

Coventry CHA Rambling Club: some basic safety etiquette for walkers

Walking is a wonderful recreational activity, but there are some risks attached. Walkers need to be aware of these and to take sensible precautions. The risks are caused mainly by three factors: weather, terrain and remoteness.

Weather:

Walkers are expected to wear clothing suitable for the outdoors, able to cope with changeable weather. You should wear (or, on a hot day, bring with you) warm clothing with a waterproof outer layer (jacket and overtrousers), irrespective of the weather on starting out. For much of the year, headgear and gloves should be included. Tops and trousers will be more comfortable made from lightweight fabrics worn in layers. These fabrics often draw moisture away from your body, keeping you more comfortable. Thick cotton garments should be avoided as they are likely to get damp/wet, taking a long time to dry. We would never advise you to wear jeans for this reason.

When appropriate, sun protection cream and/or sun hats etc. should be carried and used.

Terrain:

For some short walks in the middle of a dry summer, on a route you know is relatively flat, you may be able to get away with a pair of trainers or lightweight walking shoes. But for the vast majority of walks a pair of boots is best. Boots not only provide additional ankle support, they also allow you to step through deeper boggy patches without the water flowing over the top! In winter, good boots are absolutely essential. The type of upper is very much down to personal preference - fabric uppers with breathable waterproof linings (such as Goretex) can be very effective being perfectly adequate in everything other than full winter weather, although many prefer traditional leather.

Walking poles can help walkers cope with steep slopes, both up and down, and with stability on more variable terrain. A pair of poles is generally recommended, as opposed to just one. Please take care, however, that poles do not inadvertently jab or trip your fellow walkers.

Unfortunately, not all stiles have yet been replaced by gates, and stiles are notoriously individual in build and robustness! Please take care with stiles and ask for help if you would like it.

There may be occasions where some road walking is required. It is essential that, where there is no pavement, walkers walk on the right in single file, facing oncoming traffic, but crossing to the other side well before sharp right-hand bends. Please follow the specific instructions of the leader in all such cases.

Remoteness:

Unless otherwise indicated in the walk description, walkers should assume pubs/cafes etc. are not available on the walk and carry sufficient food and drink. Hot drinks are useful all year around, but in hot weather plentiful cold drinks should be carried - you may be surprised how much liquid you use and it's easier to pour water away than to find it!

Large groups will inevitably become strung out somewhat (particularly when crossing stiles), so please have patience for others. But please also bear in mind that (particularly in woodland) paths may dart off in all directions, so everyone should keep the person behind in view. Shout or whistle if there are problems.

Other information:

The Club provides a yellow "Medical Details" form that all walkers are required to complete and carry with them on all walks. This contains basic information such as any medication being taken and emergency contact numbers, in case there is ever an incidence. It is suggested that this complete form is kept in a waterproof bag in your rucksack, so that it can be easily located if ever required.

In summary:

Bearing the above in mind, at the end of the day, walks take place entirely at the leader's discretion. Adverse weather conditions and other factors affecting the safety of walk participants could result in the walk leader cancelling the walk, changing the route, shortening the length of the walk or in some circumstances extending the walk to avoid a hazard.

During the walk, for your own safety, it is the responsibility of all walkers to accept the guidance of the leaders, respect the countryside codes and the Club's rules, and to maintain a corporate responsibility which ensures a safe and successful day for all participants. Members on walks must inform the leaders if they are aware of any medical condition or other reasons which might affect the successful completion of the walk and, of course, they should be suitably dressed and equipped to cope with the prevailing conditions.

If the walk leader or committee members are unhappy about the safety aspects of your clothing/footwear or your capabilities for a particular walk, you may be restricted in the walks you can do, or even excluded from the day's walk. Please do not take offence - we have a responsibility both for you and the rest of the walking party in ensuring we all have a safe and enjoyable day out.