Walk The Distance makes exercise fun for those who’d rather be hiking

Walk The Distance is the type of app that’ll motivate a very specific type of person to get off the couch and get some exercise. Instead of having you walk to escape zombies or catch Pokémon, it lets you virtually walk long-distance routes like the Appalachian Trail (AT) and Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) — perfect for those of us who don’t mind our local walking paths but wish for something a little more scenic.

For every mile you walk at home, you get to see a little icon with your picture move along a map, making its way between famous landmarks like Springer Mountain in Georgia or Kennedy Meadows at the base of the Sierra Nevada. And as you reach certain points, Walk The Distance will give you pictures and facts about them. It is, in a way, a little bit like playing *The Oregon Trail*, except instead of sitting in front of a computer, you’re out getting some exercise in. (It is worth noting that there’s actually an official Oregon Trail app that does something similar if you’d rather take a more historical trip.)

I genuinely went out and did a run one evening so I could make it to the next landmark.

In my time using it, I’ve enjoyed coming home from a walk and looking at the app to see what landmarks I virtually passed. The descriptions it gives you are short and sweet, explaining things like the weather or landscape in a certain location or going over certain aspects of what it’s like to hike the trail, but for me, the photography makes them worth checking out each time. I’ve also found myself looking at the map ahead

and planning how far my next walk will be – when I read the description for Hawk Mountain Shelter that says the next stop is around seven miles away, I used AllTrails (another great app) to find an eight-mile hike nearby.

In theory, all my short walks will add up to many thousands of miles, and I'll have completed Walk The Distance's version of the AT. The app also offers a variety of shorter hikes through various national parks and cities if you want to start off with a slightly less intimidating goal.

Let me get this out of the way real quick now that you've seen a screenshot: I do not think that Walk The Distance is a nice-looking app. In fact, I think it's honestly a little ugly. If you can look past that, though, the app's functionality is pretty solid – you can see where you are on the trail in relation to other users virtually hiking it, browse through your walking history to see how many miles you logged each day, and revisit points of interest you've already passed. There's a whole backpack's worth of settings, too, that let you customize a lot of the experience.

There's even a social element to Walk The Distance, though I can't say I've played around with it much. In addition to all the users that publicly broadcast their progress, you can also add friends to walk the trail with, and the app has a mode that just shows you where you and your friends are on the trail. (If the developers are looking for some free advice, it shouldn't be the "friends" section, it should be the "tramily" section, after the portmanteau of trail and family that's used in the thru-hiking community. It'd be a nice bit of theming to go along with the fact that the app lets you pick a "trail name" instead of a display name.)

I also – and I can't believe I'm saying this – appreciate Walk The Distance's pricing structure. It gives you a lot of flexibility in how you want to pay for the app or if you want to at all. You can do the first part or two of the big hikes

for free and then pay to unlock the rest. Unlocking the entire AT is $4.99, and unlocking the PCT is $9.99. A few of the national parks and city walks are free, with others costing $0.99 each.

Walk The Distance also heavily encourages its users to donate to the associations that maintain and manage the trails in real life, which I heartily approve of.
If you don't want to pay for things piecemeal, though, there's a $2.99 a month / $29.99 a year subscription that lets you do all of the walks for free and unlocks syncing with Fitbit or Garmin. Syncing with Apple Health or Google Fit is free (and because I use another app to sync my Fitbit data into Apple's system, Walk The Distance picks that data right up).

So far, I haven't gotten to the point where I need to start paying; for the AT, that happens roughly 155 miles in. When I do, though, I'm planning on purchasing at least that trail. REI, an outdoor supply company, estimates that actually hiking the Appalachian Trail costs around $6,000, so I'm really coming out ahead by doing it for five bucks.

Of course, Walk The Distance's form of motivation won't work for everyone because not everyone is a huge hiking nerd. For those of us that it does work for, though, making it to the next virtual shelter can be just the motivation we need to get off the couch and go outside for a bit. Personally, I'm really looking forward to making some significant progress on my virtual Appalachian Trail journey later this summer when I'm out hiking a section of the Pacific Crest Trail because that's just the sort of thing I find deeply funny.

Walk The Distance is available for free on the App Store and Google Play store.

https://www.theverge.com/2022/7/23/23272407/walk-the-distance-

app-exercise-motivation