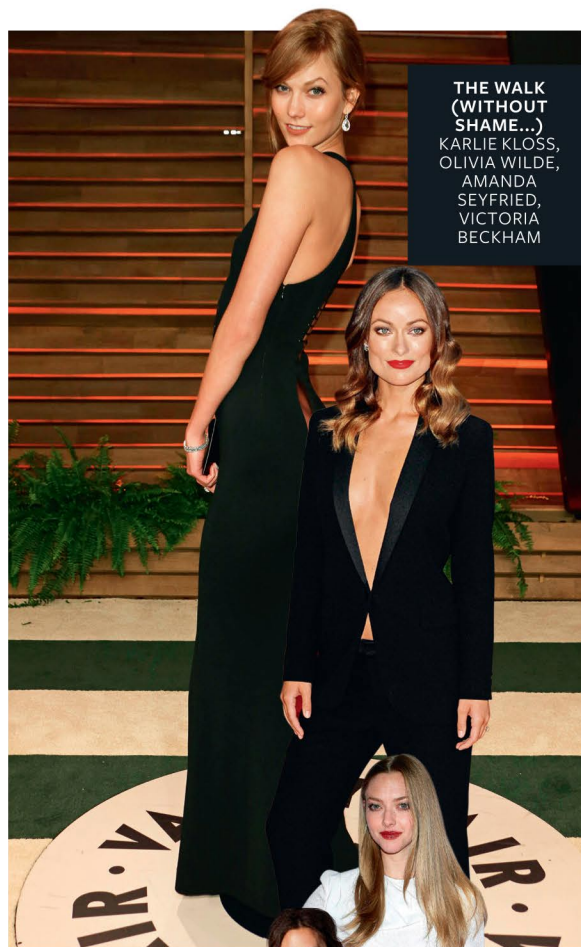
THE TRIAL I definitely lucked out on this feature. As someone who is allergic to exercise, hiking has huge appeal as it’s essentially walking, but with geeky paraphernalia. How hard can it be?

As I start my research, it dawns on me that my initial elation might have been a little premature. The first obstacle I face is my location. Jessica Biel, Olivia Wilde et al live in LA, surrounded by 160 acres of sun-drenched Hollywood hills in which to hike. I live in north London; my local “park” (half an acre of damp, patchy grass) doesn’t have quite the same appeal.

Undeterred, I crack on with the fun bit – buying an outfit. According to The Ramblers, a British charity that promotes walking for health and pleasure, “It’s important to treat your feet with care, so it’s worth investing time and money in finding the right footwear.” I start my search for sturdy hiking boots with the best intentions, but half an hour later have invested in a pair of Nike’s latest Flyknits, as worn by Rihanna and the Kardashian clan. OK, so they’re designed for running, not walking, and are definitely more fashion statement than sensible shoe, but trainers are trainers, right?

Wrong. Two hours into my first hike – a ten-mile walk through London from Richmond Park in the south to Hampstead Heath in the north – my feet are burning and my ankles are swollen and sore. Turns out walking boots are essential kit after all.

On the positive side, I’ve seen more of the city I call home in one day than I have in the entire ten years I’ve lived here. From spotting deer in Richmond Park to popping into Fulham Palace for a cuppa, I’ve visited parts of London I never even knew existed, and on top of that have



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had four hours of uninterrupted chat with my boyfriend, which is a luxury in itself.

Bolstered by my first hiking experience, I book a long weekend away in Norfolk with my best friends. The idea is to spend the days walking, and wine-fuelled evenings playing board games in the cosy cottage we’ve booked. We start our first day in good spirits – the sun is shining and the scenery is stunning. An hour in, though, ominous clouds appear in the distance and five minutes later it’s pouring with rain. None of us have planned for bad weather, and we haven’t even been organised enough to plan a route or bring a map, so have no idea where the nearest village is to take shelter and warm up with a cup of tea. As phone reception has completely disappeared too, the only option is to turn back the way we came. We arrive at the cottage in silence, soaked to the skin; this definitely hasn’t gone the way I’d hoped.

After a night drowning our sorrows, we wake up with strengthened resolve and try again, this time planning a route purposely passing through villages we can stop at if necessary. We’ve packed a bag with waterproofs if it rains and SPF if it’s hot, thin layers that we can add or shed depending on how warm it gets and a few bottles of water. Six hours later we arrive home exhausted but happy after a beautiful, supremely satisfying walk.

THE VERDICT Hiking in the Hollywood Hills, where the sun is always shining and every other person you pass is an A-list actress, is glamorous; hiking in rain-prone Britain is not. But, if you’re looking for a pain-free way to get fit and tone up over time, hiking is the perfect place to start. It’s free, easy (even for total fitness-phobes like me) and forces you to take time out, soak up your surroundings and catch up with loved ones. That’s my kind of exercise. ▷