

Staying Safe in the Countryside

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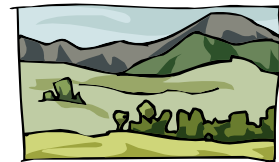


The countryside is a wonderful place to visit, but it can be a very dangerous place.

If you are planning to go out into the countryside, then there are some things you really need to think carefully about.

Clothing and Equipment You will need:

- A woollen hat or balaclava.
- Woollen or towelling scarf; Warm, long-sleeved shirt worn over warm underwear; Fibre-pile jacket or woollen sweater; windproof anorak with hood and storm cuffs and secure pockets.
- O.S. map; Silva compass; water.
- Woollen gloves or mitts; warm trousers or breeches. Cord jeans are adequate, but **denims are dangerously cold when wet.**
- Walking stockings; gaiters.
- Strong boots with moulded soles. Choose boots designed for fell walking, rather than rock climbing. They should support your ankles. Strong trainers can be used for dry summer walking.
- Rucksack; water-proof cagoule and over-trousers; food and drink for the day, (*cheese, fruitcake, hot coffee or tea,*) spare sweater and socks; first aid kit (*sticking plasters, bandages, safety pins, scissors,*) emergency rations, (*high-energy chocolate, glucose, dried fruit, etc*); survival bag; whistle and torch, to make International Distress Signal, (*a series of 6 long blasts or flashes in succession, followed by a one minute break, then repeat and so on.*)



Preparation and Procedure

- Learn to use a compass; how to read a map; and how to give simple first aid.
- Walk in company; it is safer and more enjoyable. **(Children must never venture into the countryside alone!)**
- Plan the route beforehand, balancing terrain, weather conditions and hours of daylight against your own experience and abilities, allowing a large safety margin.
- Ensure that the party members are adequately clothed and equipped and that no one is overburdened.
- Start the day with a cooked breakfast.
- Before you set off, leave, with a responsible person, precise details of your party, point of departure, intended route, destination and expected time of arrival. In an emergency the information will save time and could save a life.
- Maintain a steady walking rhythm; look ahead to avoid steep slopes and rough going; watch where you put your feet.

- The party should neither straggle nor bunch. Take special care of the youngest and weakest – their speed must be the party speed. With a large group, it is a good idea to have someone experienced at the back.
- Take a regular 10 minute break each hour, not only to rest and enjoy the view, but also to assess progress and plan the next move.
- Keep a weather eye open – rain, mist or snow can close in with alarming speed. Heed the advice of farmers and shepherds.
- Avoid bogs, peat-mosses, river crossings, streams in spate, crags crevices and loose boulders.
- Don't be afraid to turn back if the weather breaks, if the route is too much for any party member, or if time is running out. Your route planning should include the selection of safe retreats; avoiding emergencies is good leadership. If the day ends with an enforced change of plan, report your safe return to avoid an unnecessary rescue call-out.
- On completion of your journey, inform the person with whom you left your route details that you have arrived.



Emergency procedure

- Don't panic! Think and act sensibly.
- If you are lost, study your surroundings and the map carefully. Work out your likely position, and then decide whether to retrace your steps or go on, trusting the compass or a recognisable landscape feature for direction. *Of course, these days, you might have a phone with you which will give you a GPS reading.*
- If self-help is the answer, set about it methodically, with jobs for all fit members of the party.
- If you are hopelessly lost, are remote from civilisation and it is getting dark, accept the fact that a night out is inevitable and make it as comfortable and cheerful as possible. Find shelter away from risk of flood. Build a windbreak. Put on spare clothing and climb into a survival bag; stuff your feet into your rucksack; sit on bracken or heather for insulation. Huddle together for warmth; maintain circulation by regular exercise and, at intervals, make hot drinks and eat emergency rations. Continue with the distress signal to aid rescue parties searching for you. Make any phone calls that you can. *(You can't always get a signal in the hills.)*
- If you have an injured, sick or exhausted companion, assess the situation and consider the remedies. If necessary, find a sheltered place and establish an emergency camp without delay. *(Attending a den-making activity could come in useful here.)*
- If you need outside help, start by giving the International Distress Signal with a whistle or torch, and be alert for the response of 3 blasts or flashes, repeated several times. Send a competent messenger, (two if numbers permit), to raise help, travelling by a safe, direct route to the nearest settlement, mountain rescue post or public phone box. (If you can't get a mobile signal.) They are marked on O.S. maps. From there, alert the police – 999. The messenger must carry *written* details of the location of the party, (6 figure grid reference, or a



GPS reading and site description.); time of the accident or incident, nature of any injuries and numbers involved. With this information, the police will organise the necessary rescue services.

First Aid



First aid, out on the fells, requires both knowledge and common sense. If in doubt, concentrate on the comfort and morale of the patient – do not experiment. The severe injuries sustained on rugged mountains are unusual on the lower fells and moorland, but the alternative threats of exhaustion, exposure and hypothermia are equally serious: all will kill. Be on the alert for them in cold, wet and windy weather, (and look out for heat exhaustion in high summer. Recognise the symptoms – pallor of the skin and shivering, listlessness, slurred speech, abnormal vision, irrational or violent behaviour, stumbling or falling, collapse and unconsciousness. Know the treatment – stop immediately; prevent further heat loss; provide shelter from the elements, dress the victim in spare dry clothes, (don't take off the wet ones!); place him in a survival bag, warm him with a fit companion; give him warm food, warm sugary drinks and encouragement. Do **not** allow further exertion; do **not** rub him to stimulate circulation; do **not** give him alcohol. Assume that others in the party might be at risk, so get help quickly: time might be short!

Prevention is the best cure: remember the wind-chill influence on temperature, and that a fit man can live for only 15 minutes in water at freezing point. Stay warm and dry; resolve to avoid the sequence of:

Wet + cold = Dead

Fell Rescue



The Fell Rescue Association was formed to help prevent fatalities in the hills and mountains. Supported by subscription and staffed by volunteers, the Association can put highly experienced teams and dogs on the fells in emergencies. Find out where your local Mountain Rescue Posts are.

The Walker & the Farmer

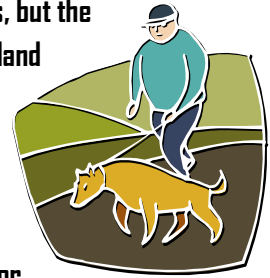
Safety in the hills is a common sense awareness which might, one day, help to keep you alive, but will certainly add much to the comfort and enjoyment of your walking whenever you set out over high ground. Common sense should also be your guide elsewhere in the countryside. Here your own safety might not be at risk, but farm stock, wildlife and the natural beauty of the landscape may be threatened or damaged by thoughtless behaviour.



Remember that the same countryside which gives recreation to the town dweller must provide a living for the countryman who, in pursuit of his living, maintains and cares for the countryside for everyone's benefit.



Lamb casualties on moor roads and wilfully damaged walls are obvious losses, but the hidden losses due to dogs disturbing livestock, (and wildlife), and grazing land being used for three-abreast footpaths are probably much greater. All are borne by the farmer at first, but then every one of us, for farming efficiency influences the cost of our food.



Most of these losses can be avoided; most are caused through thoughtless or selfish behaviour, which common sense and the Country Code can prevent. Don't imagine that this is not your problem – your good behaviour might influence an unruly visitor, help to keep your lamb chops healthy and your countryside an attractive place to visit.



To you, he's your pet pooch. To a sheep, he's a wolf.



The Country Code

Guard against all risk of fire.

Fasten all gates.

Keep dogs under proper control.

Keep to paths across farmland.

Avoid damaging fences, hedges and walls.

Leave no litter – take it home.

Safeguard water supplies.

Protect wildlife, wild plants and trees.

Go carefully on country road. (Slow down in the evening for badgers.)

Respect the life of the countryside.

Leave only footprints. Take away only photographs.

Thanks.

Enjoy your time in the countryside.

