

The Considerate Walker

Notes on led group walks : WALKING HOLIDAYS

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Also available: *Notes on led group walks: DAY WALKS**

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1 WHAT THE NOTES ARE FOR

Walking should be a friendly, healthy and safe activity that offers everybody the opportunity to delight in the variety, the beauty, the grandeur, the surprise and the challenge of the world we live in.^f When we take part in led group walks there are things we may do that can contribute to everyone's enjoyment, but sometimes, alas, we also 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. Sections 2 to 17 of the Notes offer the kind of practical advice I would have found helpful when I myself began coming on led group walks. The focus is on the well-being and enjoyment of us and our fellow walkers, presented as a combination of recommended

*To request a copy, see foot of last page.

^fIn addition to its other major benefits: the long-celebrated association between walking and creativity, and the contribution that regular walking, regardless of age, can make to the maintenance of mental and physical well-being.

good practice and points to consider. Although the language is prescriptive, they should be read as suggestions, not as instructions to be blindly obeyed whatever the circumstances.

My guess is that you will get most from the Notes if you are considering walking holidays where the walks will be more demanding than you are used to, or you are new to walking with led groups, or your previous walking has been on your own or with a small number of friends and family. At the other extreme, if you have great and varied walking experience, it is possible that you will find next to nothing in them that you aren't already familiar with. Comment on earlier versions has ranged from the welcoming – ‘a useful codification of sensible advice’ – to the dismissive – ‘what [the Notes] say is so obvious that they are unnecessary’.

The Notes plunge straight into practical advice in, I hope, appropriate but not excessive detail. If, before reading further, you would like answers to questions such as – what, if anything, is distinctive about the Notes; who wrote them; should they be seen as fixed or likely to change; who are the main providers of walking holidays – you should go first to Appendix A: About the Notes.

2 CHOOSING AND PREPARING FOR A WALKING HOLIDAY

2.1 MAKING YOUR CHOICE Individual walks can differ in their length, both the distance to be walked and the estimated time to be taken; their pace, from a gentle stroll to fast; and their degree of difficulty. 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 considering. If you have never been on a walking holiday before, give due weight to two major differences between them and day walks: that you will have to be able to walk day after day, usually with no gaps in between, over a period of time; and that if you were to find you could not cope, the price you would have to pay – not only in money terms – would be much greater. If you have serious doubts about whether you will 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.

2.2 OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO If you are unsure whether a holiday would suit you, contact the provider beforehand, as many will be able to give you additional information, at least in rough outline, on features of the holiday’s walks such as the number, length and steepness of ascents and descents; 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 any noteworthy features of conditions underfoot (e.g. much walking on sand dunes, much uneven scree). Don’t expect the provider to advise you whether you are fit enough and strong enough: this is something only you and others who know you well can judge. If, however, you tell the provider the sort of walking you are used to, it is possible that they will be able to suggest whether additional preparation on your part may be advisable, or could even be essential.

A personal example: Twenty years ago, already old, I decided that I would like to do a fairly strenuous trek in the Himalayas involving 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, given my age, serious preparation would definitely be prudent. For the first time in my life I joined a well-equipped local gym and carried out my own programme of exercises there, several times a week, for

over a year. The trek itself? I was lucky: I had no problems, it was a delight from beginning to end, at times it was hard work, and I have many happy memories.

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 first doing things 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 would 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 or won't change: if a lower graded holiday suits you best now, but you are reasonably fit, it is more than likely that with suitable preparation you would be able to enjoy more demanding walking holidays in the future. Even if you are unfit, or have a serious physical disability, don't rush to disqualify yourself from all possible walking holidays, but recognise that preparing yourself is likely to be hard work, may take longer, and that success cannot be guaranteed. And never forget that one of the best ways of improving your fitness for walking is by walking regularly.

3 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, 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 – walks generally start soon after breakfast – in order to ensure that you will be ready in good time and won't keep the rest of the group waiting.

4 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 that, in the interest of the other members of the group, you should not walk with the group again unless you are able to keep up. On a holiday where a choice of walks is offered every day and you have been attempting the higher graded walks, the leader may advise or insist that you switch to walks of a lower grade.

5 FALLING BEHIND

5.1 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.

5.2 FALLING BADLY BEHIND If you find that you are falling so far behind that you lose sight of those ahead of you – very easy in 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 could 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 the question of whether you should continue to walk with the group (see section 4 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.

5.3 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.) The risk is reduced if members of the forward group make a point, when they reach a junction, of pausing there 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 try to reunite the group (see also section 8 below).

6 OVERTAKING

6.1 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 try to increase your awareness of the risks so that, if you want to overtake, you are better able to judge whether you can do so without risking harm to yourself or others. The main dangers are falling, tripping, or bumping into unseen obstructions or other walkers. 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.

6.2 WARNINGS AND COURTESIES If you would like to overtake the walker(s) ahead of you and it appears safe to do so, it is sometimes advisable and polite to ask first ('Could I come past, please?'), or at least to 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 action. Likewise, if other members of your group, or perhaps another entire (and faster) group, are immediately behind you on a narrow path and safety permits, make a point of asking them whether they would like to come past. And don't be a queue-jumper: don't even think of overtaking when members of your group are coming together in line, preparing to pass through or over a kissing gate, stile or other bottleneck.

7 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 understand 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 and wait'. If you are like me and tend to fall behind the main group on some terrain (with me, it's on long steep ascents), but have good stamina, your going ahead could benefit your fellow walkers, since whenever the leader calls a halt for a brief rest or to regroup (or for any other reason), you may be able to catch up and then, provided the leader agrees, push on without pausing, thus avoiding causing delays later on. This ploy works particularly well on relatively straightforward or well-marked routes. It is a version of what is sometimes called 'pacing yourself', an odd term that means, roughly, that you should cultivate your ability to alter your pace and style of walking (*sometimes gradually, sometimes abruptly, sometimes from moment to moment*), in line with changes in the terrain and the character of conditions underfoot (*snow-covered, cobbled, grassy, very uneven, etc*), to the best of your capacity (*your strength, your repertoire of walking skills, your deficiencies*), without ever rushing but with a minimum of stops (see also Appendix B).

8 BACKMARKING Often, especially with a big group, the leader will want to have a backmarker. Walking at the back of the group, the backmarker's main responsibilities are to make sure no one goes astray and to alert the leader to incidents or difficulties. Also, happily rarely required, to do what they can to lead or assist stragglers who have become seriously detached. If no local guide or

de facto deputy is available to do the job, the leader may, before a walk begins, ask if a member of the group is willing to take it on. Don't volunteer unless you are confident that in an emergency you could get a message quickly to the leader, by relaying the message along the group or by yourself running to the front. Or in some other way – but bear in mind that even if you shout 'Tell [name of leader] to stop' as loud as you can, or blow a powerful whistle, local conditions may prevent your being heard; and your phone may get no signal.

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, where there is a risk of your pole(s) accidentally tripping up or injuring anyone walking close behind you.

10 STOPPING ON YOUR OWN If you wish to stop, other than momentarily, for a reason unrelated to your capability, such as looking at birds or flowers, taking photographs, or responding to a call of nature,* don't, except in an emergency, stop at a place where the walkers behind you can't safely come past. Tell the backmarker, and try also to let the leader know beforehand, so they can decide whether the group should carry on, leaving you to put on a spurt and catch up, or whether to call a halt for the entire group. There may be a good reason, chiefly safety, for everyone to keep together at that point, or the leader may, in response to your request, suggest a brief stop so that all who wish can, for example, take photographs.

11 BEING JUDGED BY, AND JUDGING, YOUR FELLOW WALKERS This is a sensitive and potentially embarrassing topic, but it must be faced, since we all tend to judge, and must expect to be judged by others. 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? 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 people) would be unsuited to this particular holiday. If you are new to walking holidays and aged under about 35, you may be surprised and worried when you find that on many holidays, including some higher graded ones, a large proportion of the walkers are in the 50 to 75 range. Try to suspend judgment, as you may find that most of them are 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 about your own appearance that could lead other members of the group to suspect that you might be a liability, don't feel obliged to tell them about it, or feel that you have to put on a perfect performance all the time. Instead try to show them, through your walking, that you won't be a problem.

12 PAYING FOR MEALS This topic 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 if 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 group to be taken by the leader to a restaurant or other place 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

*This is a somewhat old-fashioned expression. Nowadays, when a group stops, it is commonly called a comfort break, though some are still calling it a piss stop.

[†]The commonest 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.

present. Any proposal to this effect should be immediately and firmly rejected, especially if, as is often the case, it comes from members of the group who had ordered and consumed more and/or more expensive items, or simply from people who, comfortably off themselves, fail to realise that some of their fellow walkers may be less affluent and need to keep tight control of their spending. 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.

13 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 would be. If the item is important to you, try not to let your understandable concern corrupt your judgment. If, after checking, you are satisfied that the item is genuinely lost, and you would like to go back to try to find it, don't do so without telling the leader and getting their permission. Before allowing you to set off in search of the lost item, the leader has 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, side turnings or T-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 lost item, either on your own, or – more likely – with another person chosen, or at least approved, by them.

14 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 and any support staff, including local guide(s). However, on the sort of holiday where the group is accompanied by a large support team, including everyone may not be feasible. Where this is the case, you will have to use your judgment, doing your best not to offend anybody.

15 DOGS ON WALKS

15.1 A PROBLEM THAT WON'T GO AWAY The problem is rooted in the discord inherent in three enduring states of affairs: (1) dog owners (and keepers)[†] coming on walking holidays sometimes want to bring their dog(s) with them; (2) if dogs on group walks were totally uncontrolled, some of them would inevitably inconvenience, endanger or harm other walkers, other people, or animals; and (3) the topic is profoundly divisive, opinion on the topic resembling a kind of permanent cold war, with numerous local armistices, all different, more (or less) secure, and concurrent. There are also complicating factors: the great difference between badly-behaved and well-behaved dogs and their owners/keepers; the risk of unwanted incidents being much bigger on some walking holidays than on others; what the law has to say; and the fact that different providers have different

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

†A dog's keeper is the person, usually its owner, who is legally responsible for it.

policies. All the same, everybody 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 easy for owners/keepers to find out whether dogs may be allowed on a specific holiday, and what they may have to do to obtain permission for a specific dog. So if you want to seek permission, check with the provider in good time, and always before you make a firm booking.

15.2 PRACTICAL ISSUES 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 understand when to keep your dog on its lead;* that you are able to stop it if it shows signs of wanting to run at, attack or otherwise disturb or injure livestock or birds, or to damage growing crops; that it won't interfere with or endanger your fellow walkers or other people; that you expect to be able to arrange its overnight accommodation; and, *in all relevant countries*, that its insurance policy will provide adequate third party liability cover, and that you will be able to meet all your legal obligations as its owner/keeper. Everything in this section applies to all dogs, except that the UK's Equality Act 2010 grants special rights to the owners/keepers of Assistance Dogs (dogs officially registered as having been trained to help people with serious disabilities). The effect is that, within the UK, even where the provider has imposed a universal ban, Assistance Dogs must normally be allowed. Further practical advice about dogs on walks can be found in the *Countryside Code* (England and Wales) and the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code*, and on the Ramblers' website under 'Walking with Dogs'.

16 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, you should not, except in a safety emergency, intervene or criticise the guide directly. Instead, mention the matter to the leader.

17 PRAISE, COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK Constructive criticism, praise, suggestions or general comments, usually put together after you get home, should not be a problem, since most providers – and leaders – welcome feedback like this. It encourages improvement, seldom requires an instant response, and naturally pleases 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 local situation in the country/ies being visited, or something else again. Sometimes it may be more effective in the long run if you begin with questions or suggestions, or even with an apology. 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 will of course ignore much of the advice in this section, since immediate intervention may be essential.)

*Experienced owners/keepers know that it's not always easy to know when to put a dog on its lead. A leader may, for example, know an area well, but not well enough to be able to give a timely warning to the group that it is getting close to a place that is home to ground-nesting birds or to members of a protected species. Cases like this encourage adoption of an extreme default position, requiring dogs to be kept under total control all the time.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A : ABOUT THE NOTES

WHO ARE THE NOTES FOR? They are mainly for people coming on – or thinking of coming on – guided walking holidays like those offered by big providers such as Exodus, Explore, HF Holidays and Ramblers 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 not 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 most of the group.

HASN'T EVERYTHING IN THEM 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 (or at least attempt to do so), on how to maintain and enhance your fitness for walking, and on the health benefits of regular walking. Practical advice on how to plan and lead walks is also readily available. But I have found little on the topics covered here. (Also absent is advice on developing practical walking skills, and I have added a brief appendix [Appendix B] on this theme, including the probable reasons for this apparent absence.)

WHAT ABOUT THE EFFECT WALKERS CAN HAVE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND ON OTHER PEOPLE (NOT JUST ON THEIR FELLOW WALKERS)? This is a very important theme, more important than the main theme of these Notes. Because it concerns all walkers I have added another, more substantial, appendix on it [Appendix C: External impact].

WHO WROTE THEM? An old man (now aged 89). Convinced that walking has helped to preserve my physical and mental health. Aware how lucky I am to be alive and still able to enjoy long walks. For many years a participant in walking holidays at home and abroad, and leader and participant in day walks at home. The Notes express my views, developed from discussion with other walkers and leaders, from feedback on earlier versions, and from own experience. Entirely my own work – not written on behalf of any provider(s) or other organisation(s).

COULD THEY BE CHANGED? I hope they will be. As indicated, this is not the first version and I don't expect it to be the last. My knowledge, judgment and imagination are limited and fallible, so feedback that could help to improve the Notes will be welcomed, especially suggestions for topics to be added or removed, and comments on content, presentation or emphasis. (I am indebted to readers who have commented on earlier versions.) To leave feedback, see foot of last page.

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 safely and effectively with, for example, steep ascents and descents; long distances; mud, sand and the various kinds of scree; crossing snowfields, rockfields, bogs and streams; and (easy) scrambling. 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; taking steps of different kinds (fast or slow, long or short, sideways, etc); leaning forwards, leaning backwards or walking upright; ascending/descending directly or in zigzags; taking a standard route or (one or more) short cuts or extra loops; preparing for demanding walks and avoiding/minimising adverse after-effects; walking poles: the pros and cons of using two or one or none. In part this absence may be because some practical walking skills are very easy to

*In the Notes, '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 only those coming on a particular holiday in a particular area on particular dates.

learn, or may seldom be needed, but the main reason is probably that the easiest and most effective way of acquiring most practical skills is through practice ('learning by doing'), preferably with active support from experienced practitioners – in the case of walking, from more experienced fellow walkers. Many such walkers are, however, blind to the extent to which they have acquired new skills, in marked contrast with the position in music education, in respect of something else we have also been doing all our lives, breathing, where students of classical singing are made aware early on that they will have to learn new breathing skills – and never forget that they have done so. Such unaware walkers are perhaps less able to pass on their skills to others.

APPENDIX C : EXTERNAL IMPACT So far these Notes have been concerned mainly with practical advice about how to behave when we are walking in a led group, with the focus on trying to avoid endangering, harming, inconveniencing or (unintentionally) offending the other members of the group; not with a different, related and more important matter: the effect that groups of walkers can have on the environment and on other people, in particular local residents; farmers and others making their living on the land; people using the same paths as us; other visitors/tourists; and the many people, seen and unseen, we depend on when we are occupying ourselves with eating, drinking, sleeping, walking (of course), and all the other things we may do as members of a group enjoying a walking holiday. 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 given in the *Countryside Code* (England and Wales), the *Scottish Outside Access Code*, and similar offerings in other countries.

Here are some examples of such advice regarding behaviour on walks (including led group walks):

Leave gates as we find them: if closed, shut them after us; if open, leave open.

Look out for and, as appropriate, act on local signs relating to access.

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 group that will take some time to come past.

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

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

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

Take great care not to lose control of fire.

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

Remove or cover your dirty boots/shoes before entering restaurants, museums and other places that may wish or need to keep their floors clean.

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

Don't use (non-public) WCs in hotels, bars, shops, etc, without first requesting permission and saying 'thank you' afterwards, or making a small purchase when you enter.

Don't pollute streams or other water sources with waste from our washing, cooking or cleaning (if any), or with our urine.

Passing poo/faeces. Find a suitable place, at least 100 metres from paths, tracks, streams or other water sources; much further from human dwellings or campsites. Then be like a cat and bury or securely cover what you have produced.

Try to leave no trace of our presence. Bring all your refuse away with you, including your paper tissues (of any colour), your toilet paper, your banana skins, and any other things that take years to decompose (not just cans, bottles and plastic boxes and wrappings). Carry a bag or other suitable container with you to put them in.

If a group walking in an area fails to take account of advice like this, its members may be seen as demonstrating 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 groups coming to the area after them.

Walking groups should also, as far as possible, be aware of – and take account of – local customs, practices and beliefs, and relevant features of the local economy. Imparting such awareness to all the members of a group is one of the more important (and difficult) tasks of a group's leader, since lack of awareness can cause offence and/or economic harm. This can be a problem in any country, though seldom on holidays within the UK. A leader may, for example, 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 consider an alternative where recreational walking on certain days or in certain places is seen by the people who live there as contrary to their customs, practices or beliefs.

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 villages, next to cultivated plots, there were straight narrow channels, usually between one and two feet wide, with low earth/mud 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 fragile 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, thus depriving growing crops of the water they should have received. On this occasion, as well as revealing our ignorance, we had been unimaginative and unobservant, 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.

LAST WORD I hope you have found at least something in these Notes that will help to enhance the joys of your walking, and diminish the inevitable occasional irritations and disappointments. I know they are probably too long and the tone at times too demanding. It's unlikely that anybody would or could act in accordance with all my suggestions all the time, and I don't expect many readers will agree with all of them. We can all, however, try not to do things that might endanger, harm, inconvenience, or cause unintended offence to other people, including our fellow walkers – or to ourselves.

ENJOY YOUR WALKING!

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