

Introduction

It is an odd fact that, despite the ever-increasing popularity of walking, and the numerous books on hill-walking, the Global Navigation Satellite System, navigation, mountain weather, backpacking, rights of way, tables of heights of mountains and hills etc. that have been published in the last decade, there is not one book that covers all aspects of the subject. As its title, *The Walker's Handbook; Everything You Need to Know about Walking in the British Isles* suggests, this is an attempt to fill that gap.

The Walker's Handbook was originally published in 1978 and proved so popular that it went through four editions by 1991. It is now woefully out of date so this edition has been extensively revised to take into account the numerous changes and developments that have taken place in the world of walking. These include the development of the Global Navigation Satellite System, which has revolutionized navigation, and the internet that has made a huge amount of information readily available to walkers.

Earlier editions of *The Walker's Handbook* had to include much information about subjects such as long distance paths, national parks, and areas of outstanding natural beauty, but this edition gives basic facts and refers the reader to the relevant website from where the most up-to-date information is available.

Much as I love walking, and especially the countryside of England whose beautiful pastoral landscapes can move me close to tears, I have resisted the temptation to eulogize the subject and have confined myself to sticking to facts and hard information. Those looking for inspirational books will find some listed in Appendix 3.

The Walker's Handbook is intended to be a guide to good practice (but what is described is not necessarily the *only* good practice) for my target audience of inexperienced walkers seeking advice and information. Once you have gained sufficient experience and confidence, you will develop your own way of enjoying the delights of walking. I hope, too, that it may widen the horizons of more experienced walkers.

In the course of researching subjects for the book, I have been dismayed by the amount of misinformation contained in books dealing with navigation for walkers. Many do not cover walking in lowland countryside and seem to assume that the techniques used in hill-walking are equally applicable to lowland walking. There is often an implied assumption that walking in upland areas is more 'normal' than walking in lowland countryside. In fact the opposite is true. There is considerably more lowland countryside in the Great Britain than there are upland areas as is demonstrated by the

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fact that there are 333 *Explorer* maps with the 5-metre contour interval used in lowland countryside compared to the 70 *Explorers* with the 10-metre contour interval employed in upland areas.

Many proficient *practical* navigators seem not to know much about Ordnance Survey maps. They may be expert map-readers but often have little idea of the principles and concepts underlying the maps that they use. Too many books make elementary errors such as stating that the Ordnance Survey is responsible for mapping the United Kingdom or even the whole of the British Isles!

How to use *The Walker's Handbook*

Few walkers will read it from cover to cover. Those who are new to the pastime are likely to be most interested in the chapters that cover subjects such as clothing, footwear, equipment, maps and navigation; others will use it as a reference book.

Particular attention is paid to the needs of those, probably the majority, who walk in lowland countryside. Most books of instruction concentrate on walking in upland areas, but there is much pleasure and quiet delights to be discovered by walking the secret ways through the fields and woods of pastoral countryside. Navigation in lowland countryside is often more demanding, though without the inherent dangers if you lose your way, than navigating in fine weather in upland areas.

To assist readers to find the subjects that interest them, the book contains a detailed index. Within each chapter, every paragraph is numbered so the index entries refer first to the chapter number and then to the relevant main paragraph(s). Thus 4:25-7 refers to Chapter 4 paragraphs 25 to 27 inclusive. This enables readers to home in on specific topics.

At the end of every chapter there is a selective bibliography of books that cover the subject under discussion. The universal resource locator (URL) of useful websites are mentioned in the text. Remember that your search engine is your friend and is likely to throw up more websites than can be mentioned.

Corrections to *The Walker's Handbook*

I have tried to ensure that the book was factually correct *at the time of publication*. The manuscript has been read by a number experts but it is almost inevitable that some errors will have been overlooked (the faults are mine alone). If you discover an error or out-of-date information, please email me at hughwestacott@gmail.com quoting the chapter and paragraph number. The proposed correction will be investigated and if found to be accurate will be acknowledged by email and posted on my website www.walkwithwestacott.com.

A personal note

I am fortunate in that I had parents who were keen walkers and encouraged me to follow in their footsteps which, inspired by their example, I have done for well over seventy years. So I have seen and experienced many changes to the walking scene. My first boots were ex-army issue as was my waterproof gas cape, and for my first pair of shorts, my mother took in the hip seams of a pair women's ex-Land Army shorts. In 1946, I made my first backpacking trip into the wilds of Surrey with a group of school friends. I had a war-surplus commando rucksack, a single-skin tent hastily manufactured by an entrepreneur from parachute silk and for which my ever-patient and enterprising mother made a flysheet from an old cotton bed sheet which I proofed with Nev.

Walking has been good both for and to me. I have been fortunate to be blessed with glowing good health and also to be in the right place at the right time which enabled me to contribute books and articles to the outdoor press, and to lead commercial walking tours. These activities allowed me to take early retirement from librarianship and concentrate on my outdoor activities.

And so I hope that it will not seem too pretentious to look upon this, the fifth, and probably the last, edition of *The Walker's Handbook* as my legacy to the wonderful world of walking.