



HILL WALKING

INTO THE HILLS

A guide for new hill walkers



CONTENTS

The Great Outdoors	3
The British Mountaineering Council.....	4
YHA (England & Wales).....	5
How to start hill walking	6
All Abilities Walking.....	8
Be aware of the risks	9
Your day in the hills.....	10
Clothing and Equipment.....	12
Kit Lists.....	20
Choosing a map.....	21
Navigation.....	22
Hazards.....	26
Access and the Environment.....	32
Staying overnight.....	36
Emergency Procedures	38
Our Campaigns: Protecting the spaces we love	40
Next steps: learn more with the BMC	42



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THE GREAT OUTDOORS

The wild places of Britain have something for everyone. Walking can benefit both your physical and mental health, it can provide a space for solitude or a place to connect with others, bringing people together.

You don't need to spend thousands on specialist equipment, there are no entrance fees, no winners or losers – just yourself, your family and friends, enjoying the freedom and adventure that the hills and mountains provide.

Despite its simplicity, there are some things you need to know to get started. The upland areas can be hazardous places but a little bit of knowledge goes a long way. It is important to be prepared with

some basic equipment to enjoy hill walking as safely as possible.

This booklet is intended for those who are relatively or completely new to hill walking. It aims to highlight some of the most important things to know and provide a reference for learning the skills in more depth. If you develop your skills incrementally and build on past experience, you can minimise risks and enjoy exciting and inspiring days in the hills.





THE BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

The BMC is for everyone who loves the mountains and for those who are keen to discover them for the first time. We are proud to champion the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers and, with the support of our 80,000 members, are fighting to protect the outdoor environment so that people of all backgrounds can pursue their own adventures - both now and for future generations.

We campaign for freedom of access and the right to roam, we fund footpath repairs and run campaigns to clean up our hills and we lobby the Welsh and UK governments to pass outdoor friendly legislation, continually working for improved access to places we love.

Since 2016 our flagship Mend Our Mountains campaign has raised over £1 million to prevent environmentally harmful erosion by supporting the repair of paths, bridleways and bridges which underpin our experiences in the great outdoors.

By rallying walkers, climbers, outdoor users, businesses and charities behind this cause, we

have funded vital path repairs in all of our national parks and on iconic peaks including Scafell Pike, Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon), the Yorkshire Three Peaks, the Munros of Scotland, the moors of Exmoor and Dartmoor, and the South Downs Way.

From tips on how to get started, opportunities to get involved, or if you're ready to take your passion to the next level – visit <https://hillwalking.thebmc.co.uk/> to find out more and join the growing movement of people discovering the hills and making their voice count.

Members also get superb benefits like a subscription to the BMC's magazine Summit, a 10% discount in over 700 outdoor shops, and access to BMC travel insurance specifically tailored to hill walkers.

To see the range of membership options, go to <https://hillwalking.thebmc.co.uk/get-involved-membership>

If you have any hill walking-related questions, or any suggestions for what the BMC could do better for hill walkers, please send them to office@thebmc.co.uk



YHA (ENGLAND AND WALES)

YHA operates hostels all over England and Wales. We provide inclusive adventures, in extraordinary buildings, in amazing places. Yet we offer much more than quality accommodation.

YHA is a leading social enterprise and a 90-year-old charity on a mission to enrich the lives of all — but especially young people — by improving physical health, mental wellbeing, and life skills through the experiences we create.

With its network of hostels offering doorstep access to England and Wales' most beloved tracks and trails, YHA has

been the walker's friend for almost a century. We are open to all and for the benefit of everybody.

By staying with us, becoming a member, donating to our charitable work or volunteering with YHA, not only will you feel the benefit, but you'll help us continue to break down barriers to participation and connect more people to the outdoors, nature, culture and heritage.

We are YHA. Because where you go changes who you become.



HOW TO START HILL WALKING

There are many ways to get into hill walking. With no single or 'right' route in, the best way is the way that suits you! Start at the level you are already at from urban walking to lowland trails, just getting moving is a great way to begin enjoying walking and all the physical and mental health benefits that come along with it. When you're ready to take the adventure up a notch, here are a few ideas to get you started.



ASK A FRIEND

Many hill walkers make their first adventures with an experienced friend or family member. If you know someone who walks regularly, why not ask to tag along on their next trip?

JOIN A CLUB

Clubs are a great way to meet new people and learn some skills. With over 250 BMC affiliated clubs in England and Wales, there is something for everyone. Take a look on the BMC website to find your next adventure. Fast friends and fun-filled weekends guaranteed!



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JOIN A GROUP

There are hundreds of groups dedicated to getting people outside and enjoying the uplands. Have a search online to find a group you think you'll like and don't be afraid to mix and match.

BMC TRAINING ESSENTIALS

For BMC members, Training Essentials offers skills training courses at a reduced price. Delivered by trusted instructors handpicked by the BMC and the Association of Mountaineering Instructors, the courses can be tailored to individual and group aspirations. The courses act as a springboard to set you up with the skills and confidence you need to take on your next great hike.



Take a look at what's on offer to see if there is something for you.

HILL AND MOUNTAIN SKILLS COURSES

Kick start or reboot your adventures with a Mountain Training skills course – they're a good excuse to spend two days in the hills or mountains, getting to grips with navigation and becoming independent, as well as exploring somewhere new. Whatever your motivation for getting outdoors, it's never too early or too late to get some input from a professional. Courses are delivered by approved providers across the UK and Ireland.



Find out more about Mountain Training's Hill and Mountain Skills courses:

ALL ABILITIES WALKING



Adaptive equipment, all abilities walking groups and growing lists of accessible routes are all opening up the countryside to more visitors than ever. Take a look at the information below to find out more on how to get out and enjoy the hills:

- Search Miles Without Stiles for accessible walking routes
- Ramblers guidance on walking with a disability or health issue:



For more information

Independent Sites with more advice and guidance

- Experience Community is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company that provides films and information about walks and other leisure activities for disabled people and the wider community. They have a number of walking routes with short videos demonstrating the terrain so that you can plan ahead and know what to expect.



For more information

- Accessible Countryside for Everyone (ACE) provides information and promotes accessibility to leisure in the countryside of England – primarily aimed at those with mobility issues, their carers and families.



For more information

BE AWARE OF THE RISKS

The hills and mountains contain a range of hazards, from steep ground and rock fall, to hypothermia and heatstroke. Hill walking in winter brings its own risks, like avalanches and whiteouts. Managing these risks boils down to having the right level of skill and experience relative to the difficulty and seriousness of your adventure. An important part of developing your mountain awareness is judging whether your own skills are sufficient for whatever you are planning. Accidents can happen due to circumstances out of your control, such as rock fall, and first aid training can make all the difference in these events. All hill walkers should be familiar with basic emergency procedures, as outside help will always take time to arrive. Check out the 'Emergency procedures' chapter on [page 40](#) for more information.

Overcoming risk can be a hugely rewarding experience in itself and learning to manage risk in the mountains can help you deal with it better in everyday life. It can also teach you profound lessons about yourself, other people, and your own abilities – the biggest lesson of all being you are often capable of more than you realise.



YOUR DAY IN THE HILLS



Planning your route and getting familiar with it will help set you up for an enjoyable day in the uplands. Many people get caught out overestimating their ability, or not giving enough thought to the walk they are undertaking.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Transport

It is important to consider how you will get to and from the area you want to walk in, as well as factors such as the last bus or train home or parking arrangements. Using public transport is a great way to reduce emissions and can free you up to do point-to-point walks as well as circular ones. If you do prefer to drive, why not consider sharing lifts with friends and family, or even putting your journey on the BMC's Lifshare page where you can share rides with other BMC members.



Check out the BMC's Lifshare site to share a ride with another hiker



MAKE YOUR GOOD DAY BETTER.

#BeAdventureSmart ask yourself 3 questions before you set off

Am I confident I have the right knowledge and skills for the day?

Do I know what the weather will be like?

Do I have the right gear?

Not sure? Read on or find out more on the Adventure Smart website



Weather

Mountain weather can change very quickly with sunshine and blue skies giving way to torrential rain and mist. General weather apps often don't account for changing conditions in the mountains. Forecasts designed specifically for hill and mountain users are available for popular areas and can be accessed online, often completely free (see the 'weather section' on [page 30](#) for more information). Some local shops and tourist information centres in the area you are visiting may also display the forecast for the day.

Timing

It is important to consider the length, elevation and terrain of your walk which will all contribute to the time it takes to complete [page 24](#) for more information on pacing). Factor in time for breaks, and the walking pace of everyone in your group. Don't be afraid to be generous with the amount of stops you make. You might consider stopping after a steep climb for example, or at a viewpoint. On beautiful days it can be amazing to have lunch at the top of the hill, but be aware that wind and rain at the summit can be a lot stronger than lower down, so you might want to choose a more sheltered spot when the weather isn't so nice.

Planning your route

Lots of great routes can be found online and in guidebooks. Take a look at the area on your map and spot any places you might wish to incorporate into your walk; a pub or a café, for example, a wild swimming spot, a waterfall, stone circle or a viewpoint. Get creative and tailor the day to you! Guidebooks are a great way to plan your day, as they provide information on transport, route descriptions, difficulty levels, and a sense of what to expect. Good ranges to start with are Cicerone, Collins Ramblers or Trailblazer. There are also lots of websites providing route information but be aware that not all information online is reliable.

Once you know where you want to go you can plot your route onto the map. You might like to circle key spots on the map, draw a line along the paths you are taking with a pencil, or use an app like OS Maps which has a plotting tool built in. Apps also allow you to see elevation, and walking distance. Be aware however, that the time estimates for walks made through the app aren't always accurate and it is good to have an idea of how long you and your group take to walk, especially along uphill stretches.

Some people also like to photocopy and laminate the section of the map they are using (but still keep the big map in your rucksack in case you walk off route!) so that they can easily be accessed and kept in a pocket.

ON YOUR WALK

Map and compass skills

Assisting lost walkers is one of the most common reasons for mountain rescue call-outs. Whilst technology like GPS and phones can help you know where you are, they can't make route choices for you. Being able to use a map and compass is a key skill, but as with all techniques it requires practice to become proficient. [Page 22](#) contains more information on navigation skills, but if you are a complete beginner it is always a good idea to practice navigation in lowland areas first and move on to bigger challenges as you gain confidence. You may also choose to seek help from someone whether it be a friend, club member, group leader or training provider.

Being prepared: bad weather and nightfall

Remember that a forecast is only a prediction, so your clothing needs to be versatile, providing protection from the wind and rain. On hot days use sunscreen, long sleeves and a wide brimmed hat to protect from heatstroke. After the sun sets, far away from towns and streetlights, it will be very dark in the mountains. Mountain rescue teams are often called out to assist walkers stranded in the dark who would have been able to walk off themselves if they had remembered to pack a torch, so always bring one along. There are lots of other useful things to pack to help prevent bad conditions in the mountains from turning into an emergency situation take a look at [page 19](#) to see what else we recommend.

BE FLEXIBLE

If you feel you are getting tired or out of your depth, are encountering worse weather than expected, or simply running out of time, then it's no failure to turn around or to find the quickest and easiest route down the mountain. Being flexible and using your judgement is a key skill and can help to keep you happy and safe in the hills.

CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

There is not much gear that is vital, and on many lowland walks in fair weather the clothing and shoes you already have may be enough to keep you comfortable, warm, dry and safe. But it is important to have the appropriate equipment for the route and activity you have chosen and the weather forecasted. It is better to carry things you might not use, than to not have what you need when it comes down to it.

Kit and equipment can be expensive so building up what you have slowly might be the way to go. Borrowing from a friend is a good place to start. You can also search for a 'library of things' in your local area, where community owned items can be borrowed. Items on offer vary, but if you're lucky, you may be able to source some gear for your next walk.

To save money and the planet buying second-hand is always a good option. Facebook groups such as Outdoor Gear Exchange have heaps on offer, and you can also find some absolute steals on eBay and in charity shops.

For second-hand gear using reproofing, such as Nikwax (which you can buy from outdoors stores), in your wash can help to give them a new lease of life by restoring the waterproof layer that helps to keep you dry.

If you do decide to buy new don't be afraid to ask for help in the shop, the people working there will be able to support you with getting the right kit for you. BMC members can get 15% discount with our recommended retailers

Cotswold Outdoor and Snow+Rock, and with our recommended clothing and pack partner Montane, as well as a range of discounts at lots of other outdoor retailers



BMC Member Discounts

Remember that each time you wash your waterproof it can strip away its proofing- washing it less and if possible using a cleaner designed for use with outdoor clothing when you do wash it, will help to maintain its effectiveness.

As a minimum you will need:

- Comfortable shoes or boots with a good grip
- Insulating layers to keep you warm
- Waterproofs to keep you dry

FOOTWEAR

Choose shoes that are comfortable and provide good support. No footwear is perfectly suited for all seasons and terrains. A lightweight summer shoe would leave you with cold feet in winter, while winter mountaineering boots on a hot sunny day could give you overheated and blistered feet.

Walking shoes and trainers are great on lowland valley tracks, but when hiking up hills or mountains, on steep or uneven terrain, boots with good support and grip will be a much better option.

Boot construction varies a lot and affects how soft or firm a boot feels. Summer boots tend to have more flex than winter boots. When walking on bare rock a soft sole can mould to the uneven surface. For this reason, summer boots can feel more comfortable. However, a boot with a more rigid sole can grip small edges better, so would be a better choice for scrambling.

A useful way to gauge how much support a boot will give is by twisting it. Holding the heel in one hand and the toe box in the other see how easy the boot will twist. The easier it twists the less support the boot will provide on steep, uneven terrain or steep grassy slopes. But if you prefer to walk along well-defined paths with gentle inclines, a softer boot may be better for you.



Some boots can be used for summer and winter walking. But whatever you choose, make sure the boot is appropriate for the most demanding conditions you plan to walk in.

Everybody is different and the most important thing is to choose something comfortable which helps you to feel safe and stable when you walk. A good outdoor retailer will be able to help you find the right boot for your activity and foot shape. Try the boots on with your own walking socks to make sure you are getting the right fit. Many shops will let you take the boots home for an indoor trial and return them if they are not quite right. Walking up and down a flight of stairs is a good way to decide if your foot is firmly held.

It's important to break in new boots, wear them for local walks and around the house. Your first long walk will break them in properly. The stiffer and heavier they are, the more breaking in they will need. Be aware of any points where rubbing occurs. If you find your boots are rubbing, stop and apply a plaster and some tape or a blister plaster to help prevent hot spots and blisters from developing. It is not uncommon to get rubbing on the first couple of walks in your new boots, but this should stop once they are worn in.



WATCH:
Know your hill walking footwear

SOCKS

Socks can make a big difference to the comfort of your feet on long walks, and help prevent blisters too. When shopping for walking socks consider extra padding around rub points (such as toes and heels), the thickness, and sweat wicking properties. Choose whatever is comfortable for you and ensure they allow enough room around your feet so they don't get cramped inside your boot. Some people like to wear two pairs of socks consisting of a snug thin inner one and a thicker outer one. This system can reduce friction on your feet, as the sock layers will move against each other instead of your feet moving against the sock.

INSULATING LAYERS

The range of temperatures experienced in one day will often be greater in the hills than in the cities, so pack some layers that will help you to stay comfortable throughout this variation. It is a good idea to consider the weight of your rucksack when packing for the day, so try to find clothing options with more than one function to save on space and weight. Waterproofs can double up as windproofs for example.

You may already own clothing that fits the bill. You'll need something light and comfortable while you walk, something warm for when it gets colder and something waterproof in case it rains. It is better to wear several thinner layers than a single thick one, the layers trap air between them which is a good insulator and also allow you to regulate your temperature more easily by putting on or taking off layers.

Materials that do not absorb moisture are better because wet clothes can make you feel cold. Wool has always been recognised as a good material for hiking. Synthetic materials such as fleece are also used for outdoor clothing. Cotton however is not so good, since it dries very slowly, and jeans are particularly cold when wet.

Most people already have some suitable

insulating layers before they start hill walking, such as a thin wicking base layer and light woollen midlayer. The baselayer should wick moisture away from your body, and so keep your skin dry and prevent excessive chilling each time you stop. As well as providing insulation, a thin midlayer also allows moisture to wick. Fleece jackets are excellent as a third insulating layer.

All these layers should be relatively snug on your body. If too tight they will be uncomfortable, but if loose and baggy then instead of trapping warm air you're likely to have cold drafts instead. Leg muscles produce a lot of heat when you walk and thermal leg wear is only necessary in cold conditions.

Finally, for very cold days in winter, it can be worthwhile to invest in a warm jacket made with synthetic insulation or down. This will likely be too warm to wear on the move, but is perfect for keeping you warm when you stop or rest. Placed over all your layers it will prevent heat escaping as your body cools.



WATCH:
How to use a layering system



WATCH:
Stay cosy with the right hat and gloves

HEAD AND HANDS

On cold days, a hat or balaclava and scarf or neck gaiter will reduce the heat lost through the head and neck.

Fleece is probably the most popular material as it is light and flexible, and can be wrung dry if it gets wet.

On hot sunny days, a sun hat and neckerchief will protect the head and neck from sunburn and overheating. If the body absorbs more heat than it can dissipate then you could get heatstroke (aka hyperthermia or sunstroke), which is a serious medical condition with which you would struggle to get back down the hill.

In summer at least, you won't need specialised gloves. A simple pair of woollen gloves or fleece gloves will usually be fine. But in winter it is advisable to have a two or even three-layer system for gloves – a pair of windproof fleece gloves, a chunkier waterproof mountaineering glove to go over the top and finally some big toasty mittens for when your hands get really frozen. Packing spares adds very little weight but can be invaluable.

WATERPROOFS

A waterproof outer layer of jacket and trousers will help to keep you dry, and in combination with your insulating layers will prevent any dangerous reduction in body temperature.

Most modern waterproofs are made from breathable fabrics allowing body moisture to escape, whilst keeping the rain out. Non-breathable fabrics do not let perspiration escape, so you can get increasingly damp as the day wears on.

The ideal hill walking jacket should be big enough to get warm layers underneath, but not so big that it flaps around. It should have an easily accessible pocket that can accommodate a map, and large pockets for carrying hats, gloves and so on. Waist and hood draw-cords, and adjustable wrist closures help to seal out the weather and retain warmth. A stiffened hood

will provide good visibility and prevent your hood from flapping over your face in the wind.

Waterproof trousers will help to keep your whole body dry. You'll need to be able to pull them on and off while your boots are on, so make sure there are zips down the sides.

Gaiters can be invaluable on boggy ground and rainy days. They also prevent vegetation from entering your boots. In winter, gaiters are indispensable for keeping snow out of your boots and preventing your feet from becoming wet and cold. If worn with waterproof trousers, wear the gaiters underneath, not with the trousers tucked in, or water will be channelled into your boots.



WATCH:
Know your different outdoor jackets



FOOD AND DRINK

Having plenty of food and drink to power you through your day is super important and making good choices on what to bring will help you feel good throughout your hike. Low blood sugar is a common cause of accidents in the outdoors. A drop in energy can cause you to become tired and unsteady. Make sure that you carry enough food for your day, snack regularly and bring along some emergency food like high energy bars tucked away 'just in case'.

The amount of food and drink required will vary depending on weather conditions, distance and terrain walked. You do not need to take any 'specialist' food; sandwiches, snacks and some fruit will work fine.

A good breakfast will set you up for a day's walk, and whilst out, consuming little and often is the best way to keep hydrated and maintain your energy.

When it comes to drinks bring lots of water to stay hydrated, if you are going on a longer walk or multiple days you might consider a water filtration device or water purification tablets, so that you don't need to carry all your water and can protect yourself from any pollutants. If you do choose to do this, ensure that the area you are walking has access to fast flowing rivers/streams along the route. Even if using a filtration device, you should avoid drinking from stagnant water.

In cold weather, a hot drink in a thermos is a nice addition to your pack and will help you to stay toasty and warm in the hills.



RUCKSACK

A rucksack is the most convenient way to carry your equipment. There are many different sizes to choose from but when moorland walking for a single day, a 30-litre rucksack should be fine. If heading to the mountains and taking more equipment a 45-litre rucksack would be better.

When full, the rucksack should distribute the load evenly and be comfortable to wear. It should sit close to the wearer's back, allowing an upright posture to be maintained, and not restrict the movement of the head. All walkers should consider their own back anatomy in relation to the rucksack they choose.

Some rucksacks are designed with all bodies in mind but you can also buy some specifically designed for the male or female anatomy for whom the shoulder-waist-hip ratios are often different. Some rucksacks come with adjustable back panels to fit different sizes. Taking time to find the right pack for you with the features you want is always a good idea and will help to keep things comfortable and practical when out and about.

A slim rucksack with no side pockets is less likely to get caught on obstructions. Compression straps along the side of the rucksack allow a slim profile to be maintained, and can be used to secure walking poles when not in use.

Finally consider how to pack your rucksack. Regularly used items should be easily accessible in the lid pocket, side pockets, or top of the rucksack. Heavy items, such as water bottles or thermos flasks can be packed close to the back in the middle portion of the rucksack. Light items, such as fleece clothing, can be packed further away from the back of the rucksack. Distributing weight in this way will result in better stability when walking. Packing kit in a selection of drybags is the best way to prevent it getting wet, and can help you easily identify and access specific items. On rainy days especially, not having to expose all your kit to the elements at the same time makes life much easier. Carrier bags can be used as a cheaper alternative to drybags.



WATCH:
Choosing A Rucksack



WATCH:
How to pack a rucksack



SKIN AND EYE PROTECTION

A cooling mountain breeze on a hot sunny day can easily lead to the assumption that there is little chance of getting sunburn, but this is far from true. If the sun is out, applying sunscreen and lip-salve in advance and then regularly throughout the day is the way to go. Be aware that you can still get burnt on an overcast day. When spending time outdoors, it's always a good idea to apply sunscreen.

Sunglasses are always a great choice on a sunny day, they'll help you to see more clearly and you will also feel more comfortable as you look out across the view. In winter it can also be important to bring eye protection. In certain weather conditions it can become hard to move around and even lead to snow blindness. This is a reversible condition caused by unprotected eyes being exposed to UV light reflected from the snow, and is akin to part of the eyes being sunburnt.

At certain times of the year midges can ruin a great day out on the hills but having a good bug repellent can help to stop them from biting. The most effective repellents contain DEET; however, DEET has implications for the environment, and can even damage plastic equipment and clothing. Even so, if you are going somewhere where the midges, or other biting insects, are likely to carry disease it is recommended to use it regardless. Otherwise you may choose to use another more environmentally friendly repellent. Alongside repellents use a midge net and cover up to keep them off you. When stopping or resting, using a midge coil, citronella or incense sticks can help to keep them away; just be careful of flames or sparks which can cause moorland, forest and grass fires, and never leave them burning unattended.

WALKING POLES

After a day out on the hills, aching knees (especially on the descent) are very common. Poles can transfer some of the impact of walking from the lower legs and knees to the arms and shoulders. Poles also help with stability, which can be particularly useful when carrying a heavy rucksack, walking on uneven ground, or in winter when patches of ice can occur unexpectedly.

Getting the technique right is important, so take a moment to practice before getting out on the hills to take full advantage of their support. Check out the 'How to use walking poles' video on the teamBMC YouTube channel to nail your technique.



WATCH:
How to use walking poles

Remember that wrist, shoulder and elbow joints are not designed to prop up your body and we can end up aggravating other joints in an attempt to protect our knees. If you are very tired and don't need the poles for stability, it may be best to pack them away if there is a chance of tripping yourself up on them.

Poles can be a worthwhile investment for anyone who walks regardless of age or mobility as they will help to protect your joints. You can find lots of second-hand poles online, so have a think whether this might be something you could benefit from.

EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT

Whilst emergencies are a rare occurrence in the hills, there are a few pieces of equipment that can make a massive difference if they do happen.

First Aid Kit

If injury or illness happens in the hills, help may not always be close at hand. Having a first aid kit and understanding how to use is an important skill to have and seeking out some basic first aid training can make a real difference.

Torch

It is not uncommon for mountain rescue teams to assist able-bodied walkers off the hills who have simply got caught out after dark. Whether underestimating how long a walk will take, or getting lost and staying out for longer than planned, heading back home in the dark does not need to be a reason to panic if everyone has a torch. A headtorch is best, and many inexpensive models are widely available. Always take a torch and make sure you also have spare batteries.

Bivi Bag and Group Shelter

Made from tough polythene, a bivi bag provides individual shelter in case of an emergency. They are effective and inexpensive but can help to keep you warm and protect you from the elements should anything happen. If you are going out in a larger group, bringing along a group shelter could also be a good idea. Though more expensive than a bivi-bag, many people can fit in a group shelter with their warmth shared. They can also be good to bring along with your bivi bag, using them together will help to keep you warm and safe.



Mobile Phone

Mobile phones can make a real difference when needing to contact the emergency services, but should not be thought of as a 'safety net'. Phones often lose signal in the hills and can easily become lost or damaged. It is a good idea to take one regardless but be aware of other places along your route where you might be able to get signal or access a landline.

The Emergency SMS service can help you to call for help when signal is intermittent. Though signing up is simple, you should do so before leaving for your walk.: www.emergencysms.net/.

Whistle

A whistle is a great way to attract attention – the international distress signal is six blasts in quick succession, repeated after a one-minute interval. Flashing your torch in a similar manner will also be recognised as a distress signal.

Watch

Time flies when you're having fun, so keep track of it. You'll also need it if you time navigation legs.



WATCH:
Emergency packing for hill walking

KIT LISTS

Here we have listed the ideal range of items, but remember, if you are just starting out, using what you have and making sure it will help keep you safe, healthy and comfortable is the most important thing.

- Map and compass
- Torch
- Rucksack
- Food and drink
- Emergency food
- Mobile phone
- First aid kit
- Walking boots and socks (or suitable shoes for the level of walk)
- Comfortable shorts/trousers
- Wicking baselayer
- Insulating midlayer
- Fleece jacket
- Waterproof jacket
- Waterproof overtrousers
- Toilet Pack (toilet roll, spade, zip-lock bags)
- Your choice of period products

Depending on the weather:

- Sunhat/sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Hat and scarf
- Gloves/mittens
- Warm insulated jacket

Consider these items depending on the weather and level of walk. If you are able to get your hands on some of these things easily, it might be a good idea to pack them anyway. But if you're building up your kit slowly, prioritise the list above and work towards gaining access to the items below either by sharing with friends or family or owning your own.

- gaiters
- Insect repellent
- Spare gloves
- Spare socks
- Whistle
- Bivi bag
- Group shelter
- Trekking poles
- GPS device
- Personal locator beacon



CHOOSING A MAP

Having a good map and knowing how to use it is an essential skill for walking.

The development of quality mapping apps such as OS maps can be a great way to get started, as well as a valuable route setting aid, but these shouldn't be relied upon on their own. If your mobile gets damaged, loses signal or the battery dies you might find yourself becoming lost very quickly. The section below offers some recommendations for good physical maps to bring with you and the following four pages have some tips for navigation. Remember that road map apps like Google Maps or CitiMapper should never be used for walking as these don't have the detail required to navigate safely.

The main providers of outdoor maps in the UK are the Ordnance Survey, Harvey British Mountain Maps published in collaboration with the BMC, and Harvey Superwalker.

ORDNANCE SURVEY

The Ordnance Survey produces two ranges of maps for hill walking – the 1:25,000 Explorer series and 1:50,000 Landranger series. The larger scale of the former is better for complex navigation, the latter for a more general overview.



Both are commonly available in outdoor shops, or can be bought via the Ordnance Survey website



BMC members save 10% on OS Maps Premium annual subscription

BMC BRITISH MOUNTAIN MAPS

Made in collaboration with Harvey Maps, our British Mountain Maps are 1:40,000 scale and are designed to be weatherproof, convenient to handle, and convey the most relevant information to walkers. BMC members can buy them at a discount.



See the full range in the BMC shop

HARVEY MAPS

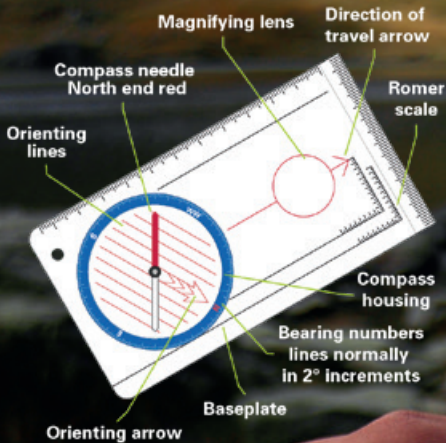
This independent map-maker produces its own range of 1:25,000 maps, the Harvey Superwalker series, which cover Britain's key walking areas. Like the British Mountain Maps, they are made specifically with walkers in mind, so can be relied upon to be robust, relevant, and up-to-date.



For more information

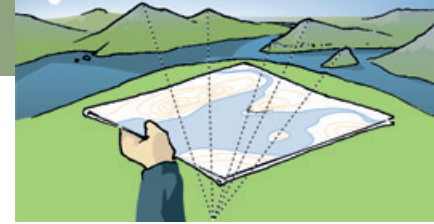
NAVIGATION

Effective navigation not only helps to make you safer on the hill, it can also mean a better day out. Developing navigation skills incrementally on less serious hills in good weather will make it easier to progress when you take on more challenging adventures.



THE COMPASS

The compass is used for finding direction, measuring bearings and distances on the map and for following magnetic bearings when walking. A hill walking compass will have a large baseplate to make it easier to handle and take bearings, as well as a number of other useful features.



SETTING THE MAP

This involves positioning the map so that all the features are lined up, with your location as the central point. What is in front of you on the ground will be in front of you on the map, what is to your left on the ground will be to your left on the map, and so on.

It does not matter if the map is upside down, as you do not need to read the text. Instead, you need to read the map symbols, lining them up with the features you can see. Rotate the map to keep it set when you change direction. In good visibility you should be able to set the map by eye, using obvious features such as a hill top or major track junction.

In poor visibility, you can set the map by lining up the compass needle with any of the north/south grid lines. Make sure that the north end of the needle, which is often painted red, points towards the top of the map, otherwise you will set your map 180° in the wrong direction!

WALKING ON A BEARING

With the magnetic bearing set, hold the compass close to your chest with the direction of travel arrow on the compass pointing forwards. Whilst looking down onto the compass, rotate your body until the north end of the magnetic needle is aligned with the north end of the orienting arrow.

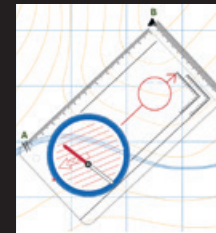
Next, identify a feature which lies on the bearing between you and your final destination. It might be a rock or some vegetation. Once identified, there is no need to use the compass again until you have reached it. You can take any route around obstacles to get to the feature. It is essential to maintain your fix on the feature as it may change in appearance as you get closer to it. Once you reach the first feature, repeat the exercise until the whole leg is completed. If walking on a bearing is new to you, why not practise in your local park?



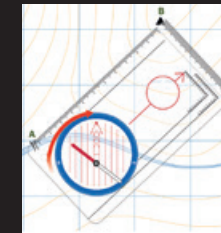
WATCH:
How to take a compass bearing

TAKING A BEARING

Before taking a bearing, always estimate visually what the bearing will be. You can then check this against the bearing taken with the compass to make sure you have not made a basic error. In the four diagrams opposite, the bearing is roughly north east.



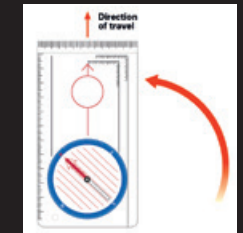
Align the compass along the required route on the map



Rotate the compass housing to align the orientating lines with the north-south grid lines on the map



Rotate the compass housing to compensate for magnetic variation



Remove the compass from the map, rotate the compass so that the north end of the needle and the orientating arrow are aligned and then proceed following the direction of travel arrow

Details about the magnetic variation to be added or subtracted will be noted on your map

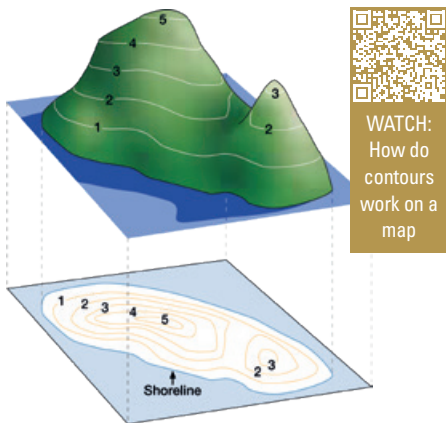
ILLUSTRATIONS: MOUNTAINTRAINING.

UNDERSTANDING A MAP

WHAT IS A CONTOUR

A contour is a line that links land of equal height. Contours are measured in metres above sea level and shown on the map as lines printed with a set interval between them. Ordnance Survey maps commonly use a 10m contour interval and British Mountain Maps use a 15m contour interval. The actual height of a contour, such as 150m, will be marked periodically.

Contours are used to represent the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional map, and it can be hard to 'read the contours' at first. To help, imagine a three-tiered cake, viewed side on you would see the tiers one above the other, each narrower than the one below. Viewed from above you would see them one inside the other, with the sense of height between the tiers being lost. Using this analogy, the map is like the bird's eye view, in which we see contour 'tiers' around the hills on a flat map.



READING THE CONTOURS

When walking in the hills, the terrain and views constantly change in shape, aspect and gradient, all of which are described by the contours. The skill to develop is converting the information given by the contours into a three-dimensional image in your mind. The best way to develop contour interpretation skills is in good weather. With practice you'll be able to identify features such as hill tops, convex and concave slopes, ridges, valleys and flat areas simply by using the information provided by the contours. Add to your mental 'image library' how the contours on the map match up with the features you see each time you head out. This will help you navigate when the chips are down!

ESTIMATING DISTANCE

Pacing and timing can help you estimate distance. The first stage is measuring the distance on the map, which is done using the millimetre or romer scales on the compass baseplate. If you know the speed you walk, you can estimate the time it'll take to walk a distance. Reasonably fit people walk at 4 or 5kmh (slower going uphill, faster going down).

PACING AND TIMING

Estimating distance by pacing requires knowing how many double paces you take to walk 100m. It's important to realise that pacing is only estimation. With just a 5% error you could be 25m out in a 500m block. When using pacing don't expect to arrive exactly at your destination, but if accurate, you should be very close.



GPS TECHNOLOGY

Basic GPS devices can provide you with your current grid reference. With more sophisticated devices and apps, whole walks can be planned and tracked digitally – you can plot routes on Ordnance Survey or equivalent mapping, either on purpose-built GPS devices or mobile phone apps, and follow it around as you progress in the hills.

Many people have taken up this kind of technology and have found it an extremely useful navigational aid. However, this technology should be treated with a certain amount of caution. Mobile phones in particular can be unreliable devices. They are rarely designed for use in remote, high altitude or wild areas, so can easily become damaged or run out of battery quickly, particularly if you are using the GPS function.

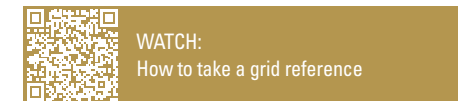
Generally, mobile phones should be reserved for use for calling for help in an emergency. Purpose-built outdoor GPS devices are much better for navigational use – they are designed with long battery lives and have more sophisticated internal technology.

However, there is always the risk of malfunction or the batteries expiring. In any case, no GPS device can ever read a map for you. It can show you where you are, but interpreting the map – understanding hazards, reading terrain, estimating timing etc – remains an essential skill.

All in all, while GPS technology can be an extremely useful addition to the range of navigational tools you use, it can never replace having a map and compass and knowing how to use them.

GRIDS, SCALES AND DISTANCES

British maps have a grid line system superimposed upon them. These grids represent one-kilometre squares regardless of the map scale, and can be used as a useful rough measure when planning a route. Grid north is the northerly direction of the north/south grid lines, and is technically different to magnetic north, the direction that a compass needle points to – but in practice, for most hill walking navigation, the difference is negligible. The grid lines are numbered and most maps include instructions on how to work out a grid reference which describes a unique 100m by 100m square on the map. It is wise to spend some time making sure you know how to do this before heading for the hills, as a grid reference is required should you need to pass your location onto someone else, such as a mountain rescue team. When you know the scale of a map you can use a ruler to measure the distance between two points and then convert this to a distance on the ground. On 1:25,000 maps, 1mm is equivalent to 25m on the ground; on 1:40,000 maps, 1mm is equivalent to 40m on the ground; on 1:50,000 maps, 1mm is equivalent to 50m on the ground.



Navigation illustrations from Mountain Training's Hill Walking book

HAZARDS

With all the right skills and knowledge most hazards can be avoided or navigated safely, but as a new walker it is good to get to know what might be out there and what to do in risky situations.

IDENTIFYING HAZARDS

Imagine stepping into the road only to see a car speeding towards you. Instantly you would identify the hazard, assess the risk, and then act appropriately by getting out of the way. When it comes to hazards in the hills, follow the same process of identify, assess and act.

Listen to your instincts, and stop if something doesn't feel 'quite right'. Changing your plans due to unforeseen circumstances is a sign of good judgement. If you carry on with the hope that 'things will work themselves out' you might find yourself getting into some tricky situations!

It is important to realise that you cannot avoid hazards. Before setting out ask yourself what hazards are presented by group composition, animals, terrain and weather, and don't forget to reassess hazards throughout the day.

GROUP COMPOSITION

Managing group dynamics is not always easy. Every individual will have different strengths, challenges, abilities and fitness. Consideration should be given to how everyone's needs and aspirations can be met, and an assessment made to decide what is realistic for the whole group. Individuals will be able to make key decisions about their own safety and participation, listening and supporting them is what's important. Remember to keep a lookout for everyone in your group, stick together and make responsible choices if people are becoming tired or looking unwell.

MOVEMENT SKILLS

Slipping is one of the most common causes of injury to hill walkers; the more uneven or steep the ground, the more likely you are to slip. Those new to hill walking may find the uneven and variable terrain challenging at first. Wearing a pair of good boots is important, but using them effectively is what will get you around the hills.

Small steps will help you position your centre of balance over your feet as you walk. Making a stable platform with each step, using as much of the sole as possible is also important. It is easier to make such a platform on grassy and muddy slopes with stiffer boots than with trail shoes and soft boots.



WATCH:
Moving over different terrain

WALKING UP, DOWN AND ACROSS

Steep ground is always easier to ascend in control than it is to traverse or descend. The ground ahead is close at hand when ascending, and with short steps, foot placements are easy to spot. On descents, in contrast, you have to extend downwards with each step, making placements more difficult to settle on. Walking poles can help greatly in these situations. Practice in secure places on short slopes. The tendency when traversing is to creep down the slope. In some situations, this may not be a problem, but traversing a steep slope for a long time can be very tiring.

TERRAIN

Look at the map before leaving and see where your route will take you. If you know what to expect you will be in better position to deal with it.

COWS AND LIVESTOCK

Take care around all livestock. Give them plenty of room and leave gates and property as you find them.

Cows are usually peaceful and calm animals but they can sometimes behave unpredictably or aggressively if they feel threatened, so it is good to give them lots of space as you pass through a field. Be especially careful around cows with newly-born calves and remember that the calves can be dangerous too. If you approach a field of cows and there are calves, try to choose a different route to avoid them.

If walking with a dog take extra care as cows and other livestock may get spooked by the dog

and try to drive it away. While the countryside is a great place to exercise dogs, it is every owner's duty to make sure their dog is not a danger or nuisance to farm animals, wildlife or other people. By law, farmers are entitled to kill a dog that injures or worries their animals, therefore dogs should be kept on a lead at any time of the year when near farm animals, particularly during the lambing season. There will be circumstances when you should release your dog from its lead. If you find yourself in a field of wary animals, move away carefully and quietly. If you feel threatened by livestock release your dog from its lead; let it run free rather than try to protect it and endangering yourself. The dog will outrun the animals and you. Remove the lead to avoid the risk of strangulation.

Those without canine companions should also move away carefully and quietly. The animals will probably leave you alone once they establish that you pose no threat.





TICKS

Ticks are small arachnids, which live off the blood of birds and mammals – including you. Ticks climb tall grass, shrubs, bushes and low-level tree branches. When you or an animal brush past they can attach themselves almost anywhere but prefer dark creases like the armpit, groin and back of the knee. Lyme disease is caused by bacteria carried by ticks in many popular walking areas. Being bitten by a tick does not mean you will contract Lyme disease, but taking steps to prevent tick bites is the best plan to follow. Avoid unnecessary bushwacking, keep your arms and legs covered, and check your clothes and skin frequently. Where possible, use an effective tool and technique to remove ticks.

Symptoms of Lyme disease typically show a few days to several weeks after being bitten. Early signs might include a red ring-shaped rash which gradually spreads from the site of the tick bite, usually with a fading centre. If left untreated a whole range of symptoms can develop, including a flu-like illness, swollen glands, mild headaches, tiredness and itching muscles and joints.



Find out more about ticks and how to deal with them

WATER HAZARDS

The water levels of streams, rivers, bogs and lakes can vary greatly throughout the year. Prolonged heavy rainfall can lead to flash flooding, with paths being transformed into streams. Be aware that you may need to find an alternative route if heavy rainfall has occurred.

Wild swimming can be an enjoyable and refreshing element to add to your walks. But be mindful of safety considerations, your confidence in swimming and strong currents.



If you are thinking of wild swimming please read the advice on swimming from the Lake District National Park

HIDDEN HAZARDS

A convex slope is shaped like a dome, shallow at the top and steeply sided. This means that the view of what lies ahead is often obscured. In descent, a convex slope may hide real dangers such as a line of cliffs, a steep grass slope or a snow patch. The contours describing a convex slope will be further apart near the top and closer together as the slope steepens. Noticing such patterns on a map will help with route planning, and map symbols will show any hazards along your route.





WEATHER

The weather in the mountains can change quickly and be much more extreme than down in the valleys. Here's how to survive and enjoy our Atlantic climate in the uplands.

Always use a mountain-specific weather forecast as there are major differences between urban and upland weather. These are available online for some areas at www.mwis.org.uk and www.metoffice.gov.uk.

Use the information from the forecast as part of your planning. Planning lunches and resting time during sunny spells or in covered areas if rain is forecasted, for example. Be aware that the weather can be more extreme in the hills than in the cities. General forecasts

are for sea level, and you can pretty much guarantee that it will be colder, wetter and windier the higher you climb.

Hill walkers should develop their understanding of the typical British weather systems, and learn how to interpret a sea level forecast for the mountain environment, including the crucial connection between a forecast and how the weather will feel. As forecasts are just a prediction, the weather you experience could be more or less severe than predicted.

Pack the right kit and equipment for the predicted weather, the more prepared you are the more likely you are to enjoy and embrace the weather whatever it might throw at you!

Wind

What feels like a stiff breeze in the valley can become a gale high in the hills, making the going harder than expected. Expecting two to three times the wind speed on the summits to that at sea level is a useful rule of thumb. If a general forecast says it will be quite breezy, you may want to think twice before heading out on an exposed ridge. Wind tends to come from a specific direction, so picking routes on a hill's sheltered side should result in the wind's full strength being avoided until near the summit.

TERRAIN

Grass Slopes

Steep grass slopes can be extremely hazardous, not only in wet conditions, but also when the grass is long and dry. It's not the ground underfoot that defines the seriousness of a situation, but the consequences of a fall. An unbroken steep grassy slope may be more serious than a steeper, but short rocky slope. If you can't avoid a steep grassy slope, take care with foot placement and be prepared for unexpected slips and falls or uneven ground hidden by the grass.

Rocks

Many walking routes may have one or more short rocky steps where care and attention are required. Though not technically demanding, the consequences of a fall in the wrong place could be serious. Confidence in your movement skills is vital; be aware that rock steps can be more challenging in descent than ascent, and can become slippery when wet. Therefore, if a bit more adventure is what makes you tick, adopt a progressive approach to your days out, building on past experiences as you develop new skills. Loose rock tumbling down the hillside is also a hazard. If walking where you think there might be loose rock above, consider if any people or animals could dislodge rocks onto you, or you onto others.

Scree

Scree, composed of loose surface rocks, is commonly encountered in the mountains, and is often tiring to ascend. In wet conditions, scree can be difficult to cross, being both unstable and slippery, and great care should be taken. Scree running, which is sliding down with the flow of the scree instead of taking small footsteps, should be avoided, as it accelerates erosion and is environmentally damaging.



ACCESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

While it could be assumed that we have always had the freedom to walk the mountainous areas of Britain, this is a right that has come from years of campaigning. With many wild spaces still being owned by private landowners we run the risk of losing access if we are not seen to be acting responsibly. A major part of the BMC's work is to protect our access to these spaces and ensure we all act together to protect, respect and enjoy them responsibly.

ACCESS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Understanding where you can and can't walk can sometimes be confusing, especially as arrangements vary across different parts of the UK.

In England and Wales, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) gives the right to walk freely over designated 'Open Access' land. In practice this covers mountain, moor, heath and down landscapes. Look for a yellow wash on Ordnance Survey maps, or the Open Access symbol on stiles, gates and crossings. Open Access land can be subject to occasional closures.

In Wales, there is an ongoing Access Reform Programme (2022) which is likely to change the access rights in Wales in the next few years. This is likely to extend public access rights to include the coast and possibly access to the rivers and lakes of Wales, as well as making it easier for landowners to divert public rights of way and to temporarily close some paths for land management purposes.

In other parts of the countryside, the Public Rights of Way network applies (the green lines on maps). When not on Open Access land, you must stick to these (although, confusingly, they also cross Open Access land, and you can walk along them even when surrounding Open Access land is closed!).



Access rights in England and Wales

ACCESS IN SCOTLAND

Different access legislation applies to Scotland, where there is freedom of access across almost all land. These rights were made statutory through the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.



For guidance see the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

TREAD LIGHTLY

Mountain landscapes may seem vast and our presence in them inconsequential. However, the cumulative impact of thousands of walkers can have a big impact on sensitive mountain environments. We must be mindful of our impact both on nature and other people.



Before setting off it is a good idea to get familiar with the Countryside Code, available on the YHA (England and Wales)

PATHS

Paths have been constructed in many areas to protect and repair mountains from the erosion caused by large numbers of visitors. Use paths wherever possible rather than taking shortcuts. If paths are narrow, walk single file to avoid further erosion.

BOUNDARIES

Climbing over walls and fences will damage them; use stiles and gates wherever possible. Leave gates and property as you find them. Farmers close gates to keep animals in or leave them open to give them access to food and water.

TRANSPORT

Traffic congestion and parking problems are often an issue in many popular upland areas. You can make a difference to the local area, the cost of travel and make a sustainable choice by using public transport, car sharing and if driving, using designated parking places.



Check out the BMC's Liftshare site to share a ride with another hiker

Cars and other vehicles blocking gates and country lanes are a major source of conflict in rural areas. While many lanes leading to the start of hill walks are narrow and twisty, large vehicles such as delivery vans, farm vehicles and emergency vehicles still need to get past, so it's important to choose your parking place carefully so it does not block or impede access for others.

PERIODS IN THE OUTDOORS

When hiking on your period you can use any of the normal products you would use anywhere else. Remember to consider how you will carry any waste off the hill side and keep products in a zip lock bag to keep them clean and dry for use. Don't forget any medication or comforts if you experience pain. Reusable heat packs are a great substitute if you like to use a hot-water bottle.

RESPECT THE WILD: POO LIKE A PRO

When out for the day it is likely you will need to go to the loo at some point. Where possible use public toilets. If none are available, there are a few easy considerations to make to ensure you don't endanger human health or poison the upland environment. Ensure you are at least 30 metres away from running water and 50 metres away from paths. Carry a lightweight trowel to carefully cut a 15cm deep hole. Bury your poo and replace the top turf. Better still, you can pack your poo into a bag and carry it out to be disposed of safely and responsibly. Toilet paper is slow to decompose and may be dug up by animals, so you should always carry this off. You can put it in a zip lock bag to make sure it doesn't escape. Don't go to the toilet in enclosed spaces such as caves and ruined buildings. Always consider the environment and other people.



WATCH:
How to Poo like a Pro



WALKING WITH DOGS

It is a criminal offence to allow your dog to worry stock. On open access land in England and Wales dogs must be kept on a short lead from 1 March to 31 July and at all times when in the vicinity of livestock. They may be excluded at all times on some grouse moors. In fields of animals, they must be kept under close control on a short lead. Dogs can cause other problems – disturbing wildlife, eating the chicks of ground nesting birds, barking, disrupting other users and defecating near paths.

WILDFIRES

Peat and vegetation which grow in upland areas can be very flammable. Accidental fires from barbecues, cigarettes and other flammables destroy habitats and kill wildlife. More fires happen in the UK than you might imagine and when carbon rich peat burns it can release masses of CO2 into the atmosphere. Respect all warning signs and if you see a fire, don't assume that someone else has called the emergency services. Note your location and dial 999.

LITTER

Take your litter home with you. If you have carried it out then carry it back in again. Where possible pick up other people's litter. And remember that organic litter takes longer than you think to biodegrade and many tropical fruit skins and peels never break down in our colder climate. Reduce the litter you need to carry out with you by repackaging your food into reusable containers before you set out.



Find a Hills 2 Oceans hub at participating YHA hostels

SHOP LOCALLY

Help support local people by shopping at local businesses such as grocers, cafés, pubs, restaurants and outdoor retailers. The local spending of countryside visitors is vital to many rural communities.

STAYING OVERNIGHT



STAY WITH YHA

YHA hostels are spread throughout England and Wales — on the coast, in the countryside and in major cities. You can choose from private en-suite rooms, dorm rooms, camping, glamping or take a whole hostel for you and yours on YHA Exclusive Hire. Hostels are equipped with convenient, quality facilities to help guests travel on a budget. These include self-catering kitchens, on site café bars, social spaces, games rooms and grounds, drying rooms and cycle stores. You can find the full accommodation offer at yha.org.uk/stay.

YHA accommodation is open to all — from backpackers to families, solo travellers to large groups. You don't have to be a member to stay. But join for as little as £15 a year and you'll gain access to a host of member benefits including discounted stays and money off well-known outdoor brands.



Find out more at yha.org.uk/join.
Get 10% off YHA accommodation with a BMC membership

CAMPING IN THE HILLS

A wild camp in the mountains, miles from anywhere, is one of the great wilderness experiences. Yet this remoteness means that your impact — or lack of it — is the most important thing. When you pack up in the morning, let the memory of your night be the

only trace of your presence.

Technically, wild camping is not permitted by right on Open Access land in England and Wales without express permission of the landowner, though in practice it is tolerated in some areas — like the Lake District — provided you make minimal impact, leave no trace of your visit and are discreet.



WATCH:
Expert tips on wild camping

Wild camping is allowed in Scotland on the understanding that you follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC). When high in the hills the legal situation is the same as in the valleys, but your impact can be more easily managed.

CAMPING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

With no facilities at hand you need to think carefully about your impact — both physical and visual.

Be inconspicuous, choose your location wisely, only using remote locations well above the highest wall line and out of sight of civilisation. Stay for one night only, pitch your tent late and leave early, never leave your tents up during the day. Choose durable, well-drained ground for your pitch, this will reduce the chances of damaging the ground or leaving any trace of your visit.

Don't use campfires or BBQs, not only do these draw attention to your presence but they also carry the risk of causing wildfires. Use a camping stove instead, stoves have the added benefit of being lightweight and easy to use. During periods with a high fire risk, don't use any open flames.

When going to the toilet remember to remove all human waste and ensure you are well away from any water sources (find out more on how to poo like a pro on [page 34](#)). As with going to the toilet, when washing up stay at least 50 metres away from any water. Consider the impact of any detergents you may use, try to opt for one with better environmental credentials.

Take all your litter and waste with you and if you find other litter in the countryside, try to remove that too. This includes 'biodegradable' waste, which will take longer than you think to decompose and can remain a risk for the local wildlife.

Use lights on their lowest setting around camp. Light and noise is very noticeable at night and can disturb wildlife and people. Keep group sizes small as large groups can have a huge impact. If you want to camp in the valley floor, always use a formal campsite with facilities to minimise your impact and help the local economy.

Before leaving your spot, remember to look back and check nothing has been left behind. Leave the area as you found it and replace any rocks or branches you may have moved.

CAMPING EQUIPMENT

Additional equipment over and above that required for a day's hill walking includes: tent; sleeping bag and sleeping mat; stove and utensils; water container and water filtration device/tablets; more food; and a bigger rucksack to carry it.

For an overnight camping trip high in the hills you are likely to need a rucksack of at least 50 litres capacity. Think carefully about how large a sack you would feel happy to carry as this will help to focus your mind when choosing what to take, and what to leave behind. On returning from your trip review what you took. Some packing decisions come down to comfort. In the end, it's all about compromise.

Choose a tent which is light, strong and easy to put up. Winds are much stronger in the hills than in the valleys, and a tent designed for valley camping may be unsuitable for the uplands. As with all aspects of hill walking, get a forecast, plan a route and assess if you and your kit are up to the challenge.

VAN CAMPING

If van camping is your thing make sure to check out our Van Life video, for tips and tricks on how to be discreet and respectful on overnight stays.



WATCH: Van Life

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Mountain incidents range from inconvenient to life threatening. There is no golden rule on how to act but there are some well-established principles that could help you out.

Stay calm and assess the situation. Consider what should be done immediately to safeguard everyone. If possible determine your exact position on the map and consider the options for walking down, sending for help, or finding shelter.

Whilst mobile phones can be very useful, you should only use them to call mountain rescue if you are in an emergency situation. If you are not sure whether it is an emergency, investigate a little yourself before sending for outside help.

If someone is injured, only minor injuries should come within the scope of treatment and evacuation by other group members. For all other cases make sure the casualty is safe from any further injury, start first aid, and call the appropriate emergency service.



SENDING FOR HELP

When phoning dial 999 and ask for: POLICE and then MOUNTAIN RESCUE.

When connected provide:

- 1 location of the incident
- 2 Number and names of people in the party and their condition
- 3 any injuries and names of casualties

Be ready to provide the following additional information:

- Number of the phone you are using and any other phones in the group
- The nature of the incident – what happened?
- Time of the incident
- Equipment which is at the accident site (warm clothing, group shelter etc.)
- Any distinguishing feature / marker / colour at the accident site

If there is no coverage at your location consider walking uphill to find a better signal. If no signal can be found, one or more reliable members of the party, with full information about the accident, should be sent to find the nearest telephone. At least one person should stay with the casualty.

A text message can be sent to summon help when poor reception does not allow voice calls. You must text 'register' to 999 in order to use this service. Complete this one-off registration before you set off.

PROVIDING YOUR LOCATION

If you have phone signal many mountain rescue teams will now send you a text with a link that will send them your exact location. If this is not an option or you have sent someone down the hill for help, you should try to provide a six-figure grid reference. If you know where you are, you can find this on your map. If you are able to, using the OS locate app on your phone will also provide a grid reference. It is wise to have this ready downloaded in case of an emergency.

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS NO SIGNAL

You have a difficult decision when a casualty is injured and you are alone and unable to make a phone call. Try to summon help by shouting, giving the distress call of six whistle blasts or six flashes with a torch, repeated regularly. If there is no response, assess the relative dangers of leaving the casualty or failing to get help. Act decisively in the interest of the casualty, but always remember to consider your own safety first.

FIRST AID

Many people do not consider the importance of first aid training until standing next to an injured companion on a remote mountainside. First aid can make a big difference to the comfort and safety of an injured person. A large range of first aid publications and courses are available, many of which are tailored to hill walkers. Search online to find a local course.

The British Mountain Medicine Society and the BMC also run the Mountain Medicine Weekend each year to help provide people with the skills and knowledge to support one another when faced with medical emergencies in the hills.



Find out more on the BMC website

FINDING SHELTER

An unintentional night out can result from a navigational error or unexpected conditions. It is one of those things a hill walker should be prepared for, although it can often be avoided with good planning, taking a torch and making an early start.

Group shelters and bivi bags provide protection from the elements. If you are caught out, consider the following:

- Seek shelter from the elements.
- Put all your spare clothing on, including hats and gloves.
- Sit on anything that will provide insulation from the ground, such as your rucksack.
- Seek warmth from other party members by huddling together.
- Keep an eye on other people for signs of hypothermia.

Come first light, if everyone is fine, continue with your journey. Get word out as soon as possible to put a stop to any search that might have begun.

EMERGENCY KIT CHECKLIST

As well as being aware of the advice on this page, being prepared for an emergency means having certain items to hand.

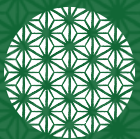
- Fully charged mobile phone
- Head torch and spare batteries (for visual distress sign if out of signal range)
- Whistle (for audible distress sign if out of signal range)
- GPS device (optional – this can be a useful navigational tool, but in emergencies provides a quick fix on your location in order to convey your coordinates to Mountain Rescue)



WATCH:
Emergency procedures for hill walking

OUR CAMPAIGNS: PROTECTING THE SPACES WE LOVE

#BMCClimateProject



THE CLIMATE PROJECT

Make a real difference to the local landscapes that you love and the global climate crisis. We've teamed up with Moors for the Future for an exciting new project.°

Out on our wild moorlands grows an amazing plant called sphagnum. When sphagnum is growing healthily, this little plant powerhouse takes as much carbon out of the atmosphere as a tropical rainforest. Help to support the planting of this incredible environment.



Sponsor one square metre of Sphagnum for £25



The BMC's Mend Our Mountains initiative is a call to action for everyone who values the hills, mountains and landscapes of Britain.

It's come a long way from our very first, 'one-off' crowdfunding drive in 2016. Since then we've raised close to a million pounds, and we're set to raise even more in the coming years. We've empowered people and professionals to look after our wild places, and we've collaborated to build a coalition of more than fifty outdoor organisations who care just as much as we do. At its core, MOM is a nationwide grassroots effort to support everywhere that people walk, climb, camp and explore.



You can help us continue this vital work by checking out the website



We're excited be working alongside YHA (England and Wales) to launch Hills 2 Oceans litter picking hubs at some of their key hostels across England and Wales, to encourage the hill walking and climbing community to help remove mountains of waste.

Hills 2 Oceans is calling on everyone to get involved in a litter pick to help remove as much litter and plastic from our hills, mountains and crags as possible, so it doesn't end up in our oceans.

By providing free litter picking equipment (bags and pickers) at participating hostels, visitors will be able to use these when they are out and about in the great outdoors, helping to protect and preserve our natural environment and tackle local litter.



Find participating hostels here



Each year, moorland fires have a devastating effect on wildlife, livestock and people, and can often destroy the underlying peat that is crucial in our fight against climate change. Worldwide, peatland contains more than 550 gigatonnes of carbon, twice as much carbon as all of the world's forests.

Never use disposable BBQs in moorland and grassland areas, they cause fires without you even realising, by heating the ground underneath the tray. Stick to camping stoves or sandwiches.

We're calling on government to make the use of disposable barbecues on open moorland a criminal offence with a severe penalty attached for anyone in breach of this.



WATCH: our campaign clip on YouTube



HELP: With our online form it takes 30 seconds to send a letter to your MP

NEXT STEPS:

LEARN MORE WITH THE BMC



CLUBS AND GROUPS

Joining a club or walking group is a great way to meet new people and learn new things. Walking with more experienced members will support your own journey and help you to take on bigger and more challenging hikes.



Find your next adventure with a BMC affiliated club

HIKING ESSENTIALS

Hiking Essentials will help to prepare you with the walking know-how to put your best foot forward. As a beginner they are a great place to start!



Check out the BMC website to find out

JOIN A BMC EVENT

From skills workshops to social walks and volunteering opportunities. The BMC has a whole range of events taking place throughout the year. Find out more about what's happening near you on the events page of the BMC's hill walking site.



Check out the BMC website to find out

TRAINING ESSENTIALS

Training Essentials are skills training courses for BMC members. Offered throughout the UK by trusted professionals, these courses are brought to you at a big discount. Whether you're just setting out or are ready to take your skills to the next step, Training Essentials is for you.



Check out the BMC website to find out

MOUNTAIN TRAINING

The awarding organisation offers Hill & Mountain Skills courses to help people build confidence and become more independent, walk leadership qualifications for those responsible for others, and a series of books to support your development as a hill walker including *Hill Walking and Navigation in the Mountains*.



Check out the Mountain Training website for all they have to offer.

HILL WALKING ESSENTIALS DVD

The Hill Walking Essentials DVD sets out the essential hiking skills. It follows two walkers, Fredelina and Ben, on days out in the British mountains. You can purchase a physical copy or download from the BMC shop.



Purchase



Download

BMC TV

If you are looking for some quick advice to help you nail that skill, or are searching for your next hiking location, head over to our YouTube channel, BMC TV. Packed with hill walking content, our short films range from essential skills to epic inspirations. New films are added regularly so be sure to subscribe to keep up to date with the latest additions.



Subscribe

Lily and Andrew
IN-STORE EXPERTS

BMC

OFFICIAL OUTDOOR RETAILER

TOGETHER WE ESCAPE

COTSWOLD
outdoor

We've been helping walkers find the right kit to get outside and enjoy our great outdoors for almost 50 years.

We truly believe people are happier outside and we're proud to support YHA Festival of Walking to encourage more people to get walking this year.

To help you prepare for your adventures, we're offering BMC & YHA members 15% discount in-store and online.

T&Cs apply. Offer expires 30.06.24.



SCAN TO
LEARN MORE

Make the right choice with people
who love the outdoors as much as you