

'It's not just about the cagoule'

BBC

Julia Bradbury will be the new face of the Ramblers — but can she make it fashionable, asks *Hilary Rose*

Ramblers have never been a byword for sexy. Hairy, yes. Geeky, yes. So anyone charged with changing their image would probably look for someone who not only knows what she's talking about — who has walked the walk, as it were — but who looks good, too. Step forward Julia Bradbury, the presenter of *Countryfile* and *Wainwright Walks*, on BBC TV, and the thinking ramblers' crumpet.

Next year Bradbury, 39, will be working with the Ramblers Association to spur more people to put on their walking boots or, indeed, to buy some in the first place. She wants to get the next generation walking, and plans to take her 11-year-old nephew out with her next year. "He will enjoy it," she jokes. "Auntie Julia says so."

"Walking doesn't have to be about doing eight-hour hikes," she continues. "I want to encourage families and individuals to get into it. It's a fantastic form of exercise and a wonderful way to socialise."

Bradbury has been a walker since she was 6, when her father, a keen walker, started her off. From their Sheffield home they would head out most weekends and, once she was old enough, would escape for long walks in the Peak District — her favourite route is still the Monsal Trail



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there. It was a bonding time and the two of them still enjoy walking together. They tackled the Knock Walk in Perthshire this year and she says that he is her favourite walking companion. Her TV presenting career has been wideranging but in fronting *Countryfile* and *Wainwright Walks* she seems to have found her niche — despite critics' occasional gripes that the BBC should have found a "professional".

"I didn't realise there were qualifications for being a walker," she retorts. "It's just one foot in front of the other, isn't it?"

For every gainsayer, there are plenty of people who think that anyone who encourages more people to get outdoors and appreciate the British countryside is a good thing.

"People come from all over the world to look at what we've got — the Jurassic Coast, the Lake District, Scotland — we have the most stunning countryside. The weather's all part of the adventure."

She talks with infectious enthusiasm about the beauty of the Cairngorms under a light covering of snow, or a frosty morning in the Peak District; the joy of fresh, cold air hitting the back of your throat; and the thrill of having what she calls a sensory experience, one that takes you away from everyday life.

"There's no such thing as the wrong weather, just the wrong clothes," she says.

Ah yes, the clothes — possibly the elephant in the room for some people. Those hideous, clunky boots; the lurid, shapeless waterproofs; the image of bearded, backpacked men grimly striding off into the distance. Bradbury is having none of it.

"There are really nice, trendy boots out there," she insists, "and they look good. Walkers sometimes have a geeky image and it's so not like that any more. Sometimes, when I go to meetings, I put heels on and people are surprised and say, 'Ooh, you look very glamorous'. Well, I don't wear cagoules all the time, you know."