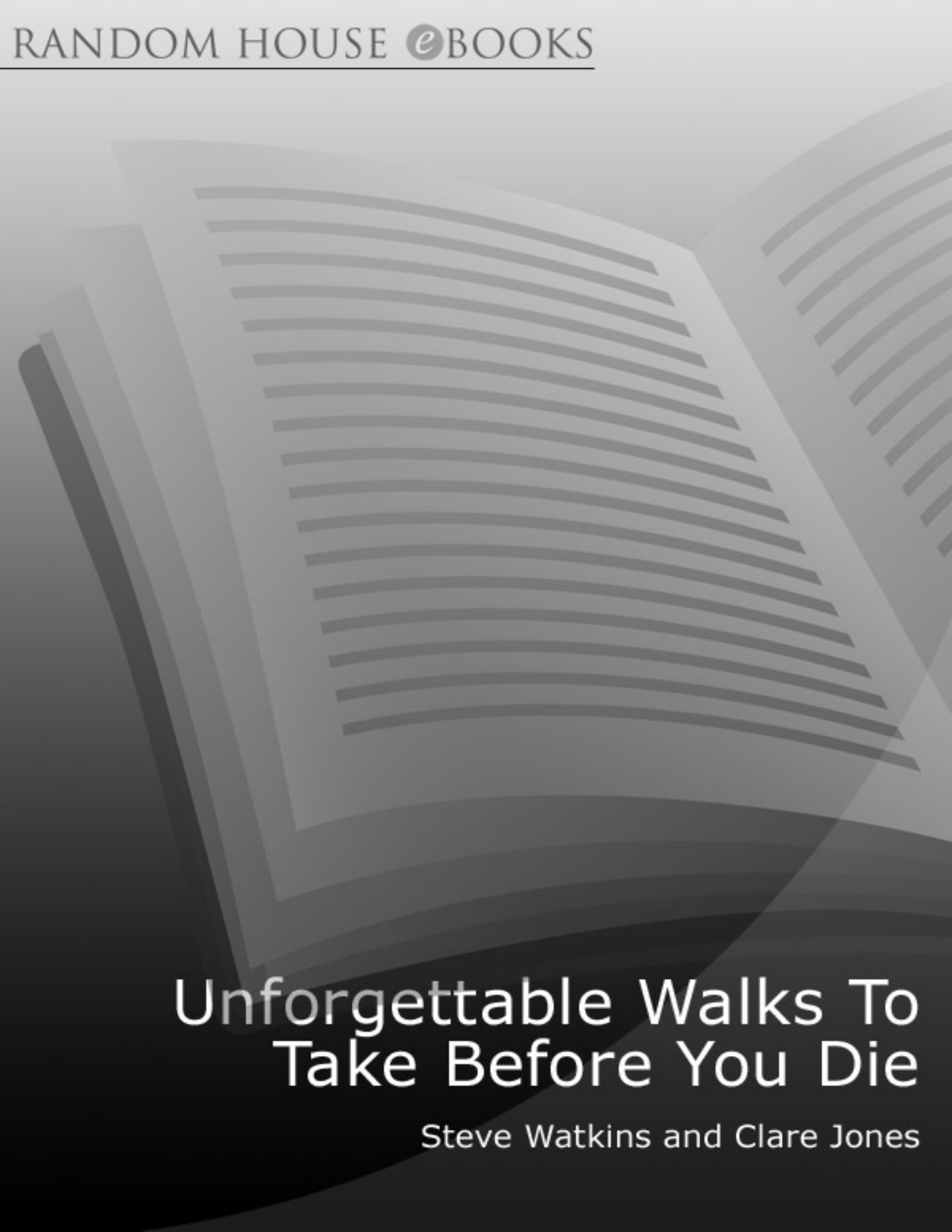


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Unforgettable Walks To Take Before You Die

Steve Watkins and Clare Jones

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About the Book

Unforgettable Walks to Take Before You Die is the fifth title in an exciting series of books that will help you search out essential sights and experiences around the world.

Photographers and writers Steve Watkins and Clare Jones draw on their years of international travel experience in selecting thirty of the world's most inspiring, spectacular and beautiful walks, each of which can be done within the space of a two-week break.

Their choices include a wide range of locations, from urban walking tours along Boston's Freedom Trail and the stunning temples of Kyoto, to the open countryside of the Yellowstone National Park in the USA and Peru's Inca Trail. There are leisurely jaunts, such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater property and a stroll around the picturesque canals of Amsterdam, as well as a few demanding walks, such as the Alpine Tour du Mont Blanc and China's Tiger Leaping Gorge trek, for those who like a challenge.

Richly illustrated throughout with specially commissioned photographs, *Unforgettable Walks to Take Before You Die* is aimed at anyone looking for ideas for an inspirational trip of a lifetime.

About the Author

Steve Watkins is a professional travel photographer and author. His images and articles have featured in many magazines, newspapers and books, including *Wanderlust*, *Geographical*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail* and various AA guidebooks. He contributes to the *Wexas Travellers' Handbook*, writes a photography column for *Traveller* magazine and tutors on workshops for Traveller's Tales. His assignments have taken him to more than sixty countries and to every continent. His photography has featured in several exhibitions, including one at London's Barbican Gallery. He markets his images through his website www.vividplanet.com

Clare Jones is a professional travel writer and photographer who has spent many years covering adventure activities across the globe. She is also sponsored by Salomon in support of their 'Women Will' campaign. Her work has featured in a variety of publications, including the *Sunday Telegraph*, *USA Today*, the *Scotsman*, the *Herald*, *Traveller*, *Geographical* and *Global* and she co-authored the flagship *AA Guide to Spain* and *Extreme Places of the World*. Clare is also an assistant TV producer and has worked on several BBC documentaries.



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Unforgettable **walks to take** **before you die**

Steve Watkins and Clare Jones

BBC
BOOKS



**For Lewis Michael Watkins, who couldn't be with us but still brought
sunshine and rainbows every step of the way.**

Introduction

The hectic pace of modern-day life often leaves us hankering after the chance to escape; to slow down, take a deep breath and soak up the simple and immediate details of our surroundings. If there is an art to travelling, walking can justifiably lay claim to being the most refined, as well as the most ancient, mode of getting around. This ultimate form of slow travel allows us to dictate how far we go, how long we linger and how much we see. By choosing to walk, which naturally engages both body and mind, we sense everything around us more acutely, and can have a deeper, healthier and more revitalizing travel experience.

Another appeal of donning walking shoes or boots is that there are endless opportunities and options to suit just about us all, no matter what our level of fitness. Walks can range in diversity from a gentle stroll through American history along Boston's Freedom Trail or a spiritual journey among the temples and shrines of Kyoto, to more committing adventures, such as traversing the Mont Blanc massif in the European Alps or climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. Even the more challenging trails are increasingly attracting relatively novice walkers, a sure sign that there is today a widespread and deep-seated desire to engage with the wild places on the planet. When the German climber Hans Meyer became the first person to stand on the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in 1889, he could not have envisaged the tens of thousands of people who now do the same every year.

With so many choices, it was difficult for us to decide which 30 walks to include. All the ones we selected are accessible to anyone with the relevant fitness levels – you

don't need to be a technical mountaineer for any of them – and they can be completed within at most two weeks; the majority require one week or less. Although you can opt to carry your own equipment, all the walks are available as organized tours, some guided, some self-guided. The Useful Web Addresses section [here](#) lists their operators. These are the ones we used while researching the book and their services will invariably add a welcome touch of comfort and convenience to your walk.

We wanted to include not only some of the world's best-known walks, such as the Inca Trail in Peru and the Coast to Coast walk in England, but also some more unusual destinations, like the Karst country of Slovenia, which takes you back into a bygone age, and the trails around Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's outstanding example of how architecture can combine with nature, in Pennsylvania, USA. Our selection is not in any way meant to be definitive, nor is it laid out in any sort of ranking priority. Of course, we have our personal favourites, but everyone will experience the walks in different ways, so lace up your boots and get out exploring some of them if you can – the map [here](#) will help you to locate them. This book is not designed to be a guidebook to trails and paths; rather, our intention is to give you a taste of what it is like to walk them. There are many excellent route guides and maps that give detailed descriptions of where to turn right and left.

Although walking is an ideal pace for taking photographs, our schedule did not allow us to hang around for days or weeks waiting for perfect weather. We undertook the walks just as anyone else would, and experienced the full range of what Mother Nature has to offer: the light of the midnight sun under clear skies in the Lofoten Islands; pelting rain on the Inca paving stones along the Takesi Trail in Bolivia; gale-force winds on the cliffs of England's South West Coast Path and glorious sunshine on the Routeburn Track in New Zealand. We may

have flinched when things got wild but, thankfully, our camera equipment and sense of humour survived.

Some of the weather patterns we experienced served as reminders that extraordinary changes to our planet are occurring and that our fragile environment needs protecting. Given the heightened fears for the health of the Earth, it is, for some, becoming harder to reconcile these with flying to long-distance destinations. Awareness of global warming and the impact of air travel makes it difficult to feel that catching a plane is environmentally viable. But understandably, given the many wonderful and inspiring places the world has to offer, people still want to see them, to explore and experience them.

First-hand knowledge of the beauty of the planet can be the motivating factor for changing our way of life. At home, altering our shopping habits or means of transport, recycling, and being careful about the way we use water can seem inconvenient. Travelling often puts us in step with a very different world. We naturally eat only what is grown locally in Bolivia, happily explore Amsterdam on foot and conserve water in drought-stricken Australia. Perhaps these are some of the more valuable lessons we learn and bring back to our own lives, helping us to take small steps to change and improve the world around us.

Should you choose a long-haul destination, once you reach it the impact you make by walking is far less than that of any other form of travel. Depending on where you live, in this book there are, hopefully, walks that can be accessed without the need to board a plane. The choice of walking as a way of travelling is perhaps as good an interim answer to environmental problems as there can be – our way to leave only a light footprint.

Steve Watkins and Clare Jones, 2008

Yellowstone National Park

USA



Steam swirls above Grand Prismatic Spring

In the centre of one of the world's largest-known volcanic calderas, Yellowstone National Park is a bubbling, hissing, surreal landscape teeming with iconic North American wildlife. From sweeping plains, high mountains and deep canyons to boiling rivers, explosive geysers and thundering waterfalls, its geographical variety is perhaps without equal - and its extensive network of trails, for both day walks and longer backcountry trips, make it a hiking wonderland.

Established in 1872, following several exploratory expeditions and lobbying of Congress, Yellowstone was the world's first national park and is more popular now than at any stage in its history, with around three million visitors a year. Thankfully, most of these don't venture far, if at all, from their cars, which makes walking the perfect way to explore, and get a feel for, the truly wild Yellowstone.

Throughout geological history there have been three major eruptions in the Yellowstone region; the most recent was 600,000 years ago and created the 72 km by 48 km caldera. These cataclysmic events were powered by the same heat and energy that today fuel over 300 geysers inside the park – two-thirds of all those on the planet – as well as numerous hot springs, mud pots and other geothermal features.

A gentle introduction, especially if you enter Yellowstone from the north entrance at Gardiner, is to take a walk around the Mammoth Hot Springs area. One of the park's multi-tiered boardwalks – common features on its more accessible trails, these reduce environmental impact and allow access to otherwise dangerous geothermal areas – winds its way up through an extravagant cascade of brilliant white, travertine terraces and steaming, thermal springs.



On the trail to Fairy Falls



Rainbow at Upper Falls on Yellowstone river



Bison are a common sight around Yellowstone

One of the most dramatic features in the park is the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone – a vertiginous, 366-metre-deep, 32-km-long fissure, carved largely by the Yellowstone river and otherwise by glacial action. The South Rim Trail makes for an exciting and relatively easy half-day hike and gives sensational views of the canyon's two pounding waterfalls: Upper Falls and Lower Falls. The path at first weaves its way through open forest. As it nears the Upper Falls there are viewpoints where, on a sunny afternoon, rainbows can be seen dancing across the plumes of spray thrown out from the cascade.

If you are reasonably fit, a side trip, Uncle Tom's Trail, will take you down an almost vertical set of 328 steps into the base of the canyon for incomparable close-up views of the Upper Falls. The testing return ascent is definitely one to take slowly. From the top of the steps, the main trail continues to Artist Point. This is the most famous place to view the canyon and the Lower Falls, a thunderous torrent that plunges 94 metres through a V-shaped cleft into the canyon. It is a lost world, where lone trees cling for life to the cliff face and the steaming azure and emerald river glows in the late afternoon with reflected light from the golden walls.

If you venture further south in the park, there will probably be encounters with bison and elk, especially around Firehole river and Geyser Basin where flatlands prevail. In the Midway Geyser Basin, another excellent and relatively easy half-day trail passes the outrageously coloured Grand Prismatic Spring en route to Fairy Falls, an enchanting, wispy cascade near the head of Fairy Creek. Soon after the start of the walk the spring comes into sight – a dense curtain of pink and blue steam rising on the horizon. Surrounded by blindingly white flats dotted with skeletal trees, Grand Prismatic is the third-largest hot spring in the world. It is an experience to see it from the ground, but to see it at its most spectacular it is necessary

to work a little. Along the trail there is a series of small hillocks with indistinct, steep paths that take you up for a staggering aerial view of the blue waters and the brilliant green, yellow, orange and rust-red fringes of the spring - colours created by bacteria growth.



Boiling pool in Firehole river basin



Desolate landscape at Mammoth Hot Springs



Boardwalks allow access on to fragile areas at Mammoth Hot Springs



Grand Prismatic Spring

Beyond the spring, the trail to Fairy Falls narrows and passes through young lodgepole pines overshadowed by legions of towering charred, black trunks. This area was badly damaged in 1988 during extensive wild fires that destroyed over one-third of the park. Tucked away in a scalloped alcove of grey rock, Fairy Falls tumbles serenely from the lip of the Madison Plateau. In free fall for much of its 60-metre descent, it eventually splashes gracefully on to darker rocks below, spreading across them into countless ephemeral rivulets.

A more remote geyser experience than the park's perennial favourite, Old Faithful, can be found along the road to West Thumb. The trail to Lone Star Geyser, an 8-km return hike, passes through lush, old-growth forest, untouched by the 1988 fires, and alongside the upper reaches of the tranquil Firehole river. It is a beautiful and easy walk, starting at Kepler Cascades, and if you time it

right you may see the geyser in action. Every few hours it erupts into a 14-metre-high jet of boiling water. And here, unlike at Old Faithful, the chances are you will be alone, seeing the wild heart of Yellowstone.



Dusk over Geyser Basin



Evening light at Grand Prismatic Spring



In Yellowstone it is necessary to be alert for the presence of bears and other wildlife, such as bison and elk. Full guidelines are available at the ranger stations. Much of the park is accessible only from June to September, as snow covers the ground and roads for the rest of the year. Backcountry trails require permits to access and take several days to hike; they are very committing and require experience. If you only have a few days in the park, the day-hike trails, which don't require permits, are the best way to sample Yellowstone's various features. Accommodation inside the park is very limited and usually booked up many months in advance. There are more options in the towns around the four park entrances.

Amalfi Coast

Italy



Positano clings to the cliffs

Clinging precariously to the steep cliffs and terraces of the Lattari Mountains, villages along the Amalfi coast seem to need only a gentle nudge to send them tumbling into the Mediterranean Sea below. Soaked in Roman, Greek and Byzantine history, and with an inexhaustible supply of gourmet food and wine, the coastline is a relatively little-known walking delight.

Stretching for around 70 km from Sorrento, south of Naples, to Salerno, the coast is renowned for its dramatic road, which twists its way above precipitous drops. The

severe terrain you pass through hardly suggests walking as a pleasurable way to explore, but a network of ancient, stone stairways and paths threads its way along the coastline, through the villages and above the cliffs into the beautiful green hinterland.

Amalfi, the pretty little port that gives its name to this part of the coast, is an ideal hub from which to access some of the area's best walks. Strung out along the mouth of a deep gorge and up its sides, the town is riddled with contorted passages and stairways, which in themselves make for intriguing exploration. The main street is dominated by the glittering, gold and columned façade of Sant' Andrea Cathedral, from where narrow steps lead below the broad cathedral steps on to a balcony walkway to Atrani, the neighbouring village. Far quieter than its popular neighbour, it is set along a narrow beachfront and punctuated at its eastern end by the Santa Maria Magdalena Church set high upon a rocky outcrop jutting into the sea.