

The Considerate Walker

A brief guide to taking part in led group walks:

DAY WALKS

*Two versions of the Guide are available. The other version is for: **WALKING HOLIDAYS**.**

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* To request a copy of the **WALKING HOLIDAYS** version and to leave **FEEDBACK**, see box at foot of last page.

INTRODUCTION

Please read this before you read any more

Walking in led groups should be a friendly, healthy and safe activity that offers everyone the opportunity to delight in the variety, the beauty, the grandeur, the surprise and the challenge of the world we live in.* When we take part, there are things we can do that contribute to everyone's enjoyment; but sometimes, alas, we may do things that can endanger, harm, inconvenience or cause unintended offence to us, our fellow walkers or others. The Guide offers the kind of practical advice I would have found helpful when I began coming on and later leading group walks. The focus is on the well-being and enjoyment of everyone, presented as a combination of recommended good practice and points to consider. Although the language is generally prescriptive, they should be read as suggestions, not as instructions to be blindly obeyed regardless of the circumstances.

It is not possible to meet the needs of all walkers, from absolute beginners to the very experienced, equally satisfactorily in a single version like this. My guess is that you will get most from the Guide if you are considering doing walks more demanding than you are used to, or have been walking with led groups for no more than a year or so, or your previous walking has been mainly with family and friends or on your own. If, on the other hand, you have good experience of long walks on difficult terrain, as a group member or as a leader, you will probably find much here, especially early on, that you are already familiar with. Comment on previous versions has ranged from the welcoming – a useful codification of sensible advice – to 'what the [Guide says] is so obvious that [it is] unnecessary'.

Part One plunges straight into advice in, I hope, appropriate but not excessive detail. If, before reading further, you would like answers to questions such as – Why are there two separate versions of the Guide? What is the target audience? Who wrote it? How has it changed over time? Why *Appendix B*, on practical walking skills? – you should go first to *Appendix A*, on pages 10 & 11.

Part Two, about the impact of walking groups on the natural and the human environment. is much shorter than Part One, not because the topic is less important, but because much that might have been said will already be familiar to most readers, since the relationship between us – as individuals and as a species – and our environment, is a theme that in recent years has received much and everincreasing attention in newspapers, books, TV and other media.

PART ONE Within the group: considering your fellow members

1 CHOOSING AND PREPARING FOR A DAY WALK

1.1 THINGS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT Walks can differ in the distance to be walked; their pace, ranging from a gentle stroll to very fast; their degree of difficulty; and the (estimated) time to be taken. Reflecting this diversity, many providers publish information about how their walks are graded, and individual walks may then be given an overall grade, such as 'easy' or 'moderate' or 'challenging', sometimes with further divisions within these broad categories. Read this information carefully, and the provider's description and grade of the walk (or walks) you are thinking of perhaps coming on. If you seriously doubt whether you would be able to meet the demands of a walk, or are unsure whether you would enjoy it, don't come on it, as there is no point in coming on a walk you may not enjoy, or which fails to suit your ability or condition to such an extent that you may reduce the enjoyment of others. Once you are on a walk it may be too late to change your mind if it turns

*In addition to its other major benefits, the association, celebrated in ancient Greece and continuing to the present day, between walking and creativity (especially getting fresh ideas), and the contribution that regular walking can make to the preservation of mental and physical health and well-being.

out that you had succumbed to wishful thinking. Nobody should feel discouraged or insulted by this advice: it is intended only to help readers to avoid unnecessary pain and disappointment.

1.2 QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK AND THINGS YOU CAN DO If you are unsure whether a walk would suit you, don't hesitate to contact the leader beforehand, as they may be able to give you additional information, at least in rough outline, on features of the walk such as whether and to what extent it involves steep ascents and descents; any noteworthy features of conditions underfoot; and any special features (e.g. many stiles, route unsuitable for walkers prone to claustrophobia or vertigo). Do not, however, expect the leader to advise you whether you are fit enough and strong enough: this is something only you and those who know you well can judge. Or you could come first on an easier walk (or walks), see how you cope, and perhaps come on harder ones later on. Or you could try walking with a different Group, if there is one nearby, since Groups aren't all the same in the usual length, pace and degree of difficulty of their walks. Don't assume you can't change: if a leisurely walk suits you best now, but you are reasonably fit, it is likely that with planned preparation you would be able to enjoy more demanding walks in the future. Even if you are unfit, or have a serious physical disability, it is possible that, depending on where you live, you could find suitable graded walks starting near where you live which you would enjoy. They may be called Health Walks. Never forget that one of the best ways of improving your fitness for walking is by walking regularly – sometimes also carrying out appropriate exercises.

2 STARTING ON TIME There is normally a published start time for a walk, and it is usual to start punctually at this time, so try not to arrive at the starting place just as the group is about to set off. In planning your journey to the start, estimate your actual travelling time, and then add a buffer to provide leeway against unexpected delays on your journey, possible difficulty finding the place, and the time required for things like changing your boots/shoes, putting on raingear, or searching for a WC or *al fresco* alternative. If you will be driving or cycling to the start, you will also have to allow time for finding a place where you can park your vehicle (see also Part Two), and walking from that place to the starting point. As far as possible, aim to be ready for walking a quarter of an hour or so before the published start time. This helps to avoid a stressful last minute rush and gives you a chance to meet some of your fellow walkers in a convivial atmosphere before walking begins.

3 KEEPING UP AND DROPPING OUT If you are having difficulty keeping up with the group, speak to the leader, whose advice is likely to depend on the extent of your difficulty, ranging from reassuring you ('It's not that you are too slow but that the ones I've let go ahead are going too fast; I'll tell them to slow down'), encouraging you to persevere ('Don't worry, I can see you are doing your best, and we've only been waiting a few moments') to, in extreme cases, where you are repeatedly falling a long way behind, requiring, in the interest of your fellow walkers, that you should drop out unless you can keep up. If, however, no suitable dropout point is available at the time, and you can't keep up, you may have to continue walking with the group until such a point is reached, or even until the end of the walk. A different possibility is that, while on a walk, you may, entirely on your own, find yourself wanting to drop out. If this happens, you should first speak to the leader, who will be concerned for your safety. If, for example, you don't know the area well, the leader will probably be able to advise you whether there is a safe route you could take, on your own or accompanied by a fellow walker, back to the start, or to a point where you could catch public transport or summon a taxi. If you are unable to tell the leader yourself, perhaps because you are already some way back, struggling to keep up, you should ask your fellow walkers to tell the leader of your wishes at once, on your behalf, before you depart. Never drop out without telling anybody.

4 FALLING BEHIND

4.1 FALLING BEHIND (BUT NOT BADLY) If you are tending to fall a little behind the main group it helps if, when you rejoin them, you say to the whole group something like 'I'm sorry I've kept you waiting'. Small gestures like this are always welcome.

4.2 FALLING BADLY BEHIND If you find that you are falling so far behind that you lose sight of those ahead of you – easy on some terrain – make a point, when you eventually catch up with the main group, of asking how long they have been waiting. Do this because your estimate of how far you had fallen behind could be seriously wrong. You might guess they had been waiting less than a minute when they had actually been waiting for several. So don't just apologise: let them see that you appreciate their patience, and don't be surprised if the leader suggests that you should drop out (see section 3 above). And unless you are in real distress, don't expect the group to wait even longer before setting off again, especially if they have already been waiting for you for a long time or in unpleasant conditions such as extreme cold, heavy rain or scorching sun.

4.3 BECOMING DETACHED Problems can arise if you find yourself walking at the head of a sub-group that has fallen behind, or are on your own at the back, and lose sight of the walkers ahead of you on a route that includes junctions. There is then a risk that you will reach points where you might go the wrong way and so become totally detached. If you reach a junction of any kind and don't know which way to go, it's best to stop there and wait to be found – don't guess! (Usually you won't have to wait long.) This risk is reduced if members of the forward group make a point, when they reach a junction, of pausing and looking back until they are sure that the walkers behind them can see which way to go. Pausing, however, carries its own risk: members of the forward group who pause could thereby themselves become detached. In circumstances like this it is important to alert the leader at once, so they can reunite the whole group (see also sections 7 and 8 below).

5 OVERTAKING

5.1 DANGERS On most walks most of the time overtaking your fellow walkers is not a problem. But careless overtaking can cause accidents, so it's a good idea to strengthen your awareness of the risks so that, if you want to overtake, you are better able to judge whether you can do so without risking harm to yourself or others. The main dangers are falling, tripping, or colliding with other walkers, dogs or unseen obstructions. These risks are greatest on steep descents, if the path is narrow or dark or along a ledge, if you run, if the ground underfoot is loose, uneven, slippery or wet, or if the surface is covered with things like fallen leaves or long grass that may be hiding hazards such as stones, tiny stumps, suckers, roots or holes that could trip you up. So if you are considering coming past in circumstances like these, think carefully before you act.

5.2 WARNINGS AND COURTESIES If you would like to overtake the walker(s) ahead of you on a narrow and/or enclosed path, and it appears safe to do so, it is generally advisable and polite to ask first ('Could I come past, please?'), or at least warn them ('Passing you on your right'), and make sure they have heard and understood you before you make your move. If you meet other walkers and see that they have stopped to let you pass, show them that you appreciate their consideration. Likewise, if other members of your group, or perhaps another entire (and faster) group, are just behind you and safety permits, make a point of asking them whether they would like to come past. If for some reason you want or need to stop momentarily, always try to do so at a point where others can pass you safely. And don't be a queue-jumper: don't even think of overtaking when members of the group are coming together in line, preparing to pass over or through a stile, kissing gate or other bottleneck.

6 GOING AHEAD Don't walk ahead of the leader unless they have clearly indicated that they do not object. If they have given permission, but with conditions, don't set off unless you are sure you can accurately recall the conditions. If you then go ahead, wait at the first path/track junction you reach, unless the leader has already told you what to do, such as 'When you come to a T-junction, turn

left`, or `Where the path forks, bear right`, or `When you reach [a specified point], stop`. If you come to a junction and are uncertain which way to go, don't guess: stop there and wait.

If you are like me now and tend to fall behind on some terrain, but have good stamina, going ahead can benefit your fellow walkers, since whenever the leader calls a halt (eg for a brief rest or to regroup), you should be able, provided the leader agrees, to continue at your own pace without pausing, thus reducing the risk that you will cause a delay later on. (This suits me very well, as I tend to fall behind now when going up long steep hills.) It is a ploy that works best on straightforward or well-marked routes. It is a version of *pacing yourself*, which means, roughly, cultivating the ability to walk steadily, only adjusting your pace and style of walking (*sometimes abruptly, sometimes gradually, sometimes from moment to moment*) in response to significant changes in the terrain and conditions underfoot (*ice-covered, freshly-ploughed, rocky, wet grass, deep mud, peat bog, etc*), to the best of your ability (*your strength, your repertoire of walking skills, your deficiencies*), without ever rushing and with few stops (see also Appendix B on pages 11 & 12).

7 BACKMARKING Often, especially with a big group, the leader will want to have a backmarker. Walking at the back of a group, the backmarker's main responsibilities are to make sure no one goes astray and to alert the leader to incidents or difficulties. Also, happily rarely required, to do what they can to lead or assist individual stragglers, or a sub-group that has become seriously detached. Sometimes, by contrivance or happy accident, there will be a member of the group, a strong walker who is willing, is familiar with the route, and has with them a good map of the area, but at other times the leader may, before the walk begins, ask if somebody will take on the job. Don't volunteer unless you are confident that if necessary you could lead or assist, and that in an emergency you could get a message quickly to the leader, by relaying the message along the group or by yourself running to the front. (Or in some other way, but bear in mind that even if you shout `Tell [name of leader] to stop` as loud as you can, or blow a powerful whistle, local conditions may prevent your being heard – and mobile phone signals can be unreliable.)

8 STOPPING ON YOUR OWN If you wish or need to stop on your own for more than a moment, for a reason unrelated to your capability, such as responding to an urgent call of nature,* don't, except in an emergency, stop without first alerting the leader, who may decide that the group should carry on without you, leaving you to catch up on your own. The leader may, however, consider that everyone should keep together at that point, or call a halt for the whole group, perhaps for an extra comfort break, or so that all who want can, for example, take photographs or just to wait for you. If the group waits, give a signal when you are ready to resume walking. If you can't make the leader aware that you want to stop, tell the backmarker or, if there isn't one, some of your fellow walkers. This at least reduces the risk of your being accidentally left behind, which could delay the entire group. Never stop without saying anything to anybody.

9 WALKING POLES Keep it/them pointing down to the ground, or upwards with the tip(s) well above head height, n – g c – p n ng , but never backwards, when there is a risk of your pole(s) accidentally tripping up or injuring anyone walking close behind you.

10 JUDGING YOUR FELLOW WALKERS This is a sensitive and potentially embarrassing topic, but it must be faced, since we all tend to judge and are ourselves liable to be judged. Here are a few suggestions. If, as you and other walkers assemble before the start of a walk, you see one or more you haven't walked with before who are *apparently disadvantaged* (AD for short),† it is not surprising if you at first wonder whether they will be able to meet the demands of the walk, because many

*This 18th century euphemism is now regarded as somewhat old-fashioned, though another old polite expression – passing water – remains in use in several European countries. Nowadays,

when a leader calls a halt so that all who wish can have a pee (pass urine/micturate), it is often referred to as a comfort break. (Some still call it a piss stop.)

†The most clearly visible features that may mark a person as AD are being old, overweight or walking with a limp, the more so if the person is very old, very overweight or has a bad limp.

AD people do walk slowly and/or find steep ascents and descents difficult (even crossing over ordinary stiles). This is, however, a generalisation, and we should not automatically assume that this particular AD person (or persons) would be unsuited to this particular walk. If you are aged under about 35 and are new to walking in groups, you may at first be worried if you observe that a large proportion of the members of the group appear to be quite old. Try to suspend judgment, as you may find that they are all strong walkers. If you see that a fellow walker is in difficulty, try to ensure that the leader is aware, and perhaps ask the person if you can help them. And if there is anything in your own appearance or gait that could lead others in the group to suspect that you might be a liability, don't feel obliged to tell them all about it, and don't feel that you have to put on a perfect performance all the time. Instead, through your walking, show the group that you are usually able to keep up and that, if you did cause delays, they would be few and brief.

11 PAYING FOR MEALS This is a tricky topic and I know that in raising it I may offend some walkers. It is not a problem when walkers bring their own food and drink and consume it on their own or share it with others. With some Groups, however, it is customary for walkers to go together as a group, usually at lunchtime, to a pub, café or other establishment where each walker orders their own food and drink from a menu. Then, at the end of the meal, it may be suggested that the total bill should be divided equally among everyone present. Sometimes the suggestion will come from members of the group who had ordered and consumed more and/or more expensive items, or simply from people who, comfortably off themselves, had failed to realise that some of their fellow walkers might be less affluent and have to keep tight control of their spending. Any such suggestion should be immediately and firmly resisted. The alternative, where each walker pays their own bill, though more complicated and inevitably taking longer, is the only fair way of avoiding the embarrassment and resentment that dividing the total equally can produce.

12 LOSING THINGS If, while you are walking with a group, you become aware that you may have lost something and think it may have been lost in the course of the walk, the first and most important thing you should do is to check as best you can that the item really has been lost: that you had it with you on the walk, and that it is now truly missing and not just in a different place from where you thought it would be. If the item is important to you, try not to let your understandable concern distort your judgment. If, after checking, you are satisfied that the item is genuinely lost and you would like to go back to try to find it, don't do so without first seeking and obtaining the leader's permission. Before allowing you to set off in search of the lost item, the leader will have to consider the safety of the entire group, including you, and the impact on the group of any resulting delay.

The leader is more likely to agree to an immediate search if you know exactly where you lost the item; going back to find it would take no more than a few minutes; there are no hazards, forks or junctions on the way; any inconvenience affecting the rest of the group would be small (for example, members who were hoping to catch a particular infrequent train or bus at the end of the walk would not, as a result of the delay, risk missing it); and the item itself is important to you and/or of some value.* If the leader gives permission for an immediate search, this may be on condition that they, or another member of the group familiar with the route, comes with you. If, on the other hand, the leader decides that any retrieval attempt should not be immediate, you may want to go back after the walk has finished, later the same day or on another day, to fetch or search for the item, preferably accompanied by another member of the group who has agreed to help you. Before setting off, try to speak about your proposed attempt with the leader, as they may be able to make helpful suggestions, and should be able to give you exact details of the route.

* Whether it is your smartphone or a handkerchief, your prescription sunglasses or your picnic lunch, your walking pole(s), your expensive watch, your credit/debit cards, your waterproof j c , y u p u / , y u c ...

13 DOGS ON WALKS

13.1 A PROBLEM THAT WON'T GO AWAY The problem is rooted in the inherent discord between two enduring states of affairs: (1) Dog owners sometimes want to bring their dog(s) with them on walks; and (2) If all owners were allowed to do this and the dog(s) were totally uncontrolled, sooner or later some would be bound to inconvenience, endanger or harm other walkers, other people, or birds and animals encountered along the way. So it's not surprising that opinion on the topic is divided, which has given rise to a kind of cold war, with many and varied local truces, some only precariously secure. There are also complicating factors: the difference between well- and badly-behaved/trained dogs and owners; the risk of unwanted incidents being much greater on some walks than on others; the diversity of legal and other regulatory requirements, both local and national; and every provider seeming to have its own policy, ranging from an almost total ban, via a myriad of regulatory options, to welcoming almost all dogs without restriction. All the same everybody seems to agree that dogs can come on walks only if the provider has resolved, as a matter of policy, not to impose a universal ban; and that, where no universal ban is in place, it should be made as easy as possible for owners to find out whether dogs can come on a specific walk; and, if so, what they may have to do to obtain permission, and whether there are conditions they may have to meet.

13.2 PRACTICAL ISSUES If you want to bring a specific dog on a walk, check the published details, and if they say you have to contact the leader in advance, do so well before the day of the walk. You may be asked to satisfy them on points such as these: that you appreciate that they may sometimes give you warnings or directions concerning you and your dog and that, if they do, you must be willing to comply at once, without protest (at least at the time); that you will always keep it in sight and are able to control it if it shows signs of wanting to damage growing crops or to run at, chase, attack, injure or otherwise disturb livestock, birds, reptiles or other animals; that it won't interfere with or endanger your fellow walkers, workers on the land, or others in the areas where we walk (see also Part Two below); that you understand when to keep it on its lead;* that you have (or will obtain) an insurance policy for it that provides adequate third party liability cover; and that you will be able to observe all relevant legal and other requirements. (such as on the collection and disposal of your dog's poo/faeces). Everything in this section applies to all dogs, except that the UK's Equality Act 2010 grants special rights to owners of Assistance Dogs (dogs officially registered as having been trained to help people with serious disabilities). The effect of the Act is that, within the UK, even where a universal ban has been imposed, Assistance Dogs may sometimes be allowed. Further practical advice about dogs on walks can be found in the *Countryside Code* (England and Wales), the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code*, and on the Ramblers website under 'Walking with Dogs'.

14 CRITICISM AND COMPLAINTS Constructive criticism, praise, suggestions and general comments on a walk are seldom a problem: most leaders and providers welcome them, since they encourage improvement and are likely to please them. But what if things go wrong and you believe the leader, by their actions or omissions, is responsible, or has said or done something which, in your opinion, is improper or unwise or unsafe? If you are uncertain what to do, you may find it helpful to consult your fellow walkers. If you decide to raise the matter with the leader, it is preferable to do so face-to-face, as soon as possible and in private. It is tempting to wait until the end of the walk, but this can be difficult, as it's the time when members of the group are likely to be saying their farewells to one

another and thanking the leader. Emailing the leader immediately after the walk is another possibility, perhaps raising the matter as a question, as a suggestion, or even as an apology and/or by mentioning things you enjoyed before you make critical comments. Approaches like this can also

*Experienced owners know it is impossible to always get this right. A leader may, for example, know an area well, but not well enough to be able to give a timely warning to the group when it is getting close to a place that is home to ground-nesting birds or members of a protected species. Cases like this encourage adoption of the default position of keeping dogs under total control, except when there are clear and convincing grounds for relaxing the requirement.

help to avoid your giving the impression that you are just a complainer. Or you may decide to do nothing, for the reason that most leaders are dedicated unpaid volunteers and normally imperfect human beings, most of whom deserve to be cherished and appreciated. The reason for focusing on leaders here is not that many are incompetent or irresponsible but that, because many day walks are conceived, developed and then led by a single person, it is inevitably that person who tends to be the target for criticism if any walkers are dissatisfied, as well as getting the credit when all goes well. (In a safety emergency you will of course ignore the advice in this section, since immediate intervention may be essential.)

PART TWO External impact: considering the natural and the human environment

So far the Guide has been concerned mainly with practical advice about how to behave when we are walking in a led group, trying to be good members of the group and not to endanger, harm, inconvenience or unintentionally offend the other members of the group: not with a different, related and undoubtedly more important matter, the effect we can have on the natural environment and on our immediate human environment: local residents; farmers and others making their living on the land; people using the same paths and tracks as us; people who run places providing shelter and refreshment; and other visitors to the areas where we walk. Groups should aim to leave the environment as it was (or better), and not to endanger, inconvenience, unintentionally offend or to other living creatures, wild, domestic or farmed. Much advice on good behaviour is provided in the *Countryside Code* (England and Wales) and the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code* (and similar documents produced in other countries). The Scottish code in particular is very substantial, with over 130 pages of detailed guidance. Both codes are regularly updated and both are readily available. Summary versions of both are also available.

EXAMPLES OF ADVICE ON GOOD BEHAVIOUR

If we are a big and/or strung out group, about to cross a busy road at a designated place where pedestrians have priority, don't all cross at once unless there is a lull in the flow of traffic. At bottlenecks such as stiles, kissing gates and narrow enclosed paths, be ready, when safe and convenient, to allow individuals and small groups we meet to pass ahead of us, especially if we are a big and/or strung out group that will take time to pass.

Be ready to exchange friendly greetings with people we meet while we are walking.

When walking downhill, give way to people walking uphill.

When a group passes through a gate, it should be left as found, unless there is a notice that says something different. So normally, if found open, leave it as it is; if found closed, shut it when we have all passed through. Hence it is essential to ensure that the last walkers through, often the ones who will have to shut it or leave it open, know how it was before the group arrived.

It can be hard to do this if a group is big and/or has become very strung out. Where this is the case it is better if the leader – or someone else who has been going on – pauses by the gate and makes sure that appropriate action is taken.

Don't interfere with people at work, and be ready to pause, such as when farm animals are being gathered or moved on roads or on farmland.

Slow down or stop for horses being ridden along roads, tracks or bridleways.

If we are on a right of way crossing a golf course and see nearby players about to play a stroke, stop to let them do so before moving on.

Resist any temptation to damage or remove crops, plants, items of value or of local or archaeological interest.

Don't offer food of any kind to birds or animals – , c p c – n` b ng to you, unless their owner or keeper has given you permission . (There may be reasons, not known to you, that make such a ban desirable or even essential.)

If we see a farm or domestic animal in distress, try to alert the owner or other local person.

When walking on footpaths, try to avoid treading on any crops growing alongside them.

Remove or cover dirty footwear before entering pubs, hotels, museums, or other places whose floors may be carpeted and/or that may wish or need to keep their floors clean.

Don't consume your own food or drink within, or in the grounds of, any eating or drinking establishment, unless the establishment has given you permission.

Don't use (non-public) WCs or washing facilities in hotels, pubs, shops, etc, without first making a small purchase or requesting and being given permission.

Don't pollute ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, or other sources of clean water, with waste from washing, cooking or cleaning, or with pee/urine.

Passing poo/faeces. At places where neither WCs nor earth closets are available, find a remote spot, at least 100 metres from paths or tracks, and from ponds, streams, or other sources of clean water; much further from human dwellings or campsites. Then be like a cat and bury or securely cover what you have produced. Try to leave no trace!

Bring all your refuse away with you: cans, bottles, boxes, wrappings and plastic; also food waste and anything that takes a long time to decompose such as toilet paper, face tissues, orange peel and banana skins. Always carry a bag or other suitable container with you to put such things in. Failure to observe this and related advice (as above) can cause harm to livestock, birds and other animals, can spread disease, pollutes the environment and is unsightly.

Many people coming on organised day walks get to the start using their own car or bicycle and then want to be able to leave their vehicle where it will be safe and won't interfere with or disadvantage others. If walkers take all the usual parking spaces, or park in a way that can cause an obstruction, this can have bad consequences, interfering with farmers moving animals or their own farm vehicles; with public and emergency service vehicles; and with other vehicle users, such as people patronising local pubs and restaurants, local residents coming to church services, and people taking part in or attending events being held at local schools or local sports or leisure centres. When future walks are being publicised, the information provided should include details of places where walkers' vehicles can be left without causing inconvenience or creating a danger to others. This can require greater restraint than just being "No Parking" signs on areas designated for use only by defined users, such as pub customers or worshippers.. All walkers should aim to minimise the risk that their own parking could create a problem, even if this means leaving their vehicle some distance from a walk's designated starting point.

If members of a group walking in an area fail to act in accordance with advice like this (and the advice about dogs in section 13.2 above), they may be seen as showing a lack of respect for the people who live and work there, which could damage the reputation of walking groups generally, to the disadvantage of later groups coming to the area.

Walking groups should, as far as possible, take account of relevant features of the local economy in the areas where we will be walking; traditions, customs and beliefs widespread among the people who live and work in these areas; and the meaning of any signs and symbols we encounter. Imparting awareness of these matters to the members of a group is one of the more difficult tasks of a leader. (Fortunately the need to do so seldom arises on day walks in the UK.) Two examples: a leader may divert the planned route of a walk to avoid interfering with a traditional and/or crowded event taking place where we would usually be free to walk, and may consider an alternative where recreational walking at certain times or on certain days is contrary to local custom, such as on Sundays in some parts of the Scottish highlands and islands.

APPENDIX A – About the Guide

WHY TWO VERSIONS? The reason is that the circumstances of day walks and walking holidays are significantly different, so any serious attempt to deal adequately with relevant topics in a single version of the Guide would be bound to fail. The danger is that such a joint version would be both confusing and irritatingly long-winded. And the more closely advice was tailored to the specific circumstances, the greater the risk. (You can compare the two versions and judge for yourself.) Some sections are identical, but overall there are hundreds of differences, large and small.

WHO IS IT FOR? This version is mainly for people coming on – led day walks, chiefly within the UK, on routes that the leader knows, but which may be new to some or all of the group.* The providers of most walks are the geographically-based *Groups** of the main national walking organisations (the Ramblers Association, usually known as ‘the Ramblers’; and the Long Distance Walkers Association, usually known as ‘the LDWA’); other local and national clubs and societies; and organisations concerned with promoting health and fitness. (If you are coming on led day walks outside the UK, you may still find most of the Guide relevant.)

HASN’T EVERYTHING IN IT BEEN SAID BEFORE? There is a seemingly endless supply of advice, much of it sound, through books, magazines and other media, on how to improve your general state of health, how to build up your fitness for walking, and on the health benefits of regular walking. Guidance is also available on how to plan and lead walks; and on the implications of physical and sensory disability and chronic illness for many kinds of physical activity, including walking in led groups. But I have found hardly anything that examines relevant topics from the Guide’s distinctive angle. Also largely unavailable is written instruction on developing practical walking skills, and the Guide includes a short section (Appendix B) on this topic, and the probable reasons for this absence.

WHO WROTE IT? Man, now quite old (93). Lucky to be alive. Convinced that regular walking has helped to enhance and maintain physical and mental health. For many years a participant in walking holidays at home and abroad and a leader and participant in serious day walks at home. [Confession: *The last ten words are no longer true. I still walk regularly, but haven’t done any long or challenge walks since 2019 or led any walks since 2020, and all recent walks have been short (seldom more than six miles). Why? In part because of the pandemic and the standard terms of insurance for walk leaders. But the main reason is the wear that comes with age. Most changes are not reversible. And every species has its range of typical lifespans, varied but always finite and never enormous, and the maximum for our species is not much over 100 years, for most of us substantially less, and I can count.*] Why have I gone on about my age? Because I want to encourage others to walk, and never to think that just because you have reached a certain age you are too old to begin walking – or to continue. After a long gap, I didn’t resume serious walking till I was about 60. Since then I have walked regularly, mainly with LDWA and the Ramblers. I didn’t do my first marathon-length walk till 1999 and went on, with huge enjoyment, to do more than 100 over the next twenty years. (Bear in mind that a moderate amount of strenuous exercise [except when judged medically unsafe], far from hastening the body’s ageing, can have the opposite effect.) Responsible for any and all errors and poor judgments in the

Guide, which expresses my own views, developed from feedback on earlier versions, discussion with other walkers and leaders, and my own experience.

*In this Guide, 'Group' – with capital 'G' – refers to one of the local branches among which the members of national walking organisations are distributed (for example, the Kirkcaldy Group of the Ramblers, the Norfolk & Suffolk Group of the LDWA), while 'group' – with a small 'g' – refers to the walkers coming on a specific walk on a specific day.

COULD IT BE CHANGED AGAIN? I hope it will be. As mentioned above, this is not the first version and I don't expect it to be the last. My knowledge, judgment and imagination are limited and fallible, so any feedback that could help to improve it will be welcomed, especially comment on content, presentation or emphasis, and suggestions for topics to be added or removed. I am grateful to readers who have commented on earlier versions. (For how to leave feedback, see foot of page 12.)

APPENDIX B – Practical walking skills

This brief Appendix is not about the sort of advanced walking skills that involve the use of such technical aids as ropes, ladders, pitons and pulleys. If that's what you want, read no more.

There is a marked lack of advice or instruction, in hard-copy print or other media, on developing the skills needed for dealing effectively and safely with, for example, steep ascents and descents; mud, sand and scree; and crossing terrain such as bogs, streams, snowfields and rockfields. Putting it another way, if you are keen to learn and seek media support, you will find little or nothing on such topics as using your hands, your eyes and your ears; using walking poles effectively (and the pros and cons of using two, one or none); taking steps of different kinds (short or long, slow or fast, high, sideways, etc); taking a standard route or short cuts or extra loops; ascending/descending directly or in zigzags; dealing with unplanned difficulties, such as finding that you have departed from your intended route; preparing yourself for walks of varying length or degree of difficulty, in order to reduce the risk that you will have problems while you are walking or afterwards; and, as far as possible, dealing promptly and effectively with anything which, while you are on a walk, might afflict you and could, to a greater or lesser extent, diminish your ability to continue walking comfortably, or could even delay or inconvenience the whole group. And accidents can happen, so of course you need to do what you can to reduce the risk by being exceptionally careful on, for example, steep descents or near cliff edges. The key point is that problems and accidents can cause delay or inconvenience, and can even in extreme cases ruin an entire walk for you and your fellow walkers. (There are a few exceptions to media silence on practical issues. There is, for example, much sound advice on reducing the risk of blisters, and on what to do if you get them, and many walkers will have found this advice helpful.)

In part the absence of media advice or instruction may be because some practical walking skills are easy to learn or are seldom required, but the main reason is probably that the easiest and most effective way of acquiring and improving many practical skills is through regular and repeated practice, with the personal example and active support of established practitioners: in the case of walking, from experienced fellow walkers ('learning by doing' not 'learning by watching'). Many experienced walkers are, however, blind to the extent to which they have acquired new skills, and such walkers tend to be less effective as mentors or role-models. This is in marked contrast with the experience of breathing – in respect of *breathing*, something else that, like walking, we have also been doing all or almost all our lives. They are made aware, both during their professional training and afterwards, that

they have to acquire, and should strive to perfect and retain, new breathing skills, and never forget them.

This brief Appendix has been primarily about acquiring and improving the practical skills involved in walking with and leading organised group walks. Most walks do not require special equipment, only suitable clothing and footwear. But if you want to explore new areas on your own, or to develop new walks that you could later lead, especially if the terrain is complicated or challenging, you could consider preparing yourself by taking a course and learning how to use maps, compass and GPS confidently. This is likely to involve a combination of book learning (or the equivalent), some supervised practice, and practising on your own or with a companion, the aim being to make your walking more enjoyable and safer for yourself and your fellow walkers. Suitable courses, free or inexpensive, are run or sponsored by walking organisations and other bodies. And never forget that while ascending requires physical effort, can be exhausting, but is usually relatively safe, descending is usually less physically demanding but much more risky and can be dangerous.

LAST WORD

We are warned against accepting gifts from strangers and to be wary of gifts that, for no good reason, suddenly appear. This Guide, bursting with unasked for free advice, is clearly caught by one or both of these warnings and should be handled with care, especially by those who do not know me. I am aware that the tone may be considered too demanding, that few readers will agree with all my suggestions, and that it would in any case be impossible to act in accordance with all of them all the time in all possible circumstances. All the same, I hope you have found at least something here that will enhance the joys and diminish to some extent the inevitable occasional irritations and disappointments experienced by yourself, your fellow walkers, and everyone you affect or come in contact with, directly or indirectly, through your walking.

I think that, viewing the Guide as a whole, two closely related points emerge. First that, as an objective, walking considerately is just as important as walking competently, the former fairly uniform in its requirements, the latter subject to wide variation, since walks can differ so much in the nature and extent of the demands they make on the skill, strength and stamina of walkers (as outlined with examples in sections 1.1 and 1.2 of Part One and in Appendix B). Secondly, that there is no necessary inconsistency or conflict between walking considerately and walking competently, in part because these objectives are intertwined in ways that make it impossible to separate them completely.

ENJOY YOUR WALKING!

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