

# The Considerate Walker

A Brief Guide to good behaviour on led group walks:

## WALKING HOLIDAYS

*Two versions of the Guide are available. The other one is for DAY WALKS.\**

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\*To request a copy of the *Day Walks* version of the Guide or to leave feedback, see foot of last page (page 12).

## **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 walking holidays where the walks may be more demanding than you are used to, or you are new to walking holidays or 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 (or treks) in challenging 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 walking holidays and for day walks? 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 10 & 11).

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 WALKING HOLIDAY**

**1.1 THINGS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT** Individual 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, and all the big ones, publish information about how their walking holidays are graded, and individual holidays are typically given an overall grade, such as 'leisurely' or 'moderate' or 'challenging', often with sub-divisions within these broad categories. Read this information carefully, and the provider's description and grade of the holiday (or holidays) you are thinking of perhaps coming on. If you have never been on a walking holiday before, give due weight to two big differences between them and day walks: you would have to be able to walk day after day, usually with no gaps in between; and if you found you could not cope, the price you would have to pay – not only in money terms - would be much greater.

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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 improvement and preservation of mental and physical well-being.

If you have serious doubts about whether you would be able to meet the demands of a holiday or are unsure whether you would enjoy it, don't book on it, as there is no point in coming on a holiday 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. 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** If you are fit and a regular walker, then, depending on the kind of walking you are used to, you should need no additional preparation before coming on many walking holidays. But if you are unsure whether a particular holiday would suit you, don't hesitate to contact the provider beforehand, as many will be able to give you additional information, at least in rough outline, on key features of the holiday's walks, such as whether and to what extent steep ascents and descents are involved; whether some walks would be unsuitable for walkers prone to claustrophobia (along narrow enclosed paths, through tunnels, etc) or vertigo (along ledges, alongside steep drops, contouring in hilly terrain, etc); whether scrambling is likely to be required; whether there are things like rivers or snowfields to be crossed; and noteworthy features of conditions underfoot (e.g. much walking on sand dunes or on very uneven surfaces). Don't expect the provider to advise you whether you are fit enough and strong enough: this is something only you and those who know you well can judge. If, however, you tell the provider the sort of walking you are used to, they may be able to suggest whether additional preparation on your part would be advisable or even essential.

**1.3 THINGS YOU CAN DO** If you are finding it hard to assess your fitness and strength, you may be able to choose an easier holiday. Alternatively, you could consider doing things first that will provide a comparable challenge on a smaller scale. For example, before choosing a holiday that would involve walks much longer than you are used to, perhaps try coming on some long day walks near where you live. Or for a holiday that could involve many long steep ascents and descents in a foreign country, arrange to come on a suitably strenuous walking weekend in a hilly or mountainous area of the UK. Don't assume you can't change: if a lower graded holiday 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 walking holidays in the future. If you are unfit, or have a serious physical disability, don't rush to disqualify yourself from all walking holidays, but recognise that preparing yourself, where (perhaps) possible, will be hard work, may take longer, and that success is not guaranteed. And never forget that one of the best ways of improving your fitness for walking is by walking regularly – sometimes supported by appropriate exercises.

**1.4 A PERSONAL EXAMPLE** Over twenty years ago, already quite old – then in my late 60s – I decided I would like to do a fairly strenuous trek in the Himalayas that would involve ascents to around 5,000 metres. I didn't want to let myself down and, more important, wanted to minimise the risk that I would be a problem for my fellow walkers. Although I regularly did long walks in hilly terrain, I judged that serious preparation would be prudent, and for the first time in my life I joined a gym. The gym I went to was local and well-equipped (and not expensive), and I carried out personal training programmes there, several times a week, for over a year. The trek itself? I was lucky. As expected it was hard work at times, but I had no problems: a delight from start to finish that left me with many happy memories.

**2 STARTING ON TIME** Every day the leader will inform you, or agree with you, precisely when the group will be setting off the following day from the hotel, refuge, camp site or other place where you are spending the night. You are the only person who can judge how long it will take you to get ready, and hence when you need to rise – all-day walks generally start soon after breakfast – to ensure that you will be ready in good time and won't keep the rest of the group waiting.

**3 KEEPING UP AND DROPPING OUT** If you are struggling to cope with the grade of the walks and 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, 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 the other members of the group, that you should not walk again with the group unless you are able to keep up. On a holiday where a choice of walks of different grades is offered every day and you have been attempting the higher graded walks, the leader may advise or insist that you switch to a lower grade. 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 of asking, when you eventually catch up with the main group, 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 no more than a couple of minutes when they had actually been waiting – an extreme but true example – over a quarter of an hour. So don't just apologise: let them see that you appreciate their patience, and don't be surprised if the leader raises with you the question of whether you should continue to walk with the group (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 lose sight of the walkers ahead of you when you are walking at the front of a sub-group that has fallen behind, or are on your own at the back. The position is worse if the route includes junctions, as there is then a risk that you may go the wrong way and so become totally detached. If you reach a junction 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 7 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 you come to a junction and are uncertain which was 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, to do what they can to lead or assist individual stragglers or, happily rarely required, a sub-group that has become seriously detached. If no local guide or *de facto* deputy is available, the leader may, before a walk begins, ask if someone else is willing to 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 it 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

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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.

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, at the start of a holiday, when you and the other members of the group gather together – often the first time you will have met one another – you see one or more who are *apparently disadvantaged* (AD for short),\* it is only natural if you find yourself wondering whether they will be able to meet the demands of the walks. 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 holiday. If you are aged under about 35 and are new to walking holidays, you may at first be surprised and worried when you discover that on many holidays, including some higher graded ones, 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 about eating together at lunchtime and again in the evening. It is a tricky topic and I know that in raising it I may offend some walkers. It is not a problem where all meals have been included in the set price of a holiday, or where each walker brings their own food and drink and consumes it on their own or shares it with others. With some providers and on some holidays, however, it is customary for the whole group to be taken by the leader to a restaurant or other eating establishment where each member has to order their food and drink from a menu, and then, at the end of the meal, there may be a suggestion 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 on a walk, 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

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\*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.

would be. 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. If the item is important to you, try not to let your understandable concern distort your judgment. 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; 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 someone else familiar with the route, comes with you. If, on the other hand, the leader decides that any retrieval attempt should not be immediate, but that an attempt would be safe and feasible, they may agree to your going back after the walk, later the same day or on another day, to fetch or search for the item, either on your own or, more likely, with them or another person chosen or approved by them. In either case the leader should be able to give you exact details of the route of the walk and may make helpful suggestions.

**13 TOKEN SNACKS** If, when there is a pause in a walk, you offer your fellow walkers things like trail mix, dried fruit or a local delicacy, try not to miss anybody out, especially the leader, any local guide(s) and any support staff. This, however, may not be feasible on holidays where the group is accompanied by a large support team. Where this is the case, you will have to use your judgment, doing your best not to offend anybody.

#### **14 DOGS ON WALKS**

**14.1 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 walking holidays, and then with them on the actual 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, 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 great difference between well- and badly-behaved/trained dogs and owners; the risk of unwanted incidents being much greater on some walking holidays than on others; what the law has to say; and the difference between the policies of different providers. All the same everyone seems to agree that dogs can come on a walking holiday only if its 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 holiday and, if so, what they may have to do to obtain permission for a specific dog.

**14.2 PRACTICAL ISSUES** If you may want to seek permission, read on. Even if the provider does not ban all dogs – and most do, especially on walking holidays outside the UK – they will need time to obtain information and assurances from you, and to consult the leader of the holiday, before they can give a decision on your request. You may be asked to satisfy them on points such as these: that you appreciate that the leader may sometimes give warnings or directions 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

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

or to run at, chase, 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 will be able to arrange suitable overnight accommodation for it; and, *for all relevant countries*, (i) that you will be able to ensure that all requirements, both legal and medical, are satisfied, and (ii) that you have (or will obtain) an insurance policy providing adequate third party liability cover. All this makes it essential that you check with the provider in good time, and *always* well before you make a firm booking.† Everything in this section applies to all dogs, except that the UK's Equality Act 2010 grants special rights to the owners of registered Assistance Dogs (dogs officially registered as having been trained to help people with serious disabilities). The effect of the Act is that, on walking holidays 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'.

**15 LOCAL GUIDES** On some holidays (chiefly overseas) there will be both a leader and one or more local guides. If a guide says or does something that concerns you, don't, except in a safety emergency, intervene or criticise the guide directly. Instead, speak to the leader as soon as convenient.

**16 CRITICISM AND COMPLAINTS** Constructive criticism, praise, suggestions and general comments on a holiday, usually put together after you get home, are not a problem, since most providers (and leaders) welcome them. They encourage improvement, seldom require an instant response and are likely to please them. If, however, you have concerns about the holiday, how best to raise them will depend on their seriousness and what they are about: whether they relate to the leader, the group, your accommodation, meals or other refreshments, extra costs, the structure of the holiday, the provider's prior description, local guides, the walks themselves, the situation in the country/ies being visited, or something else again. Sometimes it may be more effective if you begin with questions or suggestions, or even with an apology, and/or if you don't make critical comment(s) until after you have offered some favourable ones. If you are uncertain what to do, you may find it helpful to consult other members of the group and/or to seek the advice of the leader. Your options range from deciding to do nothing to contacting the provider at once. (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. This includes our effect on our immediate human environment, in particular local residents; farmers and others making their living on the land; people using the same paths/tracks as us; other visitors/tourists; and the many people, seen and unseen, we encounter and/or depend on when we are eating, drinking,

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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 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 a default position of keeping dogs permanently under total control, except where there are clear grounds for relaxing the requirement..

†The formalities involved in bringing dogs from the UK into the EC area are now very different and more complicated than hitherto, and can take up to four months. So you may need to begin preparing much longer in advance than you may be used to.

retiring for the night, walking (of course) and all the other things we may do as members of a walking holiday group. 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**

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 come past.

When we are walking downhill, give way to people walking uphill.

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

Look out for, and try to learn the meaning of, signs and symbols we may be expected to act on.

When groups pass through gates, they should be left as found, unless there are notices that say something different. So normally, if found open, leave open; if found closed, shut once we have all passed through. It is essential to make sure 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 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.)

Don't interfere with people at work, such as when farm animals are being gathered or moved.

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

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

Don't make a loud noise near where people live or are working.

Take great care not to lose control of fire.

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

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 good reasons, not known to you, that make such a ban desirable or even essential.)

Remove or cover your dirty boots/shoes before entering museums, restaurants, hotels or 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, bars, 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: 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 to members of a group on some walking holidays can be one of the most difficult tasks of a group's leader. (Fortunately this seldom presents itself as a problem to leaders of walking holidays 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.

To illustrate the importance of awareness, here is an example (not recent) of harm caused by a group I was a member of on a walking holiday in a developing country. In some of the villages we passed through, next to cultivated plots, there were straight narrow dry flat-bottomed channels, usually between one and two feet wide, with low earth walls, along which, as I later learned, a fixed quantity of scarce communal irrigation water was released at set times. We treated these channels, which looked like footpaths, as though this is what they were: we walked along them, and as a result some of their earth walls inevitably got damaged. Until the damage was noticed and the walls repaired, some of the allocated water will have been unable to flow to the right places, depriving growing crops of the water they should have received. On this occasion, as well as displaying our ignorance, we had been unobservant, unimaginative and poorly led by an otherwise excellent leader. Incidents like this must dismay the owners of affected crops and tend to colour how they regard foreign visitors, especially visitors like us ('tourists') from rich countries.

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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 – guided walking holidays like those offered by UK-wide providers such as Exodus, Explore, HF Holidays and Ramblers Walking Holidays; local clubs and societies; and the local *Groups*\* of national walking organisations: the Ramblers Association ('the Ramblers') and the Long Distance Walkers Association ('the LDWA'). They are holidays, in the UK and abroad, where a *group*\* of people, who will often never have met one another before, come together to walk on routes that the leader (and/or a local guide) usually knows well, but which will typically be new to all or most of the group.

**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 version 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.

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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 holiday in a particular area on particular dates.

**HASN'T EVERYTHING IN IT BEEN SAID BEFORE?** There is a seemingly endless supply of practical 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 more than 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. Not written on behalf of any provider or other organisation.

**COULD IT BE CHANGED AGAIN?** I hope it will be. As indicated 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 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**

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), 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. (There are a few exceptions. There is, for example, much 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 and 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.

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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