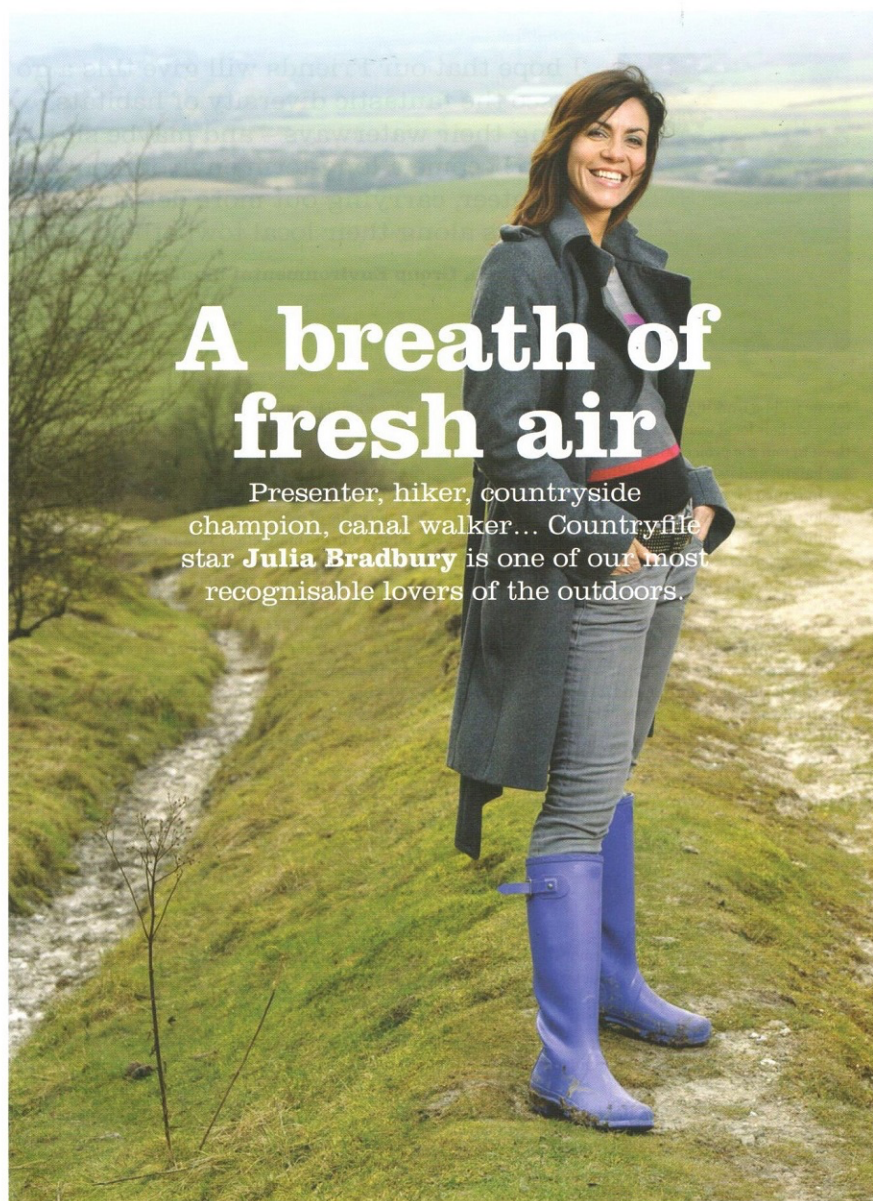


# A breath of fresh air

Presenter, hiker, countryside champion, canal walker... Countryfile star **Julia Bradbury** is one of our most recognisable lovers of the outdoors.



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You’d imagine it to be pretty challenging, presenting a TV show from half way up a mountain, with walking boots and a rain mac replacing a session in hair and make-up. But it’s something Julia Bradbury has been doing seamlessly for the BBC for many inclement seasons – and her enthusiasm has been contagious.

Her programmes, including Countryfile and Secret Britain, have brought our rural landscapes into the hearts of the most urban of households. They’ve educated us on the issues facing country communities, and reminded us of the joys of a slower, big-sky pace of life.

But Julia first came to our prime-time screens fronting consumer rights shows like Watchdog. So how did the fight against corporate giants turn into a career-defining hike across the Lake District?

‘It was a happy accident really!’ she laughs. ‘Five or six years ago, I was talking to someone at BBC 4 about potential projects. We just got onto the subject of hiking and the famous fell walker Alfred Wainwright – one thing led to another and suddenly I was involved in the Wainwright walking series.’

‘I thought at the time it was great to be doing something so completely different. There were only ever meant to be four walks. It certainly wasn’t meant to be a new career path! But it was so popular, and so warmly received, that another six walks were immediately commissioned.’

From there, Julia has gone on to do countless programmes that reflect her love of the great outdoors, including the Canal Walks series in 2011. It’s a connection that goes back to her childhood, and the influence of an adventurous father.

‘Really, everything is down to my dad when it comes to the outdoors. I grew up in both Rutland, where we lived, and Sheffield, where I went to school. And at the weekend he’d take me to the Peak District, where

he grew up, and we’d go adventuring and exploring. Hiking with my dad is where it all began for me.’

Since the success of following Wainwright’s footsteps across the north of England, Julia’s presented wildlife and travel programmes across the globe. But her love of the Lakes remains deep rooted.

‘I think the Lakes are breathtaking on a world scale,’ she states. ‘They’re right up there with all the incredible world vistas.’

‘Of course, when you’re taking on a mountain, you can set yourself pretty high goals – a certain number of miles in a day or reaching a particular summit. I think you approach a canal walk in a different way. It’s much more relaxed.’

‘Having said that, one of my favourite walks is along the Caledonian Canal in Scotland. It’s gentle, but you’ve got Ben Nevis there on your shoulder. Canal on your left, mountains on your right – it’s a double whammy.’

‘I’m a bit of a cheat in life – I love to achieve as much as possible in the shortest time possible – so this is the perfect walk!’

‘Canals are such friendly places to walk, too. It’s a very sociable activity. And of course, so much of our industrial history is stamped on them. That’s one of the most incredible things about canals, the fact that they run through the heart of our most industrial urban centres. It shows a real connection between the countryside and our cities.’

‘I think it’s why Countryfile is so successful. People say to me, “I watch Countryfile but I don’t go the country”. It’s like a guilty pleasure! But they know that the issues facing rural communities are relevant to them too. Agriculture, food, growing conditions, seasonal crops – these things are important to all of us.’

To read more about Julia’s travels, go to [juliabradbury.com](http://juliabradbury.com) ■