



New Hill Walkers

YOUR FIRST STEPS TO EXPLORING THE
MOUNTAINS OF BRITAIN AND BEYOND



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www.sportengland.org

BMC Participation Statement

The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.



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www.mountain-training.org



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1. | The Great Outdoors

The mountains, moors and high places of Britain offer everyone something rare in a hectic world – the space to think, to breathe, to challenge yourself, and most importantly to be yourself.

Hill walking is literally as easy as putting one foot in front of the other. You don't need to spend thousands on specialist equipment, there are no entrance or membership fees, and there are no winners or losers – just yourself or your friends and the wonderful sense of openness, possibility and adventure the mountains provide.

But despite its simplicity, there are some things you need to know to get started. Those mountains and moors can also be hazardous places to the ill-prepared, and a little bit of knowledge goes a long way. It is important to be prepared with some basic knowledge and 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 more important aspects and provide a reference base for learning the skills in more depth. No amount of reading or training can make it completely safe, but if you develop your skills incrementally and build upon past experience, you can minimise the risks and maximise your enjoyment.

For a relatively small island, Britain is blessed with natural wonder to rival anywhere on earth. Between the exquisite glens and wild mountains of the Scottish Highlands, the cosy valleys and sublime hills of the Lake District, the ancient landscapes and cloud-scraping summits of Snowdonia, or the accessible moorland expanses of the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales, there are enough hill walking joys to keep you busy for a lifetime. Better get started then!



2. | How to start hill walking

Walk this way

The BMC represents people who love the mountains; hill walkers, climbers and mountaineers. Hill walking is a huge part of what we do.

We believe the hills and mountains should be open and protected for all to enjoy. We campaign for freedom of access and the right to roam; fund footpath repair and run campaigns to clean up our hills; lobby the government to pass outdoor-friendly legislation; and continually work for improved access to places we love.

A great example of the work for walkers we do is our flagship Mend Our Mountains campaign. Since 2016, this has raised the best part of £1 million to prevent environmentally harmful erosion by supporting repair of the 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 on Scafell Pike, Snowdon, the three peaks of Yorkshire, the Munros of Scotland, the moors of Exmoor and Dartmoor, and the South Downs Way, to give just a few examples.

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

www.thebmc.co.uk/membership

If you have any hill walking-related questions, or any suggestions for what the BMC could do better for hill walkers, send them to

office@thebmc.co.uk

There is no single or 'right' way to get into hill walking. It can be as simple as buying a map and just exploring! But here are a few more pointers for the many ways you can get started.

Ask a friend

Many hill walkers take their first steps outside with an experienced friend or family member. This can be a fun option. Do you know anyone who walks who can take you with them on their next trip to the Lake District or Snowdonia?

Join a club

Clubs provide a great opportunity to meet like-minded people to walk with. There are over 300 BMC hill walking, climbing and mountaineering clubs in England and Wales. These vary from small and local to large national clubs, with some clubs owning huts in prime locations in mountain areas. Many members stay in one or more club for decades, building life-long friendships. Find a club near you on our website.

www.thebmc.co.uk/find-a-club



*Join a club,
find a friend,
do a course*

Go on a Hill or Mountain Skills course

Develop your personal skills, confidence and independence while learning with likeminded people in the hills. Mountain Training has two personal skills courses designed to equip you with the basic skills required to plan and enjoy your own adventures. Registration with Mountain Training is free for 12-17 year olds, £20 for adults, and gives you access to our digital logbook and both courses, which are delivered by approved providers across the UK. Courses are priced competitively and are set by each provider.

- **Hill Skills** Learn how to plan your own walks, navigate on the hill and what to do if you get lost or if there's an emergency. Typically run over two days this course is great for beginners, those lacking confidence or people who want to walk further afield in hilly countryside and moorland areas.
- **Mountain Skills** Take your walks to new heights as you learn how to look after yourself in the mountains. When things get steeper and further from help, it's important that your navigation, route finding and decision making skills can support your ambitions. This course is ideal for people new to the mountains and those looking to boost their existing mountain skills.

www.mountain-training.org/hill-and-mt-skills



Get the right maps

Having a map suitable for outdoor recreation and knowing how to interpret it is one of the ABCs of safety on the hills (see 'Navigation' section on page 18) – not to mention simply knowing where you are going! The main providers of outdoor maps in the UK are the Ordnance Survey, Harvey British Mountain maps published in conjunction with the BMC, and Harvey Superwalker.

Ordnance Survey

The Ordnance Survey produces two ranges of maps appropriate for hill walking – the 1:25,000 Explorer series and 1:50,000 Landranger series. The closer 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:

www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk

BMC British Mountain Maps

Made in conjunction 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:

shop.thebmc.co.uk

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.

www.harveymaps.co.uk

Hill Walking Essentials DVD



For a film that comprehensively sets out the skills you need for hill walking, purchase the BMC's 'Hill Walking Essentials' DVD online from the BMC shop. It follows two walkers, Fredelina and Ben, on days out in the British mountains, including the Lake District's famous Fairfield Horseshoe.

shop.thebmc.co.uk

Get a guidebook

Using guidebooks can be a great way of introducing yourself to the countryside, as they provide routes, 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 (try Googling the area you are interested in) but be wary that not all information online is reliable.

The mountains are for everyone

Many people with physical, learning and sensory disabilities go hill walking too. Read Mountain Training's Walking For All booklet to discover more about how people with disabilities can enjoy walking.

www.thebmc.co.uk/walking-for-all

Risk

The BMC recognises that hill walking, along with climbing and mountaineering, are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

Hill walking should be looked at as a form of mountaineering, and the mountains contain a range of hazards, from steep ground and rock fall to hypothermia and heatstroke. Hill walking in winter brings its own raft of 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 a given aim. 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 over which you may have no control, such as rock fall, and first aid training can make all the difference in such 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 33 for more information.

No amount of reading or training can make hill walking completely safe, but if you adopt a progressive approach, developing your skills incrementally and building upon past experience, you can minimise the risks and maximise your enjoyment. Overcoming risk can be a hugely rewarding experience in itself; learning to manage risk in the mountains helps you deal with it better in overall life, and can 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.



Watch BMC TV

BMC TV, our online video platform, is full of short films about hill walking, ranging from essential skills to epic inspiration. New films are added regularly and chances are that you'll find one to either hone your skills or give you ideas on where to go. **Check out BMC TV:**

www.youtube.com/teamBMC

Know your limits

3. | Join the club

Find like-minded people to go outdoors with. Joining a club is a great way to get out hill walking.

Why join a club?

You can learn the basics of hill walking, progress your skills and make new friends with likeminded people. Many clubs have pooled equipment for members to use, very handy when you're starting out. You'll discover new places to walk and often receive advice from experienced mountaineers. Many BMC clubs are also great if you want to progress from hill walking to learn about climbing, winter skills or higher-level mountaineering. As a general rule, clubs do not provide formal instruction but opportunities for novices to learn from those more experienced.

HOW DO I FIND A CLUB?

Search for a club near you on the BMC website:

www.thebmc.co.uk/find-a-club

Over 300 climbing, hill walking and mountaineering clubs are affiliated to the BMC. Some clubs are open to all, while others are open to those with a certain level of experience. Every club has a different balance of activities – some are exclusively climbing or walking clubs, but most are a mix of both. You should be able to tell whether a club has the right balance for you from their website or by dropping their secretary a line. There are women's clubs, university clubs, and more besides. There's bound to be a club to suit you.



Get clubbing and make new friends

What are the benefits of joining a BMC affiliated club?

BMC affiliated clubs can apply for training and equipment grants. Members of BMC affiliated clubs have access to third party liability insurance, subsidised training courses, support from BMC staff and volunteers, BMC travel and activity insurance, a free copy of BMC Summit magazine, mountain huts and discounts at over 700 outdoor shops. Plus you get access to all the experience and camaraderie of everyone in the club.

What do I need to join?

Many clubs cater for beginners, but some have guidelines on what is required to join, so check their websites or send an email.

Can I try before I join?

Most clubs allow prospective members to come and try out the club by attending a social event or dedicated new members' meet.

How to choose a club

Check out club events calendars on their websites to see what they do. Ask questions like what their age range is, where they go walking, how regularly they meet and what training opportunities there are.

4. | Young walkers

Children naturally find the outdoors fascinating. Here are a few tips for how to help kids get out walking.

BMC young people guide

Children naturally find the outdoors fascinating. Placed in a natural environment, most children instinctively begin scaling trees, clambering over walls and exploring rock pools. Nurturing this adventurousness and curiosity is likely to lead to children having strong risk awareness, natural knowledge and a healthy habit for the outdoors in adult life.

Parents may not be hill walkers themselves but can download the BMC's parent's guide to climbing, hill walking and mountaineering from our website. The various activities are explained and the meaning of commonly used terms provided. Children and their parents also need to understand the risks associated with taking children outdoors, which the guide helps to address.

www.thebmc.co.uk/youngpeople

Safeguarding young people

The BMC's Child Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines are designed to protect young people and vulnerable adults, and support those who look after them. The policy outlines the BMC's roles and responsibilities and those of BMC employees and volunteers. The guidelines include good practice advice for adults working with young climbers.

www.thebmc.co.uk/safeguarding

Clubs

Many BMC clubs welcome children when accompanied by a parent or an adult acting in loco parentis.

www.thebmc.co.uk/find-a-club



5. Know your hill skills!

If you're new to hill walking, then this booklet will provide information on some essential skills you should learn and develop on your trips into the hills and mountains. The BMC poster opposite can be thought of as a very condensed version of some of the most important advice.

- **Check the weather and plan your route**
mountain weather can change very quickly with beautiful sunshine giving way to torrential downpours. Free mountain-specific forecasts exist for popular areas, so take advantage of them. They are available online (see 'weather' section on page 24 for more information on these), or posted in shops and tourist information centres. Many people get caught out by overestimating their ability, or simply giving no thought to the walk they are undertaking. It is important to consider how long a walk can take in the uplands, see page 20 for guidance on pacing and timing.
- **Be prepared for 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 floppy hats to protect from heatstroke. It gets dark at sunset, and there are no streetlights in the mountains! Mountain rescue are often called to assist walkers stranded in the dark, who would have been able to walk off themselves if only they had taken a torch. Always pack one!
- **Know how to use your map and compass**
assisting lost walkers is one of the most common reasons for mountain rescue call-outs. Whilst technology like GPS can help you know where you are, a GPS device can't make route choices for you. Being able to use a map and compass is a core hill walking skill, but as with all techniques practice is required to become proficient.

BMC
British Mountaineering Council

Be prepared for bad weather & nightfall

Check the weather & plan your route

Know how to use a map & compass

Know your hill skills!

Support British Hill Walking Join the BMC today thebmc.co.uk 0161 445 6111

smallmountains.co.uk

- **Be flexible**
if you feel you are getting out of your depth, you encounter worse weather than expected or simply run out of time, then it's not a failure to turn around and go back down. Great days can be had in the

mountains without having to reach the summit. Being flexible and using judgement of when to turn back is a key skill. The mountains will always be there for another day, and the experience gained will add to your knowledge for the next time.

Know your skills and enjoy the hills!

6. | Clothing and equipment

There is not much gear that is vital, but it's important to have appropriate equipment for the activity and prevailing weather.

Clothing

When out in the hills you will need, as a minimum:

- shoes or boots to keep you upright;
- insulating layers to keep you warm;
- waterproofs to keep you dry.



Footwear

It is important to choose shoes or boots that are both comfortable and provide adequate support. No footwear is perfectly suited for all seasons and terrain. A lightweight summer shoe would be completely inappropriate in winter, for example, just as wearing winter mountaineering boots on a hot sunny day could result in overheated and blistered feet.

Shoes are great on level terrain such as lowland valley tracks. With little ankle support provided, they are unsuitable on uneven ground and steep climbs.

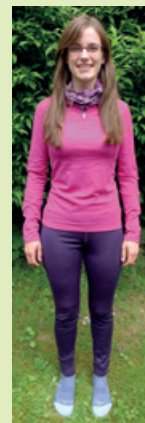
Boot construction varies greatly and affects how 'soft' or 'firm' a boot feels. Summer boots tend to flex more than winter boots. When walking on bare rock a soft sole can mould to the uneven surface better than a firm sole. For this reason summer boots can feel more comfortable. However, a boot with a more rigid sole can grip small edges more effectively. Such differences demonstrate why a softer boot is great for trail walking and a firmer boot better suited to 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. Conversely, if most of your walking is along well defined paths with gentle inclines, a softer boot may suit you better.

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. If you are very heavy with large feet, or very light with small feet you could also consider choosing a more or less substantial boot as appropriate.

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 appropriate walking socks. Specialist walking socks have design features that affect the fit of your boot, so bear this in mind when selecting your boot size. A good fit will give you room around the toes and hold the heel to prevent it lifting too much. Many shops will let you take the boots home for an indoor trial and then let you return them if they're not quite right. Walking up and down a flight of stairs can help you decide if your foot is held firmly in the boot.

Your first long walk in a new pair of boots will help break them in. The stiffer and heavier they are, the more breaking in will be required. Be aware of any rub points, and if you notice any, stop and apply tape or a plaster which should prevent blisters developing.



Insulating layers

Just as we use layers of clothing in our everyday lives to regulate body temperature, the same is true when exploring the hills. The range of temperatures experienced in one day will often be greater in the hills than in cities. Clothing to deal with such variation is therefore required. With the weight of your rucksack contents an important consideration, choosing items that fulfil a range of functions is a good idea. Waterproofs double up as windproofs for example.

You may already own clothing that fits the bill very well. You'll need light comfortable clothing while you walk, something warm for when it gets colder and something waterproof in case the heavens open. It is better to wear several relatively thin layers than a single thick one, because the layers trap air which is a good insulator, and you can regulate your temperature more effectively by adding or removing layers.

Materials which do not absorb moisture are better because wet clothes will make you feel cold. Wool has always been recognised as a good material for hill walkers. Synthetic materials such as fleece are also used for outdoor clothing. Cotton is not good 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 baselayer and light woollen midlayer. The baselayer should wick moisture away from your body, and so keep your skin dry and prevent excessive chilling every 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 we walk and thermal leg wear is likely only to be necessary in cold conditions.

Finally, for very cold days and in winter, it can be worthwhile to invest in a warm jacket made from down or synthetic insulation. This will likely be too warm to wear on the move, but can prove invaluable when stopped, placed over all your layers to prevent heat escaping as your body cools.

Socks

Good socks regulate your foot temperature and help to prevent blisters by providing a snug fit. As with your clothing, socks need to wick moisture away from your skin, as overheated feet will be uncomfortable and prone to developing blisters. Choose socks that are padded in the heel, ball and toes where the most pressure is applied. 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.



Waterproofs

A waterproof outer layer of jacket and trousers will keep you dry, and in combination with your insulating layers will prevent a reduction in body temperature which can in extreme circumstances lead to the development of hypothermia. Nowadays, just about all 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.

A 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 drawcords and adjustable wrist closures help to seal out the weather and retain warmth. A stiffened hood will provide good visibility; the alternative is one that slaps you in the face with every gust of wind! You'll need to be able to put your overtrousers on and remove them whilst wearing your boots, so make sure there are zips down the side.

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 'conveniently' channelled into your boots!

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 very wet. Keep your head warm and you will be warm!

On hot sunny days, a sunhat and neckerchief will protect the head and neck from sunburn and overheating. If the body absorbs more

heat than it can dissipate then heatstroke (also known as hyperthermia or sunstroke) could ensue, which is a serious medical condition.

In summer at least, gloves need not be over-specialised. A simple pair of woolen or fleece gloves will usually be fine. But in winter, it's often advisable to have a two or even three-layer system for gloves – a pair of windproof fleece gloves, then chunkier waterproof mountaineering gloves to go over the top, and finally some big toasty mitts for when your hands get really frozen. Packing spare pairs weighs very little but at times can be vital.

Equipment

A suggested kit list at the end of this chapter provides guidance on what to take on your hill walks. Consider your day ahead, and pack accordingly.

Rucksack

A rucksack is the most convenient way to carry your equipment, and should be neither too big nor too small. There are many different sizes to choose from. When moorland walking, a 30 litre rucksack is probably adequate; if heading into the mountains, 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. The shoulder-waist-hip ratios are different between men and women, and so some rucksacks are specially designed for women.

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. Lid pockets are very useful for gloves, hats and snacks, etc.



Finally, consider how to pack your rucksack. Regularly used items should be easily accessible in the lid pocket or top of the rucksack. Heavy items, such as water bottles or thermos flasks, should 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. On rainy days especially, not having to expose all your kit to the elements at one time makes life much easier. Heavy duty carrier bags are a cheaper alternative to drybags.

Food and drink

As crucial as taking suitable equipment is having sufficient food and drink. The amount required will vary depending on weather conditions, distance and terrain walked.

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.

It is sensible to have some emergency food, like high energy bars, tucked away 'just in case'. You do not need to take any 'specialist' food; sandwiches, snacks and some fruit will work fine.

When it comes to drinks, water will do the job perfectly well. In cold weather a hot drink is likely to be very welcome, with a metal thermos flask being more robust than a glass one.

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. This is obviously 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.

It goes without saying that sunglasses can make life more comfortable on a sunny summer's day. In winter, not wearing eye protection can make it very hard to move around or 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 parts of the eyes being sunburnt.

In Scotland especially, midges can be the bane of the summer hill walker, but repellents containing DEET work well to stop them biting. Some people do not like using DEET based repellents, preferring those containing natural ingredients such as Citronella, but these are not as effective as DEET based products. If camping in the summer, consider taking a mesh head net for extra protection.

Trekking poles

Trekking poles are increasingly popular, and are best used as a pair. Poor technique can negate any positive benefits, and there are pros and cons to using them.

After a long day out in the hills, aching knees on the descent is 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, particularly useful when carrying a heavy sack, walking on uneven ground or in winter when patches of ice can occur unexpectedly.

However, the wrist, elbow and shoulder joints are not designed to prop up your body – we're bipedal after all! If you're not careful, protecting your knees can simply mean aggravating other joints. If you are very tired and do not need the poles for stability, it may be best to pack them away if there is the chance of tripping yourself up on one! Using poles prevents your hands from being free for other things. Don't fall into the trap of not eating, drinking or checking your map simply because you cannot be bothered to take your poles off.

Emergency equipment

Whilst emergencies are a rare occurrence in the hills, the equipment to help you deal with them is relatively modest. Here are some suggestions:

First aid kit

When dealing with an injured hill walker, help may not be close at hand. therefore, taking a first aid kit and seeking out some basic first aid training is a very good idea.

Bivi bag

Made from tough polythene, a bivi bag provides individual shelter in case of emergency. Effective and inexpensive, they can also be used in conjunction with a group shelter. More expensive survival bag designs can provide greater insulating properties than a standard polythene bivi bag.

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 need not 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 some spare batteries.

Mobile phone

Mobile phones can be a godsend when needing to contact the emergency services, but should not be thought of as a 'safety net', tempting walkers to objectives outside of their experience and ability.

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 to time navigation legs.

Group shelter

Getting lost in poor visibility or dealing with even a minor injury can escalate into something more serious for the whole party if people get cold. Spare clothing should be carried for this reason, but a group shelter is the most effective way to keep warm. Made from light ripstop nylon, a group shelter is shaped like a very large upside down bowl. The warmer temperature inside the shelter is created by retained body heat and protection from wind.



A suggested kit check list

- map and compass
- torch, plus spare battery and bulb
- watch
- walking boots and socks
- shorts / trousers
- wicking baselayer
- insulating midlayer
- fleece jacket
- waterproof jacket
- waterproof overtrousers
- hat and scarf
- gloves / mittens
- gaiters
- rucksack
- drink
- food
- emergency food
- sunhat / sunglasses / sunscreen
- insect repellent (seasonal)
- spare gloves
- spare socks
- whistle
- mobile phone
- first aid kit
- bivi bag
- group shelter
- trekking poles (optional)
- GPS device (optional)



Further Information

DVD: Hill Walking Essentials (BMC)
BUY: shop.thebmc.co.uk

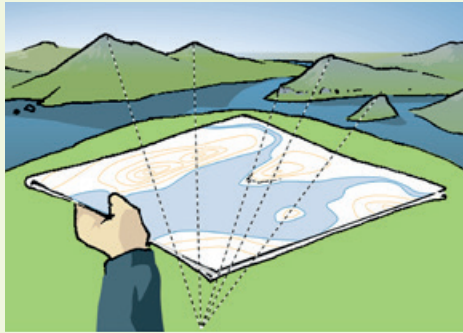


WATCH: Skills: hill walking' playlist

www.youtube.com/teamBMC

7. | Navigation

Effective navigation not only helps to make you safer on the hill, it can also mean a better day out. Develop navigation skills incrementally on less serious hills in good weather, before choosing more challenging objectives.



Map reading vs navigation

It's useful to draw a distinction between map reading and navigation, as they are often confused as the same thing. Map reading could be described as understanding the different map symbols and topographical features. Knowing that blue symbols are wet, for example, or that the distance between contour lines tells you how steep a slope is. Navigation is very different and is the ability to use this information effectively. This includes planning a route or being able to use the map to find your way.



Maps

In Britain the most commonly used maps for hill walking are Ordnance Survey maps in either 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 scale and Harvey Maps in either 1:40,000 or 1:25,000 scale. The 1:40,000 British Mountain Maps use Harvey mapping and cover the most popular walking destinations in Britain. Made from waterproof and tear resistant plastic they are both light and durable.

See page 6 for more information on where to find and buy maps.

Setting the map

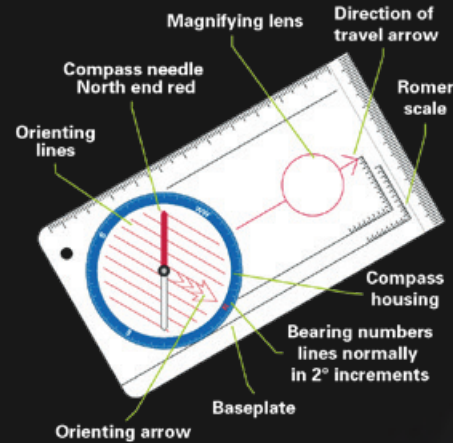
This is one of the most important navigation skills, and entails positioning the map so that all the features are lined up, with your location as the central point. What is in front of you on the ground will be in front of you on the map, what is to your left on the ground will be to your left on the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

The compass

The compass is used for 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.



Walking on a bearing

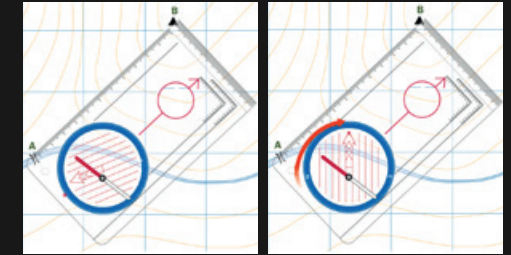
With the magnetic bearing set, hold the compass close to your chest with the direction of travel arrow on the compass pointing forwards. Whilst looking down onto the compass, rotate your body until the north end of the magnetic needle is aligned with the north end of the orienting arrow.

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?

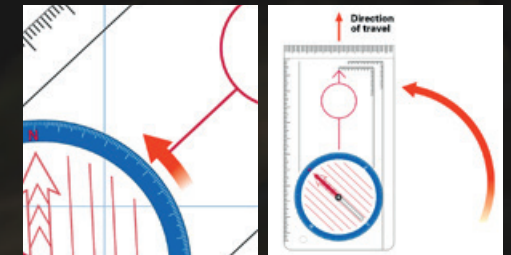
Taking a bearing

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.



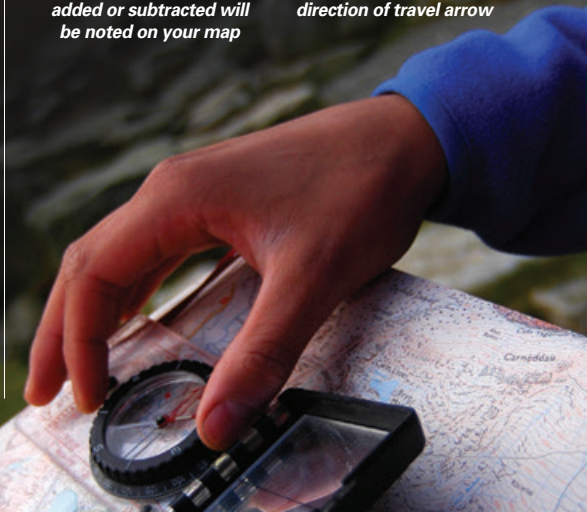
Align the compass along the required route on the map

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

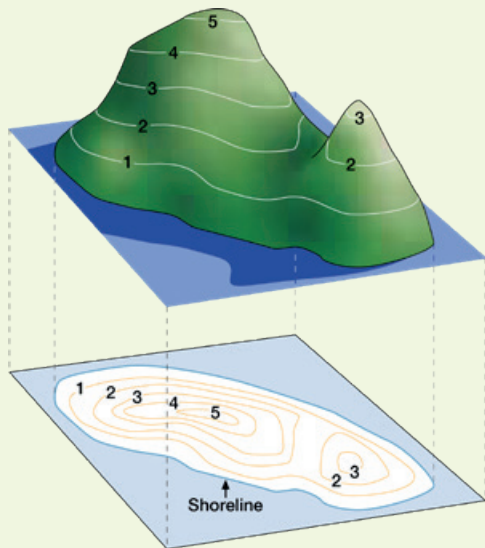


Understanding a map

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 wedding cake, each tier holding a cake wrapped in a purple band. Viewed side on you would see three bands, one above the other, each narrower than the one below. Viewed from above you would see three purple circles, 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 'bands' around the hills on a flat map.



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.

If you know the speed you walk, you can estimate the distance travelled. Reasonably fit people walk at 4 or 5kmh (slower going uphill, faster going 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.

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!

GPS technology

In recent years GPS technology and the accompanying utilisation of it for hill walking purposes has progressed in leaps and bounds. At the more basic end, a GPS device will simply provide you with your current grid reference. But with more sophisticated devices and apps, whole walks can be devised 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 succumb to the elements 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 – is an essential skill.

All in all, while GPS technology can be an extremely useful addition to your suite of navigational tools, 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.



Further Information

DVD: Hill Walking Essentials (BMC)
BOOK: Navigation in the Mountains (MTUK)
BUY: shop.thebmc.co.uk

8. | Hazards

Just as a young child has to learn about hazards in their world, novice hill walkers will encounter challenges which are new to them.

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 - get 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. Carrying blindly on with the hope that 'things will work themselves out' is not!

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. Reassess hazards throughout the day.

Terrain

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

Group composition

Managing group dynamics is not always easy. If there is a mismatch between group members in ability and fitness, then consideration needs to be given to how everyone's aspirations can be met. Make an honest appraisal of what is realistic for the whole group.

Learning from experienced hill walkers is undoubtedly effective and rewarding for all involved. This does not mean that those with less experience are not also able to make key decisions about their own safety and participation.

Movement skills

A simple slip is one of the most common causes of injury to hill walkers; the more uneven or steeper the ground, the greater the potential for a 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.

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. Trekking 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.



Cows

Most members of the public are wary of bulls, but few realise that cows, particularly those protecting newly-born calves, can also be dangerous. People have been attacked or trampled to death by cows while quietly walking their dog. The cows are thought to have been trying to protect their young by driving off the dogs.

If you approach a field of cows and there happen to be calves, try to choose a different route to avoid them.

The countryside is a great place to exercise dogs, but 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 destroy a dog that injures or worries their animals, therefore dog walkers should keep their dogs on their 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 cattle, move away carefully and quietly. If you feel threatened by cattle release your dog from its lead; let it run free rather than try to protect it and endangering yourself. The dog will outrun the cows and you. Remove the lead to avoid the risk of strangulation.

Those without canine companions should also move away carefully and quietly. The cows 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 a 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 aching muscles and joints.

For more information watch the tick awareness film on both the BMC *Hill Walking Essentials* DVD and the BMC website at

www.thebmc.co.uk/ticks

Weather

If you think British weather can be fickle, try experiencing it in the mountains. Here's how to survive our Atlantic climate in the uplands - and maybe even enjoy it...

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. 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.

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.

Temperature

Air cools with altitude. Dry air cools at about 1°C per 100 metres and moist or foggy air about half as quickly. If the forecast says that North Wales will experience a clear day, with Bangor at a respectable 10°C, then the summit of Snowdon could be a chilly zero. Brrrrrrr!!

Wind chill, the combined effect of wind and temperature, is a major mountain hazard and a common contributory factor in hypothermia cases. Some mountain specific weather forecasts, such as those produced by the Mountain Weather Information Service (MWIS), provide wind chill indications.

Precipitation

Britain receives much warm and wet south westerly air from the gulf of Mexico, the so-called gulf stream. On meeting colder Arctic air this warm air rises, forming weather depressions. The result is our predominantly wet weather.

Consider the direction of the prevailing wind given in a forecast. This will help you to predict the characteristics of any weather systems carried by that wind. North and west of Britain are oceans and so northerly and westerly air flows commonly bring precipitation. South of Britain is mainly land; wind from this direction will generally be dryer and warmer.

Northerlies are cold as they originate in the Arctic. The only 'odd' winds are easterlies. They are usually drier than those which track over the sea, but reflecting the land they pass over, are biting cold in winter yet can be quite balmy in summer.

Combined weather effects

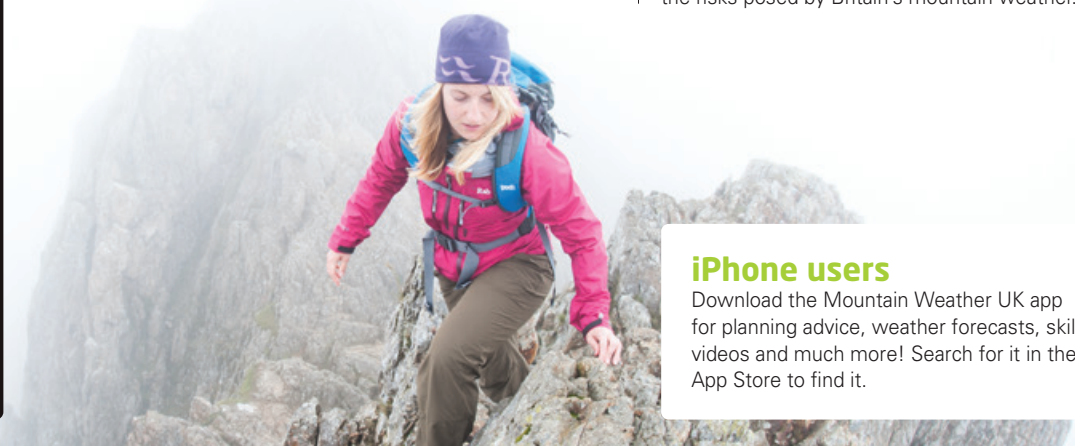
Together, cold temperatures, rain and wind can create a sense of anxiety and urgency. This may lead to hurried and unconsidered decisions being made. Good planning should predict the likelihood of these conditions and allow some critical decisions to be made in advance.

The weather can affect your rate of travel. Battling a headwind can slow you. Poor visibility will require more detailed navigation, which will take time. Snow and ice, if met unexpectedly, may necessitate a detour. Sometimes it can be too warm. On hot summer days take your time, use sun protection and drink plenty of liquid as heatstroke and dehydration are extremely debilitating.

In summary, understanding how weather 'works', paying attention to forecasts, being ready for abrupt changes, being well equipped and able to navigate if caught out, will all go towards reducing the risks posed by Britain's mountain weather.

iPhone users

Download the Mountain Weather UK app for planning advice, weather forecasts, skills videos and much more! Search for it in the App Store to find it.



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 is 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.

Rocks

Many classic walking routes may have one or more short rocky steps, sections where care and attention is required. Though not technically demanding, the consequences of a fall in the wrong place could be very serious. Confidence in your movement skills is vital; be aware that rock steps can be more challenging in descent than ascent. 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.

Water hazards

It is fair to say that high rainfall is a characteristic of our hills and mountains. Consequently, 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.

Wild swimming is a popular pursuit, and taking a dip in a mountain lake on a hot day can be one of life's finest pleasures. But be mindful of safety considerations - drownings can and do occur in wild water. See the Lake District National Park's Swim Safe code:

www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/visiting/thingstodo/water/swimming

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.

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 if any hazards lie en route.



Further Information

DVD: Hill Walking Essentials (BMC)

BOOK: Hill Walking (MTUK)

BUY: shop.thebmc.co.uk

9. | Walking in winter

'Winter' is an unpredictable term in walking. The hills and mountains can be snow- and ice-free over Christmas, but crampons and axes are often essential when climbing Ben Nevis in April. When venturing into the mountains in winter, the terrain underfoot is what's relevant. Moving around in the winter environment requires specific skills and equipment over and above those used in spring, summer and autumn.

Clothing and equipment

As it is colder in winter you will need more clothes. Just as in summer, a flexible clothing system is required, along with some extra insulating layers. Good insulation for the head, neck and hands is essential. Always take a spare pair of gloves or mitts; if you lose one you can incapacitate your hands, or worse still, get frostbite. Ski goggles will enable you to look forward when snow is being blasted into your face by strong winds. On clear days, sunglasses and sunscreen will protect the eyes and face.

A pair of winter walking boots will keep your feet warm and provide you with the required grip and support. Crampons are attached to your boots for safer travel over hard packed snow or ice. Apart from knowing how to use them effectively, what is most important is ensuring the crampons are compatible with your boots, and then fitting them properly. An axe is a vital piece of winter equipment and has a variety of functions; it can be used for support and to stop you should you slip. Walking is more physical in winter, so more energy from food is required. Taking on enough fluid is important too. A hot flask provides a welcome winter warmer; if possible, fill your water bottle with hot water, to prevent it freezing.

Finally, with this extra food, fluid, clothing and equipment you will need a good sized rucksack between 40 and 50 litres to carry it all.

Winter skills courses: learn from the professionals

There are few better ways to learn the skills you need than by having them imparted face-to-face by an experienced instructor. One of the most popular ways of doing this is to go to book in to one of the UK's mountain centres, which offer full board and accommodation to go with winter skills course itineraries which cover crampon and ice axe use, avalanche awareness and much more. The Plas y Brenin centre in Snowdonia is a great option, as is Scotland's Glenmore Lodge, with the vast arctic plateau of the Cairngorms – and Britain's most 'reliable' winter conditions – on its doorstep. See their websites for the full range of courses.

www.pyb.co.uk

www.glenmorelodge.org.uk

If you'd prefer to find an instructor in another area, you can use Mountain Training's 'Find an Instructor' facility to locate a suitably qualified instructor in winter skills, as well as the whole range of mountaineering activities, in a region of your choice. The most reliable places for winter conditions are, not surprisingly, the highest parts of the UK – Snowdonia, the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands – but other upland areas can experience them too, albeit less predictably.

www.mountain-training.org/membership/ami/find-an-instructor

Winter hazards

In winter the wind can be so strong as to blow you over, a potentially very serious situation if walking on a steep slope or ridge. Needless to say, a forecast will help you plan your day appropriately. Don't forget to take into account that winter days are short; in the Scottish highlands in mid-winter there is less than seven hours of daylight.

Navigating in winter is more difficult. Snow cover can hide features, and the ground can appear different from indications given by the map's contours. In summer, if you make an error, you are unlikely to walk off a cliff edge, as you will most likely see the drop first. Not so in winter when white-out conditions or a cornice can obscure your view. Before exploring the winter hills, sharpen up on your summer navigation.

In a single day you could walk over a variety of terrain, including: unfrozen and frozen ground; soft, hard packed or frozen snow; and patches of ice and ice-covered rock. You need to be prepared for sudden changes in terrain; a patch of ice on a path could catch you unawares. The points about movement skills noted on page 22 are of even greater importance in winter as the consequences of a slip can be more serious. You can leave a relatively safe spot for one with real objective danger in only a few footsteps. Feel confident moving around in summer first, and then progressively develop your movement skills in winter.

Avalanches occur when one layer of deposited snow slides on another or the whole snow cover slides on the ground. 90% of all avalanches involving human subjects are triggered by their victims. The evolution of the snowpack is determined by the weather; by studying the weather information before setting out and observing snowpack conditions en route hazard assessments can be made. On most hills in Britain, avalanche hazard can be avoided by sensible choice of route.

When snow is deposited on the leeward edge of a ridge or plateau, cornices are formed. These over-hanging banks of snow are extremely serious hazards. Cornices obscure cliff edges, and can collapse under your weight. Care should also be taken when walking underneath them.

The Scottish Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) provides information on snow conditions during the winter months.

www.sais.gov.uk



Further Information

DVD: Winter Essentials (BMC)

BOOK: Winter Skills (MTUK)

BUY: shop.thebmc.co.uk



WATCH WINTER SKILLS VIDEOS ON BMC TV

Confused by crampons? Hacked off by axes? Afraid of avalanches? There is no substitute for having skills and knowledge imparted face-to-face by an experienced instructor, so one of the best ways to get the knowledge you need for winter is to take a winter skills course like the ones described in this section. But we all need a refresher from time to time, so to help you reinforce your skills we have made a number of videos on winter skills specifics for BMC TV, covering things like ice axe arrest, choosing crampons, cutting steps, dealing with avalanche hazard, and coping with winter weather. View them on our 'Skills: walking and climbing in winter' channel:

www.youtube.com/teamBMC

10. Access and the environment

Thanks to many years of campaigning, we now have the right to roam freely in most mountain environments in Britain. But these rights must be exercised in a responsible manner - or we run the risk of losing them!

Access in England & Wales

Understanding where you can and can't walk can sometimes be confusing. Compounding this confusion is the fact that 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 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 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 at

www.outdooraccess-scotland.com



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 adult 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.





Mend Our Mountains

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

Though not always properly understood by the general public, footpath erosion can have a seriously damaging effect on the surrounding environment. Without intervention it has been known to result in erosion scars of 30 metres or more across – as wide as the M1. Erosion can endanger rare vegetation, disturb habitats, expose carbon-capturing peat and create run-off which adversely affects local waterways.

Since 2016, Mend Our Mountains has raised the best part of £1 million to prevent environmentally harmful erosion by supporting path repair. You can donate to it on its website:

www.mendmountains.thebmc.co.uk



The BMC's Hills 2 Oceans (H2O) campaign encourages the nation to remove as much litter and plastic from our hills, mountains and crags as possible so it doesn't end up in our oceans. The BMC is asking all its members and the wider public to help reduce this amount by joining an existing litter pick or by organising their own. Find out more by googling 'BMC Hills 2 Oceans', or following this link:

www.thebmc.co.uk/h2o-bmc-hills-2-oceans-campaign-litter-pick

Shop locally

The local spending of hill walkers is vital to the conservation and development of many upland areas. Wherever possible, support local independent businesses such as grocers, outdoor retailers, cafes and restaurants.

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.

Paths

Paths have been constructed in many areas to protect and repair mountains from the erosion that is caused by the sheer volume of visitors. Use these paths wherever possible rather than taking shortcuts. Paths are often only the width of one person; walk in single file on such sections.

Wild fires

Peat and vegetation which grow in upland areas can become dry and flammable. Accidental fires can destroy habitats and kill wildlife. Do not light fires on moorlands, not even gas stoves or barbecues, and never stub matches or cigarettes out in the vegetation. 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.

Boundaries

Climbing over walls and fences will damage them; use stiles and gates wherever possible.

Litter

Take litter home with you – if you've carried it in, you can carry it out. Where possible, pick up other people's litter, especially non-biodegradable material. Organic litter takes longer to break down than most people think; it also attracts certain predator species, so take it home. Reduce the litter you need to carry out with you by repackaging your food before you set out.

Sanitation

There's a reluctance to talk about what is one of our most natural functions! And yet by not thinking carefully about this we can endanger human health and potentially poison the upland environment. Ensure you are at least 30 metres away from running water when doing your business, and 50 metres away from paths. Carry a lightweight trowel to carefully cut out a 15cm (6") deep hole, bury your excrement, and replace the top turf. Better still, it should be packed in a bag and carried out. Toilet paper is slow to decompose and may be dug up by animals. Again, carry it out if possible. Avoid going to the toilet in enclosed spaces (caves, ruined buildings etc). Always consider the environment and other people.



Transport

Traffic congestion and parking problems are an issue in many popular upland areas. You can make a difference by taking public transport, car sharing and using designated parking places.



Camping and the environment

With no facilities at hand you need to think carefully about your impact – both physical and visual. Whenever you wild camp leave the site as you find it. Keep your group small and as discreet as possible. Camp in one place for one or two nights only and on dry / well-drained ground that won't be easily damaged. If you have to wash, dispose of soapy water well away from water courses.

Camping in the hills

Spending a night in a tent can be an unforgettable experience – and hopefully a positive one! A multi-day trip in the hills, carrying all you require in a rucksack provides a great sense of freedom and with careful planning is relatively straightforward to achieve.

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 are make a minimal impact and are discreet. It is permitted in Scotland on the proviso 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 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; more food; and a bigger rucksack to carry it all in!

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.

Further Information

BOOK: Green Guide to the Uplands (BMC)

WEB: www.thebmc.co.uk/greenguide

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11. | 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.

What to do

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 any temptation to use them to call mountain rescue in non-emergency circumstances should be resisted. If you are not sure whether it is an emergency, investigate a little yourself before summoning outside help.



Walking down

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 the casualty safe, start first aid, and send for 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 obtained, 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!

A helicopter may arrive before the mountain rescue team. Extinguish all flames and secure all equipment

First Aid

Many people do not consider the importance of first aid training until standing next to an injured companion on a remote mountainside. A large range of first aid publications and courses are available, many of which are tailored to hill walkers.



What to do if there's 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 not in ways that will endanger you.

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.



Further Information

BOOK: Call Out Mountain Rescue? (MREW)

BUY: shop.thebmc.co.uk

Support Mountain Rescue

Mountain rescue teams are run by volunteers and depend upon charitable donations to operate. Your consideration and support go a long way to ensure the service continues. Collection boxes are located in pubs and outdoor shops in most upland areas. You can also donate online at

www.mountain.rescue.org.uk

www.scottishmountainrescue.org

Registering for emergency text service

The service emergency SMS allows you to send texts to call for help in areas with low signal – a potentially lifesaving tool in the mountains. For details of how to register see

www.emergencysms.net

Emergency kit check-list: the stuff to keep in your bag

As well as knowing the advice on this page, being prepared for an emergency means having certain items to hand. Why not store this equipment in a pocket in your rucksack so you always have it when you go out?

- 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)





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BMC Ambassador
Mary-Ann Ochota on
Tryfan, Snowdonia.
Photo: Alex Messenger.

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