

Ben Fogle ready to go wild in Edinburgh

Broadcaster Ben Fogle talks about his new UK tour, Wild, and the extraordinary encounters which have shaped his life.

Ben Fogle's new tour, WILD, will see him sharing stories of hope, possibility and positivity, all learned from a career which has taken him to some of the most extreme locations in the world, whether filming for documentaries or tackling some of mankind's greatest physical challenges.

But it all began back in 2000 when Ben was one of 36 people to embark on the ground-breaking BBC Castaway series, which saw the adventurous souls ditch the rat race for a 12-month social experiment living on the remote Scottish island of Taransay.

"I think it's all luck, but you make a bit of that yourself," he says, reflecting on the past 23 years. "I have always loved travel, nature, the outdoors – that's why I did Castaway. But it was a much more intense experience than anything I could have had under normal circumstances.

"I get asked about Castaway a lot and will be talking about it on the tour, as it's a big part of me and relative to so much of what I do and have done.

"'Y2K' was a definitive time. It was pre-mobile phones, social media didn't exist, so many things were very, very different. Now things have changed so profoundly it would be difficult to go back to that innocence and simplicity.

"A channel might try it again one day but no one has

replicated it so far. Partly due to the fact nothing like it existed at that time, and people went for very pure and innocent reasons.

The landscape has changed, people go on TV now for fame and fortune and that naturally changes the dynamic.

“Heading off to spend a year on an island with a load of strangers, gave me a real grounding, and a foundation of what it takes to make a simple, off-grid life.”

That foundation allowed Ben to build his career and stood him in perfect stead for his many varied TV projects. Perhaps none more so than **New Lives In The Wild**, for which he has spent the past 12 years travelling the world to meet people living extreme off-grid lives – in a world now dominated by ease of communication and all-too-often dictated by being on-grid.

“Castaway definitely gave me the qualifications to be able to do a series like New Lives – to spend time with people living their whole life the way I did for 12 months,” he said.

“I have a better understanding of the trials and tribulations, the highs and lows, the benefits and sacrifices they make.

“The more people I have spent time with over 12 years of making that show, the more I understand what goes into making a sustainable, off-grid life like that.

“A lot of these people are quite reserved, not anti-social necessarily, but they perhaps don’t enjoy being around other people. But as I have experienced it, they can open up with me – there’s almost a mutual respect between us.”

Ben’s experience of meeting those who live in some of the world’s most diverse environments will form the basis of his new tour.

In WILD, Ben will take audiences on a journey to relive some of the inspiring and uplifting tales he has encountered on his

travels to places such as the wilderness of northern Sweden, the jungles of Honduras, the hostility of Chernobyl and the mountains of Nepal.

Having previously filmed in Chernobyl, when he met those who returned to live there as it continues to recover from the 1986 nuclear disaster, Ben took the opportunity to go back on a private visit in September, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Early in the conflict, Russian Armed Forces seized the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone – and soldiers were later reported to have radiation poisoning following their operations in the highly contaminated area.

Ben has previously spoken of the emotion he felt at seeing the families he'd previously met there – and more than a year after the invasion he doesn't see it coming to an end soon.

"I fear this is in for the long run, decades and decades of unrest in that part of the world. I can't see a quick resolution unfortunately.

"It's another thing the tour will look at – the effects that war and disaster can have on places, not just the landscape but the people too.

"It seems harsh to say, but war is part of what happens in a world where seven billion people live. It's another way that man destroys the environment around us – but can also provide examples of how a place can bounce back."

Ben's love of the great outdoors reaches back to his own childhood, where his time was divided between rural Dorset and central London – with extended school holiday trips to the Canadian wilderness to visit his paternal grandparents.

So, for someone who has experienced the wilder side of life – whether directly on his expeditions, or through his encounters with those who make a lifelong commitment to it – could Ben

ever step fully out of modern life, and would he take his family along for the adventure?

“I’m incredibly lucky that I get to straddle two worlds, being in the urban world with all it offers then going off to the wilderness – and that gives me perspective, which is so important in life,” he explains.

“There’s definitely something about that kind of life that appeals to me – but not right now. My children, Ludo and Iona, are 14 and 12 this year, and are very much involved in urban living.

“They are very well travelled. They have spent time in the jungle, in remote islands, wood cabins, the Norwegian wilderness. But then they go to school and are very much engaged with ‘normal’ society, and love researching on computers, having pizza or going to the cinema.

“We live outside London now, and that helps – we ride horses, go wild swimming, long dog walks. But it’s balance; I want them to be street savvy as well as being able in bush craft skills. I want my children to be able to wire a plug and start a fire, to make a bed and to put up a tent. They’re all skills for life and don’t need to be exclusive.

“It’s one of the biggest lessons I think I’ve learnt from meeting hundreds of people all over the world – that too many people follow a prescription for life and don’t think about how you can change that.

“Yes, on one hand I live a prescriptive life with two children, a couple of dogs, paying taxes, being very much part of society. But on the other hand, I have a pretty alternative life, spending the majority of the year away from home because of what I do for a living.

“People ask why I’m not living in a cabin in the woods, but there are sacrifices to make for that life – and I love those

great cultural events, arts, cinema, books, so what I have realised is that the search for a perfect balance is what is more important.

“My life is not something everyone could have, not everyone could do it. But I hope that after joining me on the WILD tour, people will consider what kind of things they can do in their own life, the small changes to make to find that balance.”

BEN FOGLE – WILD will be at Edinburgh’s Usher Hall on Sunday May 28.

Tickets are on sale from <https://www.ents24.com/uk/tour-dates/ben-fogle>



Ben Fogle – Wild will be at Usher Hall on May 28