

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IF YOU'RE NEW TO WALKING IN A GROUP

Most of this is common sense, but to anyone who is new to group walking, here are a few suggestions that will make it more enjoyable and safer. Remember, someone owns the land you're walking on. You have the right to walk there, but please respect the owners' rights and wishes. Don't give walkers a bad name!

- Make sure you're wearing suitable walking boots, and are carrying enough water, food and spare clothing (including waterproofs).
- Try not to get in front of the leader - they know the way! If you do want to stretch your legs, keep looking back to make sure you know where the leader is. If you come to a choice of paths, wait for the leader, otherwise you may end up on your own and on quite a different walk!
- The leader will usually ask someone to act as backmarker, if the group is larger than about six. Their job is, to state the obvious, to be at the back of the group, so try not to get behind them. Having a backmarker makes it easier for the leader - if they can see the backmarker, they know the whole group is also there.
- It's always a good idea to make sure you can see the person in front and the person behind. This way, the group doesn't get too spread out, no-one gets lost, and everyone takes care of each other.
- If you decide you need to drop behind for a comfort stop, please tell someone, usually the back marker. Otherwise, you may emerge from the bushes and find the rest of the group is out of sight.
- Walking poles are very useful. However, if you're not actually using them and just carrying them fully extended, it's not a good idea to point them out behind you like spears. Going over stiles is another time when sticks are often waved round in the air. Be careful when carrying your stick and cautious if you are close behind a walker carrying one.
- With road walking, in general, walk in single file, and on the right side of the road to face the oncoming traffic. The easiest thing is just to remember the correct side of the road will be the one the leader is on!
- When walking across a cropped or ploughed field, walk in single file. Farmers, quite rightly, don't like walkers destroying their crops.
- If you're walking with a dog, please act responsibly. You should keep your dog on a short lead at all times. Take care your dog doesn't scare livestock, especially if they have young, or disturb ground-nesting birds. Don't allow them to run into crops. Some walks may be on access land, where dogs may not be allowed.
- If you're the back marker, or at the back of the group for any other reason, ensure you close all gates unless you've been told otherwise. If you're not sure, it's good idea to close it - a closed gate that should be open will cause fewer problems than a closed one left open.

