

I'll tell you this, but you have to promise that it will get no further. Not long after we moved here we had the people next door round for dinner and – I swear this is true – they drove. I was astounded [...but] I have since come to realize that there was nothing especially odd in their driving less than a couple of hundred feet to visit us. Nobody walks anywhere in America nowadays.

[...]

One of the things we wanted when we moved to America was to live in a town within walking distance of shops. Hanover, where we settled, is a small, typical New England college town, pleasant, sedate and compact. It has an old-fashioned Main Street, and leafy residential streets. It is, in short, an agreeable, easy place to stroll. Nearly everyone in town is within a five-minute walk of the shops, and yet as far as I can tell virtually no one does.

[...]

I walk to town nearly every day. I go to the post office or library or the local bookshop, or I stop at Rosey Jekes Café for a cappuccino. I wouldn't dream of doing it other than on foot. People have got used to my curious and eccentric behaviour now, but several times in the early days passing neighbours would slow by the kerb and ask if I wanted a lift. "Honestly, I enjoy walking". "Well, if you're absolutely sure" they would say and drive away guiltily, as if they felt they were leaving the scene of an accident.

[...]

A friend of ours was complaining the other day about the difficulty of finding a place to park outside the local gym. She goes there several times a week to walk on a treadmill. The gym is, at most, a six-minute walk from her front door. I asked her why she didn't walk to the gym and do six minutes less on the treadmill. She looked at me as if I were tragically simple-minded. "But I have a programme for the treadmill. It records my distance and speed." I had no idea how thoughtless nature is in this regard.

[...]

The United States spends less than 1 per cent of its \$25 billion-a-year roads budget on facilities for pedestrians. Actually, I'm surprised it's that much.

376 words

Bill Bryson, Notes from a Big Country

Voc.:

1	"here"	the United States
2	astounded	surprised
3	odd	strange
6	sedate	calm and relaxed
7	to stroll	to walk slowly
12	kerb	edge of the road
16	gym	place for sports
	treadmill	an exercise machine on which you walk without going anywhere
20	billion	1 000 000 000

Tasks:

1

What kind of townlife does Bryson describe here? Collect the information he gives you and sum it up.

2

What does Bryson criticize with regard to the lifestyle of his American fellow-citizens? Analyze his message

3

Is this lifestyle the fulfilment of the American Dream, in your opinion? Draw upon your background knowledge