

## BARBARA MOORE - A FORGOTTEN WALKER FROM YEARS PAST

I was perusing website <https://www.wr-nw.com/> a few days ago when I came across a recent article marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Barbara Moore's walk across America (see <https://www.wr-nw.com/barbara-moore.html>).



Barbara Moore on the last leg of her 1960 walk from John O'Groat's to Land's End (photo <https://www.shutterstock.com/>)

I had never come across Barbara's name before so I got busy doing some research. I found a fascinating but tragic story that is worth sharing with everyone.

Barbara Moore (22 December 1903 - 14 May 1977), born Anna Cherkasova, was a Russian-born British engineer who gained celebrity status in the early 1960s for her long-distance walking and health beliefs.

Moore was among the first generation of Soviet female engineers after the Russian Revolution. Obviously a sports oriented woman, she became the Soviet Union's long-distance motorcycle champion in 1932. She immigrated to Great Britain in 1939, marrying an art teacher, Harry Moore. They later separated.<sup>1</sup>

In November 1944 the then-new Vegan Society held its first meeting, at the Attic Club, 144 High Holborn, London, and Moore was amongst the attendees. As time went on, she refined her ideas, becoming ever more radical.

To quote from a news release by the London Sunday Chronicle dated 17 June 1951

*A woman of 50, who looks like she was only 30, claimed yesterday that she hates food, has beaten old age, and expects to live at least 150 years. She has set out to do it by giving up food. Twenty years ago she ate three normal meals a day. Slowly for 12 years she reduced her eating until she was keeping fit on one meal a day of grass, chickweed, clover, dandelion and an occasional glass of fruit juice. Five years ago she switched entirely to juices and raw tomatoes, oranges, grasses and herbs. Now she drinks nothing but a glass of water flavored with a few drops of lemon juice. She says, 'There is much more in sunlight and air than can be seen by the naked eye or with scientific instruments. The secret is to find the way to absorb that extra - that cosmic radiation - and turn it into food'.<sup>2</sup>*

Moore held that people could live to be 200 years old by abstaining from smoking, drinking alcohol and sex. She claimed she had cured herself of leukemia by way of a special diet. She was not just a radical vegetarian. She was a breatharian<sup>3</sup>, believing it is possible for people to survive without food.

There was a lot of scepticism about her claims and she was a controversial figure. In an attempt to demonstrate the correctness of her theories about dieting and exercise, she embarked on a series of lengthy walks across Europe,

1 Much of the information in this article is taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara\\_Moore\\_\(vegetarian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Moore_(vegetarian))

2 See [https://web.archive.org/web/20080516100239/http://www.vivendodaluz.com/EN/amboflight/barbara\\_moore.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20080516100239/http://www.vivendodaluz.com/EN/amboflight/barbara_moore.html)

3 See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inedia>

Australia, Canada and the USA in the late 1950's and 1960's. On each occasion, she walked with only nuts, honey, raw fruit and vegetable juice for nourishment.

Here are a few of her documented walks.

In December 1959, she walked 600km (373 miles) from Edinburgh to London in 7 days. The final stage of her walk is captured in a photo along the road near Stamford, Lincs., dated 12<sup>th</sup> December 1959.<sup>4</sup> The caption reads

*Dec. 12, 1959 - Dr. Barbara Moore, the 56 year old marathon walker - nears the last fifty miles of her 373 mile walk form Edinburgh to London. Today is her seventh day on the road. Even though she is "very tired" - and her feet more blistered than ever - she says she is determined not to give up.*



*Barbara Moore with 50 miles to go in her 1959 600km walk from Edinburgh to London (photo <https://www.alamy.com/>)*

In early 1960, she walked 1,400km from John o'Groats to Land's End in 23 days. Her arrival is captured for posterity on BritishPathe newsreel.<sup>5</sup>

In 1960 she also completed the 3,387 miles walk from San Francisco to New York City, departing San Francisco on April 13 and arriving in New York City on July 6, 86 days in total. Her feat is documented in the wikipedia page [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_people\\_who\\_have\\_walked\\_across\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_who_have_walked_across_the_United_States). Her finish is captured by the US newsreels.<sup>6</sup>

Later that same year, she travelled to Australia, where she completed a marathon 400 miles walk from Albury to Blacktown.1960. Once again, the BritishPathe newsreel footage captured her in action.<sup>7</sup>

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4 See <https://www.alamy.com/dec-12-1959-doctor-barbara-moore-on-the-last-fifty-miles-nears-end-image69361351.html>

5 See <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/dr-barbara-moore-arrives-in-cornwall>

6 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WZWxfhmjIE>

7 See <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/dr-barbara-moore-walks-in-australia>



*Left: Barbara Moore at Penrith, the halfway point on her John O'Groats To Lands End Marathon  
Right: Barbara Moore arrives in Schiphol in Holland in 1961 for another of her long walks*

To test her health theories, she planned to build a laboratory next door to her home in Frimley. She was soon drawn into a lengthy legal battle over a sewer and access roads for a nearby housing estate. She spent years and her life savings fighting her case with various government ministries, but ultimately lost in the High Court of Justice. Her legal disputes had cost her more than \$85,000 and left her bankrupt.

She still refused to give in and spent her 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday (in 1965) in prison for contempt of court. She was also jailed for refusing to obey a judge's order to remove flower tubs from her front yard (an unrelated incident in May 1962 that does perhaps paint a picture of someone who railed against authority and was her own worst enemy).

She was still in the news in 1967, walking with paratroops to attack a non-stop walking record at Aldershot, Hampshire. And once again, BritishPathe captured it.<sup>8</sup> One guesses that this might have been a bit of a fundraiser to try to recoup some of her lost court costs.

Sadly, she died in virtual anonymity, without funds and near starvation because she refused to eat, according to Terry Lyons, a Government health official and a friend. *"She had so changed that nobody recognized her;"* Mr. Lyons said. *"She wasn't the strong, belligerent woman she had been. After years of losing in the courts, she had finally lost all faith in British justice and decided she was going to die."*<sup>9</sup>

She had moved into a flat by herself, shut herself away and had seemingly given up the will to live. She was eventually admitted to St. Giles Hospital in London under a false name (to escape attention) and died 24 hours later, on 14 May 1977, aged 73.

Thus ended the life of a wonderfully gifted but personally flawed ultra distance walker.

Tim Erickson  
Monday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020

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8 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgV7s4UJydY>

9 See <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/05/15/archives/dr-barbara-moore-who-walked-across-us-is-dead-at-73.html>