

The **Green Guide** for:

GROUPS OF WALKERS

»» Minimal impact advice for walking groups of all sizes



PHOTO: ALEX MESSENGER



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PHOTO: ALEX MESSENGER

INTRODUCTION

Walking groups come in many different forms. Though most people's concept of a group tends to be one of university clubs, the military or outdoor centres, even a small informal gathering of friends could be perceived by others as a group.

It's important to remember that beginners and groups have as much right to walk in the hills as individuals. Indeed, many walkers are likely to have started out by joining a group even if they are no longer part of one. This booklet aims to give guidance on how all types of group, including informal ones, can minimise their impact whilst out in the hills.

TOP TIPS: GROUPS OF WALKERS



PHOTO: JON GARSIDE

- Parking is an issue in many popular walking areas. One advantage of walking with a group is being able to share transport more effectively. This is better for the environment and minimises the number of parking spaces needed.
- If travelling in multiple vehicles, consider lift sharing as a way to reduce your impact on the environment and parking spaces.
- Ensure that your group knows the principles of the Countryside Code and follows them. See page 16 for information on where to find the code.
- Group sizes should be small and the greater the potential hazard on your route, the smaller and more under control your group should be.
- The BMC's Regional Access Database (RAD) is generally thought of as a resource for climbers, but if you're heading out scrambling it's worth checking it as a number of popular

scrambles (eg Raven Crag, Kentmere) are also restricted during nesting season.

- Make sure you are either following a path or well away from any paths or tracks. The most vulnerable areas are those immediately to the side of paths where users spreading out from the path can lead to increased wear and badly eroded 'motorway' paths developing.

► TOP TIPS FOR LED GROUPS

- Route selection and timing is crucial to ensure a good day for your group and minimise your impact on other users.
- Brief your group on the challenges that the hills present, but also on the environmental value of their surroundings. Highlight the 'dos and don'ts' for a day in the hills.



Considerate parking away from gates and without blocking the road is essential to prevent conflict with local farmers and residents.

PHOTO: PLAS Y BRENNIN

ACCESS

▶ OPEN ACCESS LAND

The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) gives recreational users a right of access to the uplands of England and Wales on foot. It covers areas of mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land. These areas are designated as 'open access' and are marked on OS maps in a yellow wash.

Landowners must allow free use of open access land to recreational and educational users, but are allowed to charge for use by commercial users. In practice this means that if the primary purpose of a group visit to open access land is for recreation or education (eg a club day out or a training course) then no charge should be made.



Signs used to show where designated Access Land starts and ends, usually attached to stiles, gates and fence posts. The left hand image shows the symbol for entering access land and the right hand image the symbol for leaving access land (not a no entry sign).

The restrictions that are sometimes used on CRoW access land do not affect public rights of way (so you can walk along them even when surrounding access land is closed).

Dogs need to be kept on a short lead of no more than two metres between 1 March and 31 July each year to protect ground nesting birds, and at all times in the vicinity of livestock.



WATCH: One dog and his man

www.thebmc.co.uk/dogs

▶ BMC HILL CODE

- **Footpaths:** either stay on paths or well away from them – avoid walking on path verges
- **Gates:** leave gates as you find them
- **Parking:** park carefully – avoid blocking gates, driveways and the road
- **Risk:** develop the skills to manage the risks associated with walking and scrambling
- **Wildlife:** do not disturb livestock, wildlife or cliff vegetation; respect seasonal bird nesting restrictions
- **Dogs:** keep dogs under control at all times; don't let your dog chase sheep or disturb wildlife
- **Litter:** leave no trace – take all litter home with you
- **Sanitation:** don't make a mess – bury solid waste and carry out sanitary items
- **Economy:** do everything you can to support the rural economy – shop locally



▶ RIGHTS OF WAY & ACCESS LAND



Area access:



Access land boundary and tint: gives a right of access on foot without having to stay on paths, specifically including walking and climbing.



Access symbol: marks the start of access land and area wide access on foot: usually placed on gates, stiles and fence posts.



'Negative' access symbol: marks the end of area wide access, although linear access such as public rights of way or permissive footpaths may exist beyond it: usually placed on gates, stiles and fence posts.

Linear access:

..... **Path:** not a public right of way

----- **Footpath:** right of way on foot only

----- **Bridleway:** right of way on foot, horseback or bicycle (cyclists are obliged to give way to other users)

+++++ **Restricted byway:** right of way on foot, horseback, bicycle and non-mechanically propelled vehicles

+++++ **Byway open to all traffic:** as for restricted byway but including a right of way for motorised vehicles

Public rights of way can sometimes be diverted, removed, created or have the rights suspended, but only by the local highway authority. Official signs, posted by the authority, will be found on the route to tell you if there are any changes to the local network.



Check access

The BMC's Regional Access Database (RAD) isn't just for climbers! Of particular relevance to walkers and scramblers are voluntary access restrictions during bird nesting season for a number of popular scrambles. The details of the extent of these restrictions are listed in full on RAD and kept up to date through the nesting season. So if a nest is vacated early or used later into the year than is usual, the restriction dates will be updated as needed on the RAD by the BMC's access team. Always check to see if the area you want to visit whilst scrambling has a restriction during the nesting season – even if it usually does, it might have been lifted early!



The RAD can be viewed online at www.thebmc.co.uk/rad or you can download a free iOS or Android smartphone app to check access details whilst out and about.



WATCH: Don't ruffle feathers by ignoring access restrictions

www.thebmc.co.uk/birdsfilm



> LITTER

Plan ahead – if you took it in, take it out. Don't dig rubbish in to the ground or try to hide it under boulders. Removing empty packets is much lighter than carrying in full ones. Remember that food waste is litter too. Do your bit for the environment and take away litter left by others.



Disposable BBQs leave unsightly scorch marks and are often left behind with other litter. By all means enjoy a picnic whilst walking in the hills, but leave BBQs at home and pack out your litter.



PHOTO: ALEX MESSENGER.

> FIRES & BBQS

Fires and BBQs can be highly destructive in sensitive mountain habitats. Although the idea of a camp fire may seem nice, it's best to avoid the risk of starting a wild fire. It's tempting to take disposable BBQs into the mountains as they appear to be self-contained, however the same risk of fire exists with them and if they are not used carefully, they can create scorch marks on grass.

A much better option if you need to heat food or water is to use a purpose-built camping stove, which is easily packed in and out, as well as leaving no trace of its use if used appropriately.

PHOTO: ROB DYER.

> SANITATION

Whilst out in the hills, it's unlikely that you will find toilet facilities on your route. Although sanitation isn't a major issue with walkers generally, (as by the activity's very nature, it takes place over a large area), interest points and popular wild camping spots can suffer if users don't think about sanitation in advance. The best option is to 'go before you go', but inevitably we will all get caught short sometimes and on multi-day trips this will only work for so long.

Packing out human waste and disposing of it when back in civilisation is the best solution. It eliminates any problems by removing the potential cause from the environment.

If packing out is not an option, solid waste should be buried no more than six inches deep to allow rapid decomposition in the upper layers of soil. Toilet paper should either be burned in situ, if there is no chance of starting a wild fire, or placed in a sealable bag, packed out and disposed of when back in civilisation.



PHOTO: ROB DYER.

Essential kit to minimise the impact of your solid waste – a sturdy but lightweight trowel, a small amount of toilet paper, ziplock bags, lighter and hand sanitizer.

Help the Hills

How long will your litter last?

Litter can take a lot longer to degrade than you think. If you see it, pick it up. If everyone does their bit our hills will stay clean.

Paper bag
1 month



Food waste
2 years



Plastic bag
10-20 years



Cigarette butt
12 years



Wine bottle
Not biodegradable



Plastic bottle
450 years



WILD CAMPING

PHOTO: ANDY NEWTON.



PHOTO: MIKE HUTTON.

Rough camping next to roads or near civilisation is inconsiderate. Use a campsite whilst staying in populated areas; wild camping as the name suggests is only appropriate in remote areas well away from civilisation.

Wild camping is a very different undertaking from staying at an established campsite. Wild camping is not permitted by right on open access land in England and Wales without express permission of the landowner, but it is permitted in Scotland provided that you do so responsibly and follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. With no facilities at hand you need to think carefully about your impact – both physical and visual.

Something to consider is what the purpose of taking a group wild camping is? Unless your group will benefit from the experience of wild camping, it may be better to use valley campsites instead to eliminate any impact. With this in mind, there is no reason why small, well-managed groups cannot go wild camping and have a minimal impact in doing so.

The main guideline to reducing your impact whilst wild camping is to aim to leave no trace. This means nothing left that isn't a natural part of the landscape and no damage to ground or vegetation.

“Take only photos and leave only footprints.”

- Keep group sizes small and manageable – large groups can have a huge impact compared with one or two people.
- Avoid wild camping ‘honeypot’ areas and try to choose less popular areas where others are unlikely to be.
- Be inconspicuous – locating your campsite well away from civilisation and popular walking routes is a good idea, as is considering using dull coloured tents that blend into their surroundings.
- Pitch camp at dusk and strike at dawn – don’t keep standing camps in the uplands.
- Choose well-drained ground that won’t be easily damaged for your campsite.
- Clean, pure water is a valuable resource relied upon by many people living in mountainous areas. The nutrient content of streams in most upland areas is low, and altering this by adding pollutants and soap will kill local insect and plant life. If you have to wash, dispose of soapy water well away from water courses. Always consider your impact downstream.
- Sanitation, litter and fires are critical considerations whilst wild camping – see pages 10 & 11.

WHAT IS THE BMC?

The BMC stands up for climbers and walkers in England and Wales. Join over 80,000 members today to get gear discounts, Summit magazine, personal liability and accident insurance and the warm glow that comes from helping us keep crags open.

Join today and support our vital work.

JOIN NOW: go to www.thebmc.co.uk/join or phone **0161 445 6111**

FURTHER READING & INFORMATION:



READ:
BMC Green Guide to the Uplands
A good practice guide for walkers, climbers and mountaineers.



www.thebmc.co.uk/greenguide



WATCH:
BMC Hill Walking Essentials DVD
An info-packed instructional DVD for those new to hill walking.



www.thebmc.co.uk/hill-walking-essentials-dvd



READ:
Scottish Outdoor Access Code
Public access to Scotland's outdoors. Your rights and responsibilities.



www.outdooraccess-scotland.com



READ:
BMC New Hill Walkers booklet
Your first steps to exploring the mountains of Britain and beyond.



www.thebmc.co.uk/new-hill-walkers-booklet



READ:
The Countryside Code
Respect. Protect. Enjoy.



www.naturalengland.org.uk/countrysidecode



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www.mountain-training.org/find/find-a-leader

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