



Greta Thunberg's integrity

As she continues her slow journey around the United States, Greta Thunberg continues to garner publicity and raise the cause of climate change.

There's so much you can say about her that's inspiring but one thing that I think gives her message added force is the integrity with which her lifestyle matches her views. In this, I'm particularly thinking of the fact that she sailed across the Atlantic rather than take a flight.

I have similar admiration for a more local environmental activist, who is a former work colleague, Ian Christie (google him for more), who—until last year—had avoided going on a plane journey since the early 1990s. (The exception made was to attend a wedding of a close member of his wife's family in Kenya.)

One of the irritations of celebrity environmental preachers like Sting is that their message may be right, but they don't seem to live it out. Prince Harry walked into a similar bear trap with his reasoning about avoiding a third child. A third child, he argued, is not justifiable given the environmental cost.

It's an interesting, arguably important, argument, about the need for stability in the world population. The problem is that Harry's lifestyle undercuts it. In the last twelve months, he has taken ten flights, five of them by private jet. And while flying to visit Commonwealth countries may be an unavoidable part of being in the Royal Family, that doesn't apply to his

private jet to visit Elton John in France. Nor did Meghan Markle strictly speaking need to fly to Flushing Meadow to see her friend Serena Williams in the final of the US Open tennis. Talking the talk has not been matched by walking the walk.

But to pick those two out is unfair. It's the biggest dirty environmental secret of the 'woke' generation. A lot of people who enthusiastically do their recycling, drink their coffee out of reusable cups and avoid plastic like the plague still take flights regularly.

What to do? I've been mulling this one over for a decade and a half. Since 2005, I've been on a maximum of one return flight a year (though, for full disclosure trips to Australia in 2008 and to America in 2017 took in an extra domestic flight as well as the main one there and back). I think I signed a 'silver pledge' on the Plane Stupid website: the 'gold pledge' would have been to cut flying altogether.

On the one hand, it's a meagre gesture: the real heroes are the George Monbiots, Ian Christies and Greta Thunbergs, but then, it's at least been manageable. Or rather, at least I've managed it.

There may be a time when nifty technology makes flying environmentally clean, but it's not coming on stream for some time, and if that means sacrificing a bit of travel, then at least cutting down is not really too much to ask, is it? Or go the other way: the option of not changing doesn't bear thinking about.