

How I lived by spending nothing for two years

In November 2008, Mark Boyle gave up money for more than two years while living in a caravan. He shares his top tips for living on less with Jessica Winch.

By Jessica Winch *The Telegraph* 10 May 2013

In November 2008, Mark Boyle gave up money for more than two years. The business and economics graduate quit his job with an organic food company and set up home in a donated caravan on a Somerset farm.

1

"I got to the point when I was looking at all the big issues in the world, such as deforestation and sweatshops, and I realised they are all symptoms of a deeper cause; a separation from what we consume. The most potent tool we have in terms of separation and an illusion of independence is money," he said. "I wanted to see if it was possible to live without money, and how it would affect me."

2

However, the 34-year-old said support had increased over the past few years. "I'm sure some people still think it's a bit of a joke," he said. "But when I started in 2008, just before the financial crisis hit the headlines, I was mostly taking criticism. But since then most people are incredibly positive about what I've done.

3

He said few people will want to give up money completely, although there has been an increase of that in the past year.

The vast majority of people were simply interested in how they could spend less. "I think that's a sensible approach," he said.

He said the first few months of living without money were "definitely the hardest period".

4

He cooked food – grown, donated or foraged – on a rocket stove outside the caravan. He bathed in a river with soap made from the plant soapwort, and made his toothpaste from washed-up cuttlefish bones and fennel seeds.

5

"After two or three months I just started to trust that everyday my needs would be met somehow," he said.

6

There are also websites such as Liftshare, which matches journeys and cars to save on petrol. If you want to reduce your spending on the high street, Mr Boyle suggests organising a clothes swap with friends or neighbours.

He set up a "Freeconomy" community online in 2007, where skills and tools are shared. "It's not about having to go off and live in the woods, you can do it from your house," he said.

Mr Boyle wrote a book, *The Moneyless Man*, during his time living without money. His latest book, *The Moneyless Manifesto*, is available free online and contains practical advice for people who want to live on less money.

7

He has just won planning permission for a straw bale, timber frame, passive-solar house in Devon, which he hopes to start building in June using the proceeds from his book sales.

Although it may seem ironic that Mr Boyle has made money from living a moneyless lifestyle, he said he was always clear that the profits made would go towards this new

project. "We are working towards living in a localised gift economy, meeting all of our needs through gifting and growing our own food," he said.

There is also a moneyless wedding to plan with his fiancée, Jess. "I'm not sure how it will work," he said. "It's a big conversation to have, how you put on a wedding for free.

Match these paragraphs with the correct gaps:

A

"I came from a very conventional background and everything was new to me," he said. "How I eat, how I get from A to B, and how I brush my teeth. All these things were new, and I felt the lack of perceived security that money gives us."

B

He volunteered at the farm, grew his own food, cooked on a wood-burning stove and generated electricity through a solar panel, bought for £360 before the experiment started.

C

He travelled around on foot or by bicycle. Instead of a flush toilet, Mr Boyle had a compost lavatory – still one of his top tips for people wanting to emulate his moneyless lifestyle.

D

"It is just people who don't have that much money, wondering how they are going to survive the next year. Money isn't as secure as they thought it was when times were booming."

"We want to show that people don't have to get into masses of debt to have a really fun wedding."

Luckily, his fiancée shares his views about living on less. "The time I lived without money, I've never been happier or healthier," Mr Boyle said. "It had its ups and downs but it was a whole new way of being in the world. I want to get back there as quickly as possible."

E

Mr Boyle, who returned to the monetary world in 2011, is currently housesitting at Emerson College, an adult education centre that runs courses in a range of areas from biodynamic agriculture to storytelling.

F

For those who prefer to put Colgate on their toothbrush, Mr Boyle advocates websites such as Freecycle and Freegle, where goods and services are given away or exchanged.

G

He admitted that when he started he was seen as "a bit of a joke". "I used to get a lot of criticism," Donegal-born Mr Boyle said. "When you challenge money, you challenge a lot more than notes and coins. You challenge a whole perspective on the world."