



**Lara Campana's story**

I've loved mountains and the outdoors since I was a child, but after being badly bullied at work I crashed into a nervous breakdown, developing anorexic behaviour. Controlling food obsessively was the only way I could feel in control. I was skin and bone, and even walking in the town centre was a challenge.

One day a friend told me that he was joining Edinburgh Young Walkers. I felt so frustrated. I could give him lots of advice on gear but I couldn't help myself. He came back from a hike up Ben Ledi, full of energy and with beautiful photos. It made me want to get back into the outdoors, back to the hills, back to Lara. So I sought psychological help and went through a painful journey on the road to recovery. A few months and two stones later, I signed up for my first walk. It was an easy urban walk but I still found it challenging. One stone later I did a 20-mile coastal walk with the group in beautiful weather and I loved every minute. Finally, two stones later, back to my normal weight, I climbed my first Munro, Ben Lomond. It was not a great day, weather wise - it was windy and showery - but I did it. When I reached the top I welled up. I had won!

People in my walking group have always been so kind and supportive. I felt cared for at all times and this pushed me not to give up. Mountains really have given me a second chance. None of the gorgeous things I encounter on my way are taken for granted. I savour every minute, every smile, every friendly chat, every amazing view and this keeps me from relapsing.



**D** aspiring to walk the West Highland Way, bag a Munro or climb their own personal summit, whether with friends, family or as individuals. Everyone should feel they belong in our countryside and value our landscapes and wildlife, enjoying the many benefits of being active outdoors.

And there's so much to explore. From the rolling Galloway hills to the ancient rocky landscapes of Sutherland, from our two stunning national parks to the 26 official long distance routes, Scotland's Great Trails. There are endless sandy beaches that would put tropical islands to shame, and more than 60 scheduled ferry services taking you to dozens of amazing islands. It's good for us all to be more active, given our

modern, sedentary lifestyles. It keeps us physically healthy, and research shows that being in a natural environment adds to our sense of wellbeing and can help to address mental health problems such as depression.

If you don't have friends to walk with, why not join a group to give you confidence and help you to explore places you might not find on your own? Ramblers Scotland has 56 walking groups, including four specifically for younger walkers based in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Tayside. All our groups organise and run their own walk programmes, and they often also include social events. Non-members are welcome to go on a few walks for free

**Top:** looking south from Ben Lomond

**Middle:** pause for a rest in Glen Affric

**Top right:** Torridon. Photographs: Helen Todd

**Bottom:** Buachaille Etive Beag, Glencoe. Photograph: Sandy Janas

before deciding whether to join the organisation.

If you want to start slowly, our Medal Routes project has gathered more than 600 short, circular routes of 15, 30 and 60 minutes – bronze, silver and gold medal routes – from Dumfries to Shetland, which help you to get out and about locally. They are all available to download from our website or the Medal Routes app. We also have a routes database, Ramblers Routes, which has route suggestions across Scotland, with shorter walks free to download for non-members.

The Ramblers has been promoting walking for more than 80 years. As well as our group walks, we've been campaigning on behalf of walkers and were influential in securing Scotland's fantastic rights

**Above:** Lara looking fit and well having discovered walking

**Right:** Lara, with her cousin, before taking up the pastime that has changed her life

of public access to land. This September we'll be organising a festival of walking across the whole of Great Britain, so look out for activities in your area that you'd like to join.

Now that summer's here there's really no excuse not to get outdoors and go for a walk – what's stopping you? ■

● *In Scotland you have the right to be on most land and inland water, provided you act responsibly. Full guidance on responsibilities, whether for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, canoeists or for those managing the land, is given in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.*

[www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com)