

# “Looking east over Striding Edge, I knew I had a new addiction”

HARRISON WARD

I've suffered with crippling depression for most of my life. The minute I hit puberty an uncontrollable urge of self-loathing, demotivation and insecurity plagued me, and at its worst brought thoughts of suicide. At 18, while working behind a bar, I discovered alcohol would sedate my mind and silence the damaging thoughts. Whilst at university, drinking became a day-to-day habit, a 'medicinal' way to manage the 'black dog'. Before long I was consuming over 20 pints daily, had taken up smoking and ballooned to 22 stone. Depression had lured alcohol into my life on the false pretence of being a saviour, it turned out to be another poison.

My secret battle became public around my 21st birthday. In the early hours, heavily inebriated, I made a call to my mother via the closest payphone to the railway tracks. I had rung to say goodbye, having decided it was the end. Thankfully it wasn't. This should have been the turning point. But I didn't want change, I was managing my darkness the best I could by means of liquid sedation.

Four years of blackout drinking continued and I surprisingly found a girlfriend. She was somebody I didn't deserve as I hid my double-life. Then the bubble burst when I acted unfaithfully under the influence. I came to terms with the fact that I'd become an alcoholic, but deservedly it was already the final straw.

All association with the destructive life I had created was removed. I left the area, my job, my flat, friends and vowed



Harrison has given up smoking, drinking and lost seven stone in three years, while taking his passion for cooking into the outdoors. Follow his journey on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube: @fellfoodie.




to remove alcohol and cigarettes from my routine. I threw myself into fitness, even beginning to run.

A fortnight later, my friend

Ryan arrived on my doorstep and said: “We're going hiking up Blencathra.” Under the haze of substance withdrawal, I couldn't take it in. I didn't even own any boots. Kindly, Ryan stopped en route and bought me a pair. A slow and demanding vertical plod commenced. I was never going to give up, and eventually the summit was reached. While descending Ryan asked: “Helvellyn next?”

A week later we parked at Swirls car park on a day with barely a cloud in the sky. I donned my boots and began marching up the steep ascent. Finally, the trig point was reached and with it a spectacle that sparked something in me. Looking east over Striding Edge, I knew a new addiction had been ignited.

Scafell Pike and many other Lakeland fells followed, as well as Snowdon, Crib Goch and Ben Nevis. Hiking boots became interchangeable with trainers as slow walks developed into technical runs. Eleven months on, I completed a marathon. It felt like redemption.

Today, the outdoors remains a key component of my lifestyle. I've ticked off half the Wainwrights, frequently wild camp and have taken my passion for cooking into the outdoors too. Now I'm over three years sober, seven stone lighter and smoke free. The combination of fitness and nature has been instrumental in my turnaround, boosting my mental strength and keeping darker thoughts at bay. It has been truly life changing. 

Mountains for the Mind is a **Trail** magazine campaign promoting the benefits of spending time outdoors for better mental health. Find out how you can support it at [mountainsforthemind.co.uk](http://mountainsforthemind.co.uk)

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