

# The Considerate Walker

A Brief Guide to good behaviour on led group walks:

## DAY WALKS

Two versions of the Guide are available. The other one is for *WALKING HOLIDAYS*.\*

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\*To request a copy of the *Walking Holidays* version of the Guide or to leave feedback, see foot of last page (page 11).

## **WHAT THE GUIDE IS FOR – and other things you should know before you read on**

Walking in led groups should be a friendly, healthy and safe activity that can offer everybody 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 can contribute to everyone's enjoyment; but sometimes, alas, we do things that can endanger, harm, inconvenience or cause unintended offence to us and our fellow walkers, and can even sour the atmosphere within an entire group. The Guide offers the kind of practical advice that I – the Guide's author – would have found helpful when I began coming on and later leading group walks. The focus is on the well-being and enjoyment of us and our fellow walkers, 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.

I know that the Guide is attempting the impossible: to appeal to and meet the needs of all walkers, from absolute beginners to the very experienced, in a single offering. My guess is that you will get most from it if you are considering doing walks that may be more demanding than you are used to, or you are new to walking with led groups, or your previous walking has been mainly with family and friends or on your own. Whereas if you have good experience of long walks in difficult terrain, as a group member and/or as a leader, there is probably little in it you aren't already familiar with, and you may find some parts of it tediously elementary. Comment on earlier versions has ranged from the welcoming – 'a useful codification of sensible advice' – to the dismissive – '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 – What, mainly, is the Guide's target audience? Why are there two separate versions, for day walks and for walking holidays? Who wrote it? Why and how has it changed over time? Why Appendix B, on practical walking skills? – you should go first to Appendix A: About the Guide (on pages 9 & 10).

Part Two, about the impact of walking groups on the environment, including the human environment, is much shorter than Part One. This is because much that might have been said in it will already be familiar to most readers, since the complex relationship between us – as individuals, as Irish/ Mexicans/Gujaratis, etc, and as a species – and our environment, is a theme that in recent years has received much and ever-increasing attention in books, newspapers, TV and other media.

## **PART ONE Within the group: considering your fellow walkers**

### **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 spent walking. 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 'strenuous', 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 have serious doubts about 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

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\*In addition to its other major benefits: the association, celebrated in ancient Greece and continuing to the present day, between walking and creativity, and the contribution that regular walking can make to the preservation of mental and physical well-being.

reduce the enjoyment of others. Once you are on a walk it may be too late to change your mind if it turns 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 should 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; noteworthy features of conditions underfoot (e.g. much mud, some badly rutted footpaths); 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 a harder one later on. On a different tack, you could try walking with a different nearby Group, 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 more than 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 supported by 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 point 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 safely and considerately, and to walk from that place to the designated 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 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 you can't, and no suitable dropout point is available at that point, you may have to struggle on until such a point is reached, or even remain with the group 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 ever happens, speak to the leader without delay before you do anything.

#### **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 make a difference.

**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 asks you to 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's important to alert the leader at once, so they can reunite the whole group (see also section 8 below).

## **5 OVERTAKING**

**5.1 DANGERS** On most walks most of the time overtaking 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 or 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 or uneven or 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 – easier said than done – 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 others 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 through or over a kissing gate, handgate, stile 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, however, you come to a junction and are uncertain which way to go, don't guess: stop there and wait.

If you are like me 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 to catch up and then, provided the leader agrees, 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 nearly always fall behind now when going up 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 gradually, sometimes abruptly, 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 capability (*your strength, your repertoire of walking skills, your deficiencies*), without ever rushing and with few stops (see also Appendix B).

**7 BACKMARKING** Often, especially with a big group, the leader will want to have a backmarker. Walking at the back of the 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, a member of the group may be available, a strong walker who knows the route as well as the leader, but at other times the leader may, before the walk begins, ask if somebody else will take on the job. Don't volunteer unless you are confident that, if necessary, you could lead or assist and/or 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 a reason unrelated to your capability, such as responding to an urgent call of nature,\* don't, except in an emergency, stop without first trying to speak to the leader, who may decide that the group should carry on without you, leaving you to put on a spurt and catch up. The leader may, however, consider it essential that everyone should keep together at that point, or decide to call a halt for the entire group, perhaps for an impromptu comfort break, or so that all who wanted could, for example, take photographs or look at wildlife or flowers. If you can't tell the leader, tell the backmarker or, if there is no backmarker, some of your fellow walkers. Telling reduces the risk of your being accidentally left behind, which could delay the entire group. So – *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, or even – with great care – pointing ahead, 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 since we all tend to judge, and are ourselves liable to be judged, it must be faced. 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 only natural

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\*This 18<sup>th</sup> century euphemism is now regarded as somewhat old-fashioned, though another old expression, passing water, continues to be used in several European countries, and some walkers still call it a piss stop. Nowadays, when the leader calls a halt for the whole group so that all who wish can pass urine (micturate), it is commonly referred to as a comfort break.

†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.

if you find yourself wondering whether they will be able to meet the demands of the walk. Why so? Because many AD people do walk slowly and/or find ascents and descents difficult. 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 surprised and worried when you discover that in many groups a large proportion of the walkers are in the 50+ age range. Try to suspend judgment, as you may find that they are all strong walkers. If you see that a fellow walker who is AD is in difficulty, try to ensure that the leader is aware, and perhaps ask the walker if you can help. 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 about it, and don't feel that you have to put on a perfect performance all the time. Instead try to show, through your walking, that you should be 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 where 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 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 needed 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.\* Where 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

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\*Whether it is your prescription sunglasses or your picnic lunch, your smartphone or a handkerchief, your walking pole(s), your waterproof jacket, your expensive watch, your camera, your wallet/purse, your credit/debit cards . . .

setting off, try to speak about your proposed attempt with the leader, as they should be able to give you exact details of the route of the walk and may also make helpful suggestions.

### **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 their dogs 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, and that this 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 great difference between well- and badly-behaved/trained dogs and owners; the risk of unwanted incidents being much greater on some walks than on others; what the law has to say; 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 everyone 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 whether there are conditions they may have to meet.

**13.2 PRACTICAL ISSUES** So 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 a warning or direction concerning you and your dog and that, if they do, you must 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 birds, livestock or other animals; that it won't interfere with or endanger your fellow walkers or other people; that you understand when to keep it on its lead;\* that you have an insurance policy providing adequate third party liability cover; and that you will be able to meet all your legal obligations as its owner. Everything in this section applies to all dogs, except that the UK's Equality Act 2010 grants special rights to the 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 must normally 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, since most leaders (and providers) welcome them: they encourage improvement and is 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 a difficult time for such a conversation, when members of the group may be saying their farewells to one another and thanking the leader.

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\*Experienced owners know it's 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 that 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 a default position of keeping dogs permanently under total control, except where there are clear grounds for relaxing the requirement.

Emailing the leader immediately after the walk is another option, perhaps raising the matter as a question or suggestion, or even as an apology, and/or by not making your critical comment(s) until after you have offered some favourable ones. Or you may decide to do nothing, for the good reason that leaders are only human: most are dedicated unpaid volunteers who should 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 inevitable that that person tends to be the target for criticism if any walkers are dissatisfied, as well as getting the credit when the weather is kind and all goes well. (In a safety emergency you should of course ignore the advice in this section, since immediate intervention may be essential.)

## **PART TWO External impact: considering the environment (including other people)**

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 trying not to endanger, harm, inconvenience or unintentionally offend the other members; not with a different, related and undoubtedly more important matter: the effect we can have on the environment, including our immediate human environment – in particular local residents, people using the same paths/tracks our group may be using, farmers and others making their living on the land, people who run places providing shelter and refreshment, and other visitors/tourists. Groups should aim to leave the environment as it was (or better), and not to endanger, harm, inconvenience or unintentionally offend other people. Some aspects are covered by the advice on good behaviour in the *Countryside Code* (England and Wales) (as updated from April 2021), the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code*, and similar offerings in other countries.

### **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 we are 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 a gate 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 walking at the front – pauses by the gate and makes sure that appropriate action is taken.)

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.

Don't offer food of any kind to birds or animals – farm, captive or domestic – that don't belong to you, unless their owner or keeper has given you permission to do so. (This is because 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.

Don't damage or remove crops, plants, stones or items of local or archaeological interest.

Remove or cover your dirty boots or shoes before entering museums, pubs, hotels and other places 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 clear permission.

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

Don't pollute streams or other water sources with waste from your washing, cooking or cleaning, or with your urine.

Passing poo/faeces. Find a suitably remote place, at least 100 metres from paths, tracks, ponds, streams or other water sources; much further from human dwellings or campsites. Then be like a cat and bury or securely cover what you have produced and leave no trace.

Bring all your refuse away with you, not only cans, bottles, boxes, wrappings and plastic, but also all things that can take years to decompose, such as your toilet paper, Kleenex-type face tissues (of any colour), orange peel and banana skins. Always carry a bag or other convenient container with you to put them in. Again, leave no trace. Failure to observe this and related advice (as above) pollutes the environment, is unsightly and can spread disease.

If a group walking in an area fails to take account of advice like this, its members may be seen as revealing their lack of respect for the people who live and work there, thereby tending to damage the reputation of walking groups generally, to the disadvantage of later groups coming to the area.

Walking groups should also, as far as possible, take account of local customs, practices and beliefs; relevant features of the local economy; and the meaning of any signs and symbols we encounter. This is important, since failure to do so can cause offence and/or harm. Imparting awareness of these matters can be one of the more difficult tasks of a leader. Fortunately this challenge seldom presents itself as a problem to leaders of day walks within the UK. A couple of examples: a leader might divert the planned route of a walk to avoid interfering with a traditional and/or crowded event taking place in an area where we would usually be free to walk; and might consider an alternative where recreational walking on certain days of the week is known to be contrary to the customs, practices or beliefs of many of the people who live there.

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## **APPENDIX A – About the Guide**

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

**WHY TWO VERSIONS?** Because the circumstances of day walks and walking holidays are significantly different. For this reason any serious attempt to deal adequately with relevant topics in a single ver-

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

sion of the Guide would be bound to fail. The danger is that 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 danger. (You can compare the two versions and judge for yourself.) Some sections are identical, but overall there are hundreds of differences, some of them big.

**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 maintain and enhance your fitness for walking, and on the health benefits of regular walking. Guidance is available on the implications of physical and sensory disability and chronic illness for many kinds of physical activity, including walking in led groups; and on how to plan and lead walks. But I have found little 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 subject and the probable reasons for this absence.

**WHO WROTE IT?** Old man (now 91). Lucky to be alive. Convinced that regular walking has helped to enhance and preserve physical and mental health and fitness. For many years a participant in walking holidays at home and abroad, a leader and participant in day walks at home, and still doing long walks. *[Confession: The last sentence is no longer true. I haven't led any walks, long or short, since early 2020; I haven't done any organised (walking) marathons since 2019; and all recent walks have been short. Why? In part because of the pandemic and the terms of the insurance policies held by the national walking organisations. But the main reason is almost certainly normal wear and tear: every species of living things has its range of typical lifespans, very varied but always finite and never enormous, and the maximum for humans is not much over 100 years, for most of us a good deal less. And I can count.]* Responsible for any and all errors and poor judgments in the Guide, which expresses own views, developed from feedback on earlier versions, discussion with other walkers and leaders, and own experience.

**COULD IT BE CHANGED AGAIN?** I hope it will be. As mentioned above, this is not the first version and I don't intend 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 11.)

## **APPENDIX B – Practical Walking Skills**

There is a marked lack of advice or instruction in 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 snowfields, rockfields, bogs and streams. 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 or one or none); taking steps of different kinds (short, long, slow, fast, high, sideways, etc); taking a standard route or short cuts or extra loops; ascending/descending directly or in zigzags; fine-tuning your route; dealing with unplanned difficulties, such as finding that you have departed from your intended route; preparing yourself for walks (of any length or degree of difficulty), 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. (There are a few exceptions. There is, for example, much sound advice in the media 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 this absence of media advice or instruction may be because some practical walking skills are easy to learn or seldom required, but the main reason is probably that the easiest and most effective way of acquiring most practical skills is through practice ('learning by doing'), with the personal example and active support of established practitioners – in the case of walking, from experienced fellow walkers. Many walkers are, however, blind to the extent to which they have acquired new skills, and such unaware walkers are likely to be less effective as mentors or role-models. This is in marked contrast with the experience of professional singers – and many actors too – in respect of *breathing*, something else that, like walking, we have 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 it.

### **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. I know 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 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 section 1.1 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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