

MAGAZINE OF THE RAMBLERS  
*Britain's walking charity*

# WALK

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& BEYOND**

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walk

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# Welcome to walk

'So are you a walker?' I must have been asked a dozen times since joining the Ramblers. And rightly so. Rest assured, I like nothing more than lacing up my boots and slogging up hills for the sheer pleasure – even more so now my two young children are able to join me on shorter walks. And I can't wait to get out and about a lot more under the guise of work.

Putting this issue together got me thinking about the different ways we enjoy walking. In *Masterclass* (p78), we hear from three individuals who prefer to walk alone – and give advice



**Where we've been**  
Ashdown Forest, Sussex/  
Kent; Pontcysyllte  
Aqueduct, North Wales



about starting out as a solo walker. For the 83% of us who live in towns and cities, walking is something we do as we go about our daily lives – it's a mode of transport – and in *One Step Ahead* (p24), we examine what makes a 'walkable' neighbourhood and reveal the benefits this can bring to communities. Why not nominate your neck of the woods for our second Britain's Best Walking Neighbourhood award?

For Raynor Winn (*My Walk of Life*, p69), the South West Coast Path became something of a refuge following a tragic change in her circumstances. Literary biographer Claire Tomalin (*My Perfect Day*, p90) walks to stay healthy and beat writer's block. While in *This Season on Foot* (p8), we've picked some superb events and festivals that aim to bring us together.

Whatever motivates you to get out of the door, enjoy the spring and keep in touch.

Natalie

Natalie Hoare **Editor**

**READER  
PANEL**

Every issue we ask Ramblers members to share their views.  
Sign up to join our reader panel at [walkmag@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:walkmag@ramblers.org.uk)  
**We asked... where is your favourite waterside walk?**



**Maud Jones, Carmarthen  
& District Ramblers**

'The Swansea Canal from  
Pontardawe to Godre'r  
Graig provides a green oasis  
of calm in the nature reserve, and a  
glimpse of a kingfisher, if you're lucky.'



**Geoff Eldridge,  
Rochdale Ramblers**

'Hebden Bridge to  
Littleborough on the  
Rochdale Canal, which  
flows through the narrow valley floors  
between Lancashire and Yorkshire.'



**Natalie Thomas, Sheffield 20s  
and 30s Walking Group**

'Chee Dale always makes for  
a calming and adventurous  
waterside walk along the  
River Wye. The stepping stones, little  
bridges and rock faces make you feel  
as if you're miles from home.'



**Over to you...** We'd love you  
to be part of our reader panel  
for a future issue. Email  
[walkmag@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:walkmag@ramblers.org.uk)



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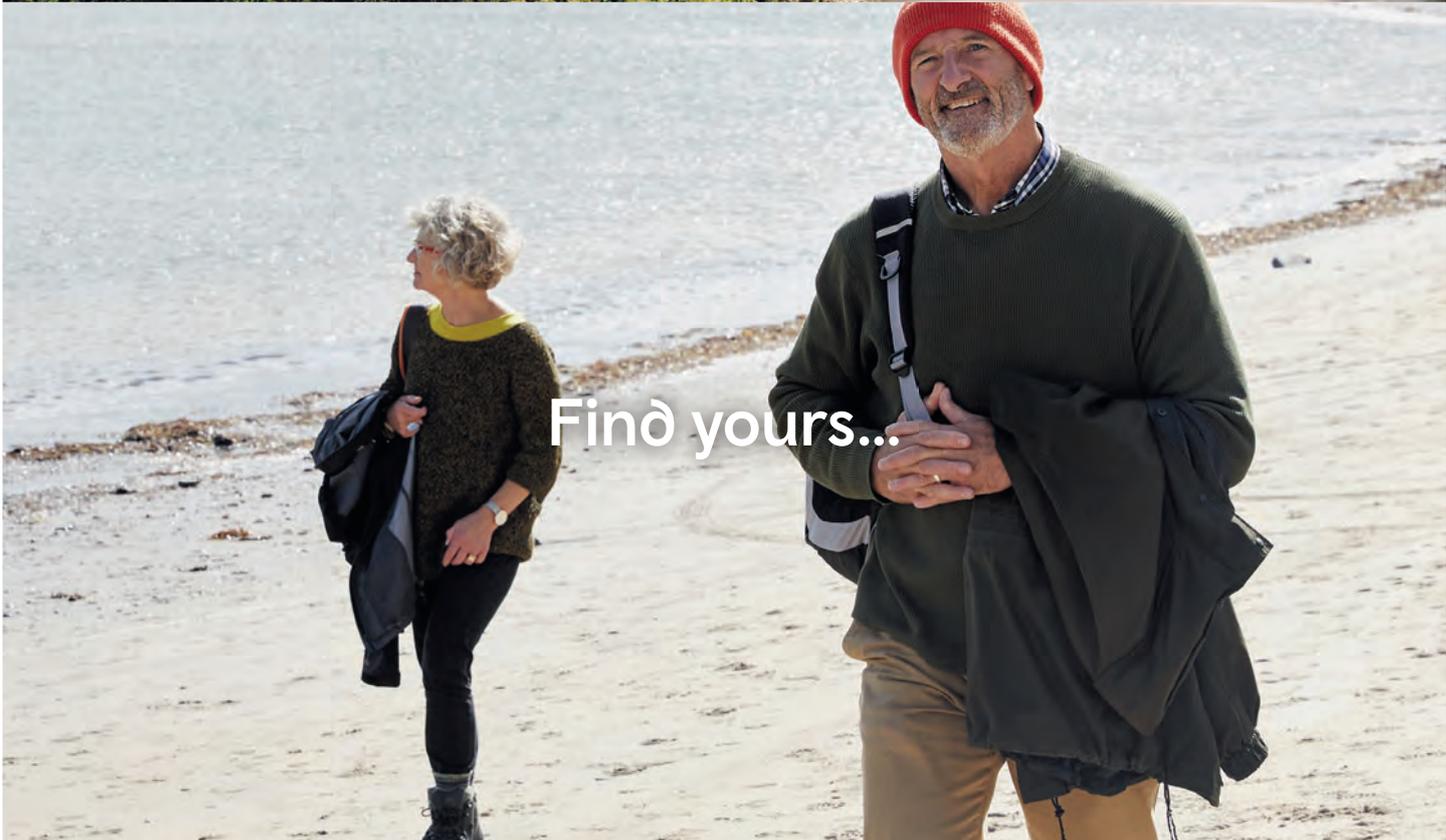
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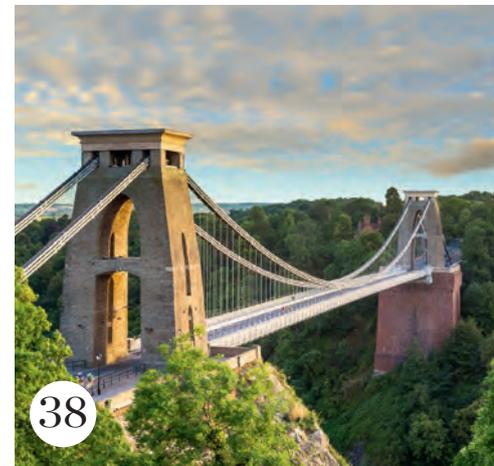
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**Nominate now**  
*Celebrate the places that  
encourage people to go about  
their everyday lives on foot.*  
Visit [ramblers.org.uk/vote](http://ramblers.org.uk/vote)





# The view from here

## Gardom's Edge, Peak District

**Where** Below Gardom's Edge, near Baslow, Derbyshire (SK272734).

**Maps** OS Explorer OL24; Landranger 119.

**About** North-east of the village of Baslow, on the eastern edge of the Peak District National Park, the dramatic gritstone escarpments of Baslow Edge rise above the Derwent Valley. This continuous ridge shelters a patch of woodland, beneath an outcrop known as Gardom's Edge, where the moss grows profusely, blanketing every surface in the shade of the old oak trees. Photographer Darren Ciolli-Leach captured this verdant, timeless landscape one summer morning.

'I'd arrived early, around 4am,' says Darren. 'It's a little-visited spot that retains an unspoilt feel, which I love. I must have come here 30 or 40 times.'

'Gardom's Edge was named after a blacksmith from the nearby Chatsworth Estate. The area is also an important Bronze Age site, with some remarkable rock carvings and standing stones.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: DARREN CIOLLI-LEACH



*This photograph is taken from Landscape Photographer of the Year: Collection 12 (£25, AA Publishing, ISBN 978 0749579272).*



# THIS SEASON ON FOOT

*What's on offer for walkers this spring*



## APRIL

### **Kington Walks Spring Weekend**

**12-14 APRIL**

More long-distance paths converge on the historic drovers' town of Kington, Herefordshire than almost anywhere else in the UK. This spring, Kington Walks is supporting the 50th anniversary of the Offa's Dyke Association with a selection of walks along the trail. There will be walks to suit all abilities, as well as the ever-popular 15-mile Eight Peaks Challenge. Booking is essential. [kingtonwalks.org](http://kingtonwalks.org)

### **Mole Valley Ramblers Spring Walks Festival**

**24-28 APRIL**

Discover the Surrey Hills with five days of free guided leisurely to challenging walks led by local Ramblers. Walks are aimed at encouraging anyone to join in and get healthy. [molevalleyramblers.org.uk/festival](http://molevalleyramblers.org.uk/festival)

### **Haltwhistle Spring Walking Festival**

**27 APRIL - 6 MAY**

Explore this beautiful part of Northumberland with a choice of 25 guided walks led by local volunteers, covering Hadrian's Wall country and the North Pennines AONB. Special-interest walks include birds, archaeology and singing. [haltwhistlewalkingfestival.org](http://haltwhistlewalkingfestival.org)

### **Ulverston WalkFest**

**27 APRIL - 6 MAY**

Visit the Lake District for 10 days of walks led by experienced leaders. To celebrate the festival's 20th anniversary, there are new guided walks and events themed on the number 20, including a 20km walk, a 20-trees walk and lunch at 2,020 feet. Evening events include a pie-and-pea supper, followed by a talk by the festival's founder. [ulverstonwalkfest.co.uk](http://ulverstonwalkfest.co.uk)



### **Ride2stride Festival**

**30 APRIL - 6 MAY**

A week of walks, talks and music along the Settle-Carlisle railway line. Enjoy the landscape and culture of the Yorkshire Dales and Eden Valley, on more than 30 free walks led by experienced walk leaders. Speakers will share their knowledge and love of the area, and pubs will be buzzing with music and song. [ride2stride.co.uk](http://ride2stride.co.uk)

## MAY

### **Bristol Walk Fest**

**1-31 MAY**

Bristol's festival offers walking events such as historical tours, nature walks, exploring street art and walking sports. Most walks are free and range from less than a mile to more than 10. [bristolwalkfest.com](http://bristolwalkfest.com)

### **Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival**

**4-12 MAY**

More than 50 led walks in



and around Shropshire's Ironbridge Gorge, a World Heritage Site, where the Industrial Revolution began over 300 years ago. From challenging day hikes to family-friendly trails, there's something for all ages and abilities. Walks are free but booking is essential. Well-behaved dogs on leads are welcome on some walks. [ironbridgewalking.co.uk](http://ironbridgewalking.co.uk)

### **Stevenage Walking Festival**

**4-12 MAY**

North Hertfordshire



📍 Clockwise from this picture: Haltwhistle Spring Walking Festival; Bristol Walk Fest; ride2stride; Wales Coast Path Festival



PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY, GETTY, ISTOCK

Ramblers will be leading more than 30 walks over nine days. There are health walks, dog walks, history walks and evening walks. There's also an 18-mile trek along the Ouse Valley Way from Huntingdon to St Neots. Walks are free and led by local volunteers. [swf.nhrng.org.uk](http://swf.nhrng.org.uk)

**Wales Coast Path Festival**  
**4-19 MAY**

To mark the seventh anniversary of the Wales Coast Path, Ramblers

Cymru will be celebrating with seven walks in seven locations from North to South Wales, including hidden parts of the Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire coast. Learn about Wales's industrial heritage; spot dolphins, red squirrels and seabirds; discover shipwrecks, castles and lighthouses; or forage for edible seaweed. Walks are free, although there's a charge for rail rambles and buses on linear walks. [ramblers.org.uk/en-go-walking/wales-coast-path](http://ramblers.org.uk/en-go-walking/wales-coast-path)

**International Waendel Walk**

**10-12 MAY**

The annual Waendel Walk, named after an Anglo-Saxon chieftain, takes place in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. There are waymarked walks from three to 26 miles, starting and ending at the Castle Theatre, with pubs and entertainment along the way. To celebrate its 40th anniversary, there are two new routes passing through the Nene Valley. [www.wellingborough.gov.uk/waendelwalk](http://www.wellingborough.gov.uk/waendelwalk)

**Kendal Walking Festival**

**10-12 MAY**

Enjoy the glorious scenery surrounding this town on 13 guided walks, ranging from a two-hour historical stroll to a 13-mile circuit of the Kentmere Horseshoe. There's also a series of talks. [kendalwalkingfestival.co.uk](http://kendalwalkingfestival.co.uk)

**Whitchurch Walking Festival**

**10-12 MAY**

A weekend of walks set in the Welsh Marches. Choose from short guided walks exploring the history of the town to the 15-mile circular Whitchurch Wheel. Themes include sketching, poetry, nature and a canal boat trip. Enjoy a film screening and a ceilidh in the evening. [whitchurchwalkers.co.uk](http://whitchurchwalkers.co.uk)

**Winchcombe Cotswolds Walking Festival**

**17-19 MAY**

A weekend of guided walks set in the heart of the beautiful Cotswolds. There's something for everyone, from a short stroll to a 21-mile challenge. Themed walks cover sheep, beekeepers, history, steam

**READER PANEL**



'We are heading up to Glen Coe for Easter. We're all looking forward to going somewhere we haven't been as a group. We can't wait to bag some Munros!'  
**Natalie Thomas, Sheffield 20s and 30s Walking Group**

offers a choice of walks covering areas as far west as Pembroke and east to Tredegar. With transport provided, it's a great opportunity to discover some of South Wales's spectacular pathways in the company of fellow Ramblers. [llanelliramblers.org.uk](http://llanelliramblers.org.uk)

**Malvern Walking Festival**

**25 MAY - 2 JUNE**

The beautiful Malvern Hills are the jewel in the crown of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are around 60 walks, with views that have not changed greatly since Edward Elgar was inspired to write his music all those years ago. Most walks are £4 and range from two to 18 miles, and there are some multi-day trails. **01684 892289; [malvernwalking.uk](http://malvernwalking.uk)**

trains and llamas. **01242 602925; [winchcombewelcomeswalkers.com/festival](http://winchcombewelcomeswalkers.com/festival)**

**Chilterns Walking Festival**

**18 MAY - 2 JUNE**

Explore the Chilterns AONB with over 80 walks led by local guides. There's a woodland cooking walk, wild garlic walks and a vintage cinema walk, which visits film locations, followed by a viewing in an iconic setting. Most walks are free but must be booked in advance. [visitchilterns.co.uk/walkingfest](http://visitchilterns.co.uk/walkingfest)



**JUNE**

**Corsham Walking Festival**  
**7-9 JUNE**

Visit this historic Wiltshire market town on the fringe of the Cotswolds AONB, with 27 free led walks exploring its industrial and rural history. Themed walks include hidden quarries, manor houses and a disused Second World War airfield. There are walks to Bath and Castle Combe and a children's treasure hunt, a murder mystery, and a Saturday evening quiz and buffet. [corshamwalkingfestival.org.uk](http://corshamwalkingfestival.org.uk)

**Llanelli Festival of Walks**

**24-27 MAY**

Organised by local Ramblers, this festival

**Get more online**  
Discover some seasonal walking ideas at [ramblers.org.uk/blogs](http://ramblers.org.uk/blogs)



## WIN A WALKING HOLIDAY FOR TWO IN THE SWISS ENGADINE!

DISCOVER ONE OF EUROPE'S MOST IDYLIC REGIONS ON  
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**M**any Swiss believe the Engadine to be the country's most beautiful valley. This, of course, is quite an accolade, when you consider the competition in a land famed for its picture-postcard perfection.

**T**he Engadine astonishes first-time visitors with the silent splendour of its ancient villages, and the sublime nature of its landscapes. On this self-guided discovery of the lower and upper Engadine – both very different in character – you follow Inntravel's carefully compiled route notes, and stay in the valley's three most picturesque villages, and their best hotels. Your luggage is transported from place to place, meaning that all you need carry each day are a few essentials, leaving you to soak up the scenery while contemplating your next dinner of delicious local cuisine – a fine reward for your efforts. Above all, this is a region that is made for walkers: linking the villages are splendid paths close to the River Inn and across the upper slopes, giving you varying perspectives on this wondrous valley, and some fabulous memories to take back home.



Switzerland.

"This really was a bucket list kind of trip to a wonderful and less-discovered part of the world. The lovely inns, the spectacular hikes, the incredible food, the beautiful and ancient towns – all combined to make a perfect holiday. We recommend it highly!"



**HOW TO ENTER**

The prize is Inntravel's 7-night **Villages of the Engadine** walking holiday for two people (sharing), including half board accommodation, 2 picnics, route notes and maps, luggage transfers between hotels, airport transfers and return flights from the UK. Departure dates are 25 June to 22 September 2019. The closing date is 14 April 2019. To enter, and for full terms and conditions, visit [www.inntravel.co.uk/walk-engadine](http://www.inntravel.co.uk/walk-engadine)

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The *Slow Holiday* people



# Front FOOT

Campaigns and news from the world of walking

## PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

# Happy 70th birthday national parks and trails

This year is the 70th anniversary of landmark legislation that secured definitive maps of public paths and national nature reserves in England and Wales, enabling more people to connect with nature, following decades of campaigning by the Ramblers and other organisations.

Described in 1949 by Lewis Silkin, Minister of Town and Country Planning, as 'the most exciting Act of the post-war Parliament', the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act laid the foundations for national parks, reserves and trails – and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) – across England and Wales.

The Ramblers fought for our most beautiful landscapes to be protected for the enjoyment of all from the beginning, alongside the right to roam campaign, and is widely credited with their establishment. The first paid secretary of the Ramblers,

the late Tom Stephenson (below), and past president, the late Francis Ritchie, played central roles in lobbying for those parts of the Act that dealt with national parks, rights of way and access to open country.

Vanessa Griffiths, CEO of the Ramblers, said: 'Our national parks, AONBs and



national trails are as special to the Ramblers now as they were when we pressed for their formation more than 70 years ago. But we know that they could be even better with the right support and resources. We've given evidence to the Glover Review on protected landscapes to help achieve this.'

The findings of the independent Glover Review are expected to be released this year, ahead of 16 December 2019 – the date in 1949 that the legislation received Royal Assent and became an Act of Parliament.

The review will outline how this network of special landscapes can meet our needs in the 21st century, and whether there is scope for their expansion, and how access to them can be improved.

*Watch out for a national parks and trails special edition this autumn. Ramblers Scotland will celebrate 20 years of Scottish national park legislation next year.*



## Kitted out

**Christopher Somerville**

Our columnist muses on his 'essential' items of outdoor kit...

### #15 AI colour chart

*I was buying paint the other day, the kind you slosh on a wall.*

*'A tin of paint, please.'*

*'How much, mate?'*

*'Ooh, enough to cover the wall.'*

*'Silk, matt, emulsion, eggshell, sheen?'*

*'God, I don't know. Erm ...'*

*'Colour, mate?'*

*'Well, sort of... white?... -ish?...'*

*'China White, Great White, Paper White, Natural White?'*

*'Hmm, well ...'*

*I nearly beat a retreat to blush all by myself in a dark corner. But the storeman, having had his fun, took pity on this incompetent. He chose a quantity, a texture and a colour for me. Then he spun his screen to show me his colour chart.*

*Who on earth thinks up these names? Big Foot Feet (orange),*

*Lurid Drizzle (blue), Civil Servant (grey). Seriously! And who the hell selects Gargoyle Gas (yellow), Alien Armpit (green) or Dead Salmon (pink) to add a touch of je ne sais quoi to their bedroom décor?*

*When I got home, I Googled 'stupid colour names' and lucked into a list selected by a neural network during a recent Artificial Intelligence (AI) experiment. It's pure gold, believe me.*

*One of the biggest challenges facing someone who writes about the outdoors is describing the delicate colours of nature. How do you catch the exact hue of an emerging bluebell petal, the tips of a birch branch in March or an evening sky before a late snowstorm? Well, now I know, and it's a brave new world of colours for me henceforth. Thanks, AI!*

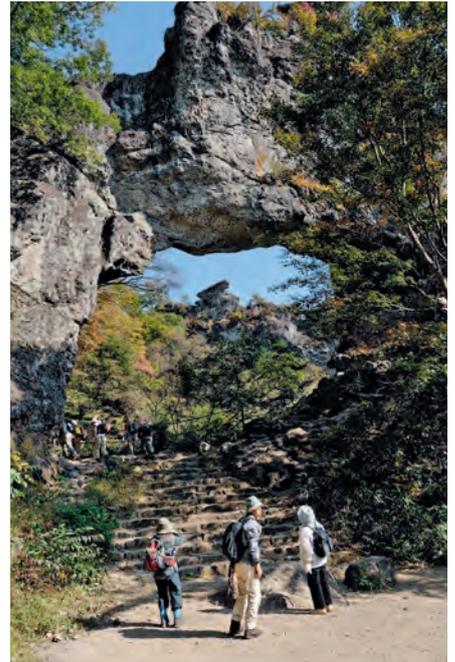


## INTERNATIONAL Walkers' rights in Japan

The Ramblers' chair of trustees, Kate Ashbrook, has been advising walking advocates from Japan about setting up an organisation like the Ramblers in Japan. Among those present was Kosei Hamada from the Misato Footpath Association and Mirei Kurata, who promotes paths and walking for Kumamoto City.

There is currently no ministry or national organisation with jurisdiction for footpaths in Japan, but a walking movement is gathering momentum, as more people recognise the benefits that walking can bring.

Kate said: 'They are already doing great work promoting walking, and we agreed that a common problem in both our nations is that people are not aware of where they can walk.'



**Find out more**  
Read more on walking in Japan here: [ramblers.org.uk/blogs](http://ramblers.org.uk/blogs)

## AGRICULTURE BILL

### Farmer keeps path clear



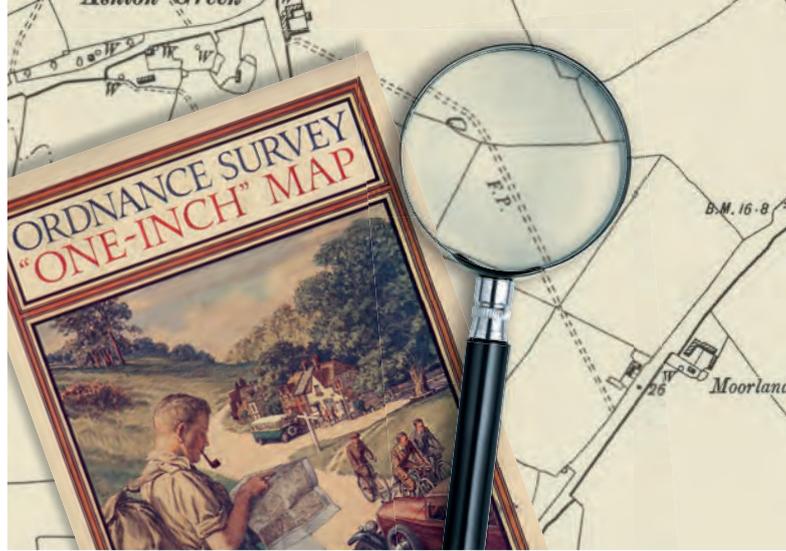
Avon Area Ramblers celebrated a local farmer's efforts to maintain public rights of way over his land. Mervyn Keeling, of Wilmington Farm near Bath, was nominated by the Bath Ramblers' footpath volunteer team for reinstating a footpath after cropping and providing a clear and direct route for walkers to use. Norton Radstock Ramblers presented him with a framed certificate.

Keith Weller, a volunteer with the maintenance team said: 'It's wonderful to

have paths reinstated. Walkers can see exactly where to enter and exit a field and how to walk across the crop, enjoying nature and causing the least possible damage to crops.'

Stephen Russell, policy and advocacy officer for the Ramblers, said: 'This is a great example of the kind of action we want to see encouraged by the Agriculture Bill, currently making its way through Parliament. We think that farmers and landowners should, as a condition of receiving public money, be required to meet their existing legal duties to keep clear existing public rights of way on their land. That's fairer for farmers, more convenient for walkers and a better use of public money.'

Thanks to the Ramblers' Your Path Awaits campaign, the Agriculture Bill, which will replace the Common Agricultural Policy in England and Wales once we have left the EU, will also include provision for payments from the public purse to landowners who do more to 'support public access to and enjoyment of the countryside'.



## HISTORIC MAPS

# Finding forgotten paths

A Ramblers' campaign to identify and map thousands of historic pathways ahead of a 2026 deadline has captured the attention of national and international media outlets.

The Don't Lose Your Way project, which is funded by Ramblers Holidays Charitable Trust and players of People's Postcode Lottery, aims to get an estimated 10,000 miles of public rights of way in England and Wales officially recorded on definitive maps ahead of 1 January 2026 – the deadline set by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. Any unmapped paths that have not been submitted to local highway authorities before the cut-off date could be lost forever.

Jack Cornish, Ramblers' Don't Lose Your Way programme manager, and some of our volunteers have been interviewed by *The Guardian*, *The New Yorker*, *The Times*, the *Daily Express* and the *Sunday Telegraph* – and the project has

also featured on a number of regional BBC television news programmes and radio stations.

'It has been really exciting to see how much people have engaged and been interested in the project,' said Jack. 'These are rights of way that have been built up by ordinary people over time, and what we're doing is ensuring generations to come can enjoy them. The project goes right to the heart of what we do – securing and protecting public rights of way.'

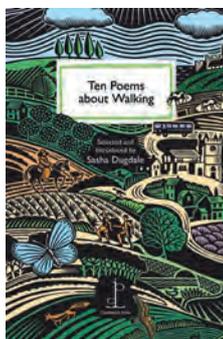
We are asking everyone who has a passion for maps and pathways to get involved, and we are developing a simple online mapping system that uses the current rights of way network as well as various historical maps. This will be launched in the summer.



**Get involved**  
Download the guide from  
[ramblers.org.uk/  
DontLoseYourWay](http://ramblers.org.uk/DontLoseYourWay)

## IN PRINT

# Ten Poems about Walking



Compiled by Sasha Dugdale (£4.95, Candlestick Press)

This new slim anthology of poems would make a great alternative greetings card for the poetry-appreciating Rambler in your life. Containing contemporary works – and one by English romanticist William Wordsworth, whose works are synonymous with the landscapes of the Lake District – the poems all celebrate the delights of walking. A woodland walk; a saunter through city streets; setting off early to find a heron; climbing Helvellyn; walking alone or walking with a dear friend. And in *Old Man Travelling*, Wordsworth seems to capture the tranquillity that can be achieved by placing one foot in front of the other: *The little hedge-row birds, That peck along the road, regard him not. He travels on, and in his face, his step, His gait, is one expression...*

## NEW SPRING KIT

### Tilley Polaris hat

£80 [tilley.com](http://tilley.com)

Handcrafted with a lifetime guarantee, Tilley hats have become the headgear of choice for adventurers – David Attenborough and Brian Blessed own one. The Polaris is ideal for spring and summer, featuring a Schoeller renewable finish that shrugs off dirt, rain and dew, and an ingeniously hidden sun shield that can be unfurled to protect the neck. A Velcro loop stows sunglasses and, like all Tilley hats, it's packable – and it floats.



### RugGear RG650 smartphone

£170 [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)

Tough-tech manufacturer RugGear has launched an outdoor smartphone that can 'withstand a 1.5m drop and remain under water for up to half an hour without sustaining damage'. The RugGear GR650 smartphone with Android 8.1 also has a touchscreen that it's claimed can be operated with rain-dampened fingers or while wearing gloves.

### ProTrek hiking socks

£10.50 and £12.50 [hj.co.uk](http://hj.co.uk)

Established since 1882, HJ Hall's new range of ProTrek socks suit all seasons and walkers. The HJ700 Light Hike variety is nice and thin to suit walking in warmer seasons, and is woven from a lightweight, ultra-durable, breathable fabric with reinforced toe and heel. HJ701 Adventure Hike sock (right) is a middle-weight, all-season affair. Both are available in grey, blue marl and rust tones.



### Inov-8 Roclite 335 and 345 GTX men's graphene hiking boots

£150 [inov-8.com](http://inov-8.com)

Working in partnership with the University of Manchester, Inov-8 has released the world's first graphene hiking boots. Graphene is a man-made 2D material that is one atom thick but 200 times stronger than steel, and Inov-8's new Roclite 335 and 345 GTX boots each feature graphene-enhanced rubber soles, making them extraordinarily tough, grippy and very light-weight.



## RESEARCH

### Volunteers are happier and healthier

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has launched its Time Well Spent report, which surveyed 10,000 adults across Britain. The research showed that almost all respondents (96%) who had volunteered at least once in the previous 12 months were very or fairly satisfied with their experience. And 90% felt they made a difference. And 77% said that the experience had boosted their mental health and wellbeing, while 53% said it had improved their physical health. More than three-quarters of 18- to 24-year-olds – the group most likely to experience feelings of loneliness – said volunteering had helped make them feel less socially isolated.

## FIELD TRIPS

### Inspiring students



Ramblers' North East Lancashire Area has successfully completed two secondary school projects, inspiring a new generation of walkers and demonstrating the educational and health benefits of exploring your local area on foot.

Area chair Mike Counter, and Glenda Brindle, Blackburn and Darwen group secretary, organised walks with pupils from schools in Burnley and Darwen, encouraging them to undertake fieldwork and present their findings to their peers. 'This project showed that walking can be a vehicle to deliver many parts of the school curriculum – humanities, history, industry, arts and even mathematics,' said Glenda. 'We will be taking the project to two local primary schools this summer and hope to advise a larger network of schools on how to set up their own projects.'

## TRUST IN US

### National Trust Council appointment

The Ramblers has been re-elected as an appointing body to the National Trust Council, and Tompion Platt, our director of advocacy and engagement, will be the appointee. Appointing bodies are 'kindred bodies' that have an interest in the trust's work. The council is responsible for holding the trustees to account and members act as advocates for the National Trust's work.



## CONSERVATION

### Join the wildflower hunt

Conservation charity Plantlife is seeking budding botanists to assist with its annual survey to discover more about the state of wildflower species.

Starting on the Easter weekend, the Great British Wildflower Hunt invites members of the public to look out for 72 different flower and plant species – native and non-native.

Participants are asked to record, in their own time, their findings on a

downloadable spotter sheet or via a smartphone app. Plantlife would like people to continue searching for flowers such as dandelion, bluebell, cowslip and toadflax throughout the spring and summer until September.

Last year, more than 15,200 wildflowers were spotted – from the Channel Islands to the Orkneys – providing important evidence about changes in our wildflower species' distribution.

## FESTIVAL

### Wales Coast Path is seven



(11-12 May), concluding in Llanelli and Llantwit Major on 18-19 May.

Walks will be free, although there is a fee for transport for rail rambles and linear walks where a bus is provided.

'I'm delighted Ramblers Cymru is leading this walking festival in May,' said Angela Charlton, director of Ramblers Cymru. 'It's seven years since the launch, and the Wales Coast Path and the iconic route continues to offer new discoveries. Walk with us and explore the secrets and stories of Wales's varied shoreline.'

Wales is the only country in the world to have a complete, dedicated coastal footpath, offering spectacular walking for a grand total of 870 miles.

To mark the seventh anniversary of the opening of the Wales Coast Path, Ramblers across Wales will be holding a walking festival in seven locations on seven days.

Starting in Llandudno on Saturday, 4 May, it will move to Anglesey and Porthmadog on Sunday, 5 and Monday, 6 May, before heading west to Cwm Tydu and Saundersfoot the following weekend



**Spread the word**  
*Why not recommend a friend*  
[ramblers.org.uk/Wales](http://ramblers.org.uk/Wales)

**TRENDS**

## The world of walking

Statistics from across the UK tell us much about the state of walking. It seems in England we are walking less overall – there was a downward trend in both number of walking trips taken and distance travelled between 2002 and 2016. Wales has seen the frequency of walking as a means of transport fall from 66% to 58% between 2013 and 2018. But Scotland has seen an increase in leisure walking between 2011 and 2017.

**Women make more annual walking trips than men\***



**SCOTLAND**



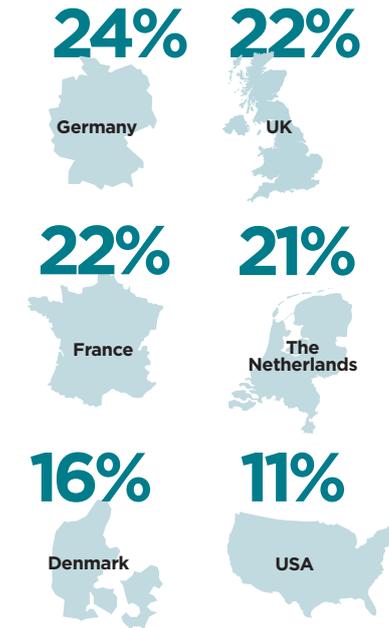
Between 2011 and 2017, the rate of recreational walking (for at least 30 minutes) has risen from 57% to 70% in Scotland

**WALES**



Between 2013 and 2018, the frequency of walking as a means of transport has fallen slightly from 66% to 58% in Wales

Walking share of all daily trips, international comparison



'Just walking' (for pleasure, exercise or to walk the dog) is the number one purpose of trips on foot in England



SOURCES: WALKING IN THE UK TRANSPORT SYSTEM: HOW AND WHY IS IT CHANGING? DECEMBER 2018  
\*IN ENGLAND, NATIONAL TRAVEL SURVEY 2017, SCOTLAND'S PEOPLE ANNUAL REPORT 2017  
WALKING & CYCLING IN WALES: ACTIVE TRAVEL 2017-18

## PARTNERSHIP WORKING

# Ancient route restoration

An ancient path that was historically used by mourners travelling to church is among several to be restored under a £15,000 joint initiative involving two Ramblers groups in Sheffield.

The Bradfield Ancient Ways Improvement Project aims to repair or replace 21 stone and six wooden stiles, five gates, fencing and three sets of stone steps along a network of paths within the parish of Bradfield in South Yorkshire.

The year-long project was launched by Sheffield Ramblers and Sheffield 40s Ramblers, along with Sheffield City Council's rights of way team, and aims to not only preserve these unique heritage structures,

but also to make the paths safer and more accessible to walkers.

Jeremy Kenyon, of Sheffield 40s Ramblers, said: 'Some of the network forms part of the circular 53-mile Sheffield Country Walk through the picturesque Loxley Valley, overlooking Damflask Reservoir. We believe this is an ancient church pathway that was first used nearly a thousand years ago. The path is very difficult to use – it's like an obstacle course – but work is already underway to fix it and we hope to engage path maintenance volunteers from across the area and encourage a lot more people to enjoy walking here.'

The project is expected to be completed in the winter.

## PATH NEWS



### Heart of Wales Line Trail WALES AND SHROPSHIRE

The final section of the 142-mile Heart of Wales Line Trail, through Powys, has been completed and will be launched at Llandrindod Rail Station on 28 March. The trail has been developed with the help of local Ramblers groups and rail enthusiasts, and weaves a path between Craven Arms in Shropshire and Swansea. [heart-of-wales.co.uk](http://heart-of-wales.co.uk)



### Vanguard Way KENT, SURREY AND SUSSEX

A section of the 67-mile Vanguard Way that links Croydon in South London to Newhaven in East Sussex has been redirected in the Edenbridge area, due to increasing levels of traffic on what were quiet country lanes past Haxted Mill when the route was first launched in 1981. The new route passes further east. [vanguardway.org.uk](http://vanguardway.org.uk)



### Rotherham Ring Route SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Lord David Blunkett, president of South Yorkshire and Northeast Derbyshire Area of the Ramblers, has officially launched a booklet detailing the revived Rotherham Ring Route. The 50-mile route traverses the gently rolling landscapes of South Yorkshire and has been split into 10 linear sections and nine circular routes. [tinyurl.com/jcokfaa6](http://tinyurl.com/jcokfaa6)

## PATH SUCCESSES

### Cambrian Way work



Lampeter Ramblers has surveyed and trailmarked a large section of the 291-mile Cambrian Way. The section that runs through Ceredigion is now fully trailmarked,

enabling walkers not familiar with the area to follow the path with confidence through some of the most remote parts of Wales. 'The legacy of the Cambrian Way is steeped in Ramblers' history, so we were more than happy to get involved in the project,' said James Williams from the Lampeter Ramblers.

### Board meeting



Volunteer path teams from Mole Valley, Reigate and East Surrey Ramblers assisted Surrey County Council to clean and make safe a boardwalk across marshy terrain in

Wotton. The boardwalk had become extremely dangerous to use. 'The financial squeeze on local authorities is continuing, so the work these teams do to help maintain the rights of way that we all enjoy is going to become ever more important,' said a member of Surrey Ramblers.

### Barkham Way gates



Loddon Valley Ramblers' path team has installed three kissing gates to improve access on the Barkham Way, with assistance from East Berkshire Ramblers. The

gates were purchased by Wokingham Borough Council, Barkham Parish Council and East Berkshire Ramblers. Wokingham's rights of way team arranged delivery of the gate components to the site, and the path team completed the work. The gates replace three difficult stiles and demonstrate partnership working at its best.

 **Find out more**  
See a map of path successes at  
[ramblers.org.uk/pathsuccesses](http://ramblers.org.uk/pathsuccesses)



## CASEWORK FOCUS

# Protecting rights of way

The Ramblers engages with landowners and local authorities to try to resolve rights of way issues without recourse to legal action. However, when more intractable cases go to public inquiry or court, we work with legal experts, local authorities and our volunteers to protect walkers' rights

### CASE 1

## Bratton, Wiltshire

### RESULT SUCCESSFUL

The historic Watercress Walk in Bratton, Wiltshire, has now reopened as a public right of way thanks to efforts by local residents with support from West Wiltshire Ramblers.

The new owner of the Luccombe Mill estate blocked all access to a section of the Watercress Walk. However, local residents were able to establish that it had been in use since 1947 by villagers and amenity groups, including the Ramblers.

The villagers organised an 80-plus signature petition to Wiltshire Council,

which resulted in a three-day public inquiry in the village in September 2018.

Wiltshire Ramblers supported the villagers through this process, and following the hearing, the planning inspector confirmed the pathway's status.

Philip Dring, publicity officer at West Wiltshire Ramblers, said: 'I am very pleased with the outcome of this case and it is great that the path has been acknowledged as a public right of way. I think that the efforts of the Bratton villagers should be at the top of the list in receiving rightful praise and am pleased that the Ramblers were able to support them.'

### CASE 2

## Mansfield Woodhouse, Nottinghamshire

### RESULT SUCCESSFUL

Nottinghamshire Ramblers has helped residents defeat an attempt to extinguish a well-used footpath at Mansfield Woodhouse between The Mount and Clipstone Drive. For seven years it has been unlawfully obstructed, after Mansfield District Council granted a developer planning permission for five houses on the site of a demolished community centre where the path runs.

For residents of several nearby roads (Pelham Way, the Mount, Lilac Grove and others), the path was the shortest way to countryside, including a rural bridleway and walks in the attractive Badger Hill and High Rocks plantation by the River Maun, and to the 'top field' park with its children's play area – exactly the sort of path that encourages urban residents to walk.

This council believed existing routes on ordinary pavements were acceptable, so they made an extinguishment order under section 118 of the Highways Act 1980, on the footing that it was not needed for public use.

Objections, from the Nottinghamshire Local Access Forum, the Ramblers and others, pointed out that the path was well used before its unlawful closure. The matter was referred to an inspector appointed by the Secretary of State, who accepted those arguments plus the contention that even the shortest alternative route (on ordinary pavements) would be three times as long.

The inspector therefore rejected the order in December 2018, and we look forward to the path's reinstatement.

 **Found a path problem?**  
Report it via the Pathwatch App  
[ramblers.org.uk/pathwatch](http://ramblers.org.uk/pathwatch)



## ANTARCTICA

# Historic 920-mile triumph

A 49-year-old man from Hereford has walked his way into the history books this winter, after becoming the first British adventurer to complete a solo unsupported and unassisted journey on foot across Antarctica. Louis Rudd (above) was the second person in history to complete the 920-mile journey, just two days after the first – American Colin O’Brady, 33.

It took Louis, a father of three, 56 days to complete the gruelling walk, hauling a 130kg sled across the frozen continent,

climbing more than 6,000ft (1,830m) over *sastrugi* – wave-like ridges created by the wind.

‘I’m absolutely elated that I was able to complete this journey successfully,’ Louis told *walk*. ‘It took a huge amount of time, effort and funding to get me to the start point, and I didn’t want to let everyone down.’

Louis now returns to life as an army captain, based in Brecon, Mid Wales, where he enjoys walking with his family.

## WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE

# Keeping our countryside open

Volunteers and staff at the Ramblers have made great strides forward over the past year to protect and maintain our rights of way. Working closely with members, volunteers and the public, who contact the Ramblers to tell us what is happening to our path network on the ground, the policy and delivery teams:

- Respond to about **2,000** public rights of way enquiries.
- Process around **1,450** path orders. These are generated every time a council plans to create, divert or extinguish a path in England and Wales.
- Receive more than **8,000** reports of path problems via Pathwatch ([ramblers.org.uk/pathwatch](http://ramblers.org.uk/pathwatch)). These are passed on to local authorities and local volunteers.
- Work with around **440** footpath secretaries and officers in England and Wales. The teams provide support for engaging with local authorities, advice on

servicing notices and legal paperwork, help with court action and public inquiries, and they deliver guidance and training.

- Support in the region of **160** path maintenance teams and **2,000** volunteers throughout Great Britain – providing advice, support with insurance and funding for tools and training.
- Log hundreds of ‘path successes’ – more than **80** in one Ramblers area.
- Count the thousands of volunteer hours spent working on paths. One area alone recorded **5,500** hours of volunteer footpath work in the past year for one area.

‘Protecting and maintaining our path network is one of the most important things we do as a charity,’ said Tompion Platt, Ramblers’ director of advocacy and engagement. ‘Most of the work is done by members who volunteer their time. Without their dedication, we couldn’t keep our paths clear and open for all walkers to enjoy.’

## NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK

### Investment needed

A Sustrans review of the UK-wide National Cycle Network has revealed that 42% of the 16,575 miles of signed routes are classed as ‘very poor’ and in need of improvement. The network is used by millions of people each year – more than half of all journeys are on foot. The Government has earmarked £1 million to repair and upgrade sections of the routes.

The Scottish Government has committed £7 million towards the development and maintenance of the paths in Scotland and, in Wales, Sustrans is in discussion with Assembly members. ‘The Ramblers particularly supports improvements to the network that will improve the experience for walkers,’ said Kate Conto, Ramblers’ senior policy advisor.

## NICE AND TIDY

### Spring clean



Between 22 March and 23 April, the Ramblers is supporting the Great British Spring Clean, a Keep Britain Tidy campaign that aims to mobilise half a million people to collect and safely dispose of single-use plastic – recycling as much as possible. Groups, schools and individuals can get involved – just register your own litter-picking event, or search for one to join that’s local to you. For more information, visit [keepbritaintidy.org](http://keepbritaintidy.org)

## ISLE OF MAN

### Active Travel plan

An Isle of Man minister is proposing to connect two of the island’s most populated areas with ‘pleasant routes’ for walkers and cyclists in an effort to reduce congestion and limit car use for shorter journeys. More than 40% of the island’s population live in the capital, Douglas, and neighbouring village, Onchan, but existing roads between the two make some non-car users feel unsafe. The plan is part of the Government’s Active Travel strategy, which aims to get more islanders walking and cycling around the island for everyday, short journeys. Infrastructure Minister Ray Harmer told the BBC: ‘If you prioritise one mode of transport for 50 years, you end up with everyone using their vehicle because it’s the easiest thing to do.’

REGISTER  
FOR YOUR  
FREE WILL  
TODAY

Tom Stephenson, former Ramblers president, inspired the creation of the Pennine Way, Britain's first long-distance trail. In fact, since 1935, the Ramblers has made enormous progress improving walkers' rights, opening up new places to explore and helping everyone find their feet. But there is so much left to do to protect and share the power of walking. And with a gift in your will to the Ramblers, this can be your legacy

# Leave a lasting footprint with a gift in your will

We've partnered with Farewill to provide a free will (RRP £90)\* to readers in England and Wales.\*\* Make your will online in four simple steps, with live support from their specialists.

Claim your free will by visiting [www.farewill.com/walk62](http://www.farewill.com/walk62) and using the code **walk62** at checkout. If you would like more information on gifts in wills, please email [membership@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:membership@ramblers.org.uk) or call **020 3961 3232**.

\*There is absolutely no obligation to leave a gift in your will to the Ramblers. The Ramblers has set a limit of 150 basic wills that can be redeemed free of charge through this promotion.

\*\*Unfortunately, this offer is currently unavailable in Scotland.

Registered charity, England & Wales no: 1093577,  
Scotland no: SC039799

 Farewill

  
**ramblers**  
at the heart of walking

# YOUR VIEW

*Have your say – and you could win a great prize!*

STAR  
LETTER



## Walking to beat depression

I suffered with postnatal depression after the birth of both my children (*Overcoming Loneliness*, winter, p36). Indoors was my 'safe place' and I spiralled deeper into depression, suffering suicidal thoughts. The stigma attached to depression, and the thought that my kids might be taken away if I admitted to what I was going through, led me to get involved in walking. I set up a Facebook group and used it as motivation to get out every day with the children. Before long, people were asking if they could join me for walks. I now have 6,000 members spanning three counties and enjoy group walks all over the country. The people I have met along the way have become friends for life. It's so true that walking is good for the soul. I haven't totally overcome depression, but the improvement to my life is amazing.

**Lucy Welch, Fleet**

## Dedicated family walking groups

Great to see **walk** celebrating the pleasures of getting outdoors with children (*Masterclass*, winter, p80). The best piece of advice, in an article full of top tips, was to go walking with other families, because this makes it easier and more fun for everyone. In Edinburgh and Dundee, we have sub-groups for family walks and regularly attract lots of new families, as well as existing members with their children or grandchildren. Our groups can range from 10 to 30 people, including babies in slings. Visit Edinburgh Ramblers Family Walks ([ramblers.org.uk/edinburgh](http://ramblers.org.uk/edinburgh)) and Dundee Ramblers Family Walks ([ramblers.org.uk/dundee-district](http://ramblers.org.uk/dundee-district)) for more information.

**Martha Mattos Coelho, Edinburgh Ramblers Family Walks**

## Make it a fun adventure

Your article about walking with children (*Masterclass*, winter, p80) offered many good tips, but I was disappointed to read: 'Good parking and nearby toilets are essential...' Such advice reinforces the mistaken idea that a car is a must if you want to take children on a walk. A bus or train trip can be part of the fun for children. They are less confined and can

enjoy the full attention of adults. The number travelling is completely flexible, making it easy to let children invite their friends along. Those who don't have access to good public transport are likely to live in suburbs or small towns, where there may be walks closer to home.

**Margaret Dickinson, London**

## Helping the homeless

Over the winter, there has been much publicity about the plight of the homeless in Britain. But it's not just winter, it is all year round. Ramblers can help by donating second-hand but usable walking gear such as gloves, hats, fleeces, socks, boots and waterproof/windproof coats to their local homeless charity. Such gestures can make a lot of difference to homeless people.

**John Grace, White Cliffs Ramblers**

## Bag a bargain

Further suggestions on where to get hold of second-hand or cheap walking gear (*Ask the Experts*, winter, p77) are charity shops (new and second-hand), the Freecycle Network and army surplus stores. Happy shopping!

**Marie Critchley, High Peak**



## Vegan walking boots

I would like to offer further advice to Jennie Solley (*Ask the Experts*, winter, p78). The Alberg Dalesway 2-3 season vegan boot is my personal favourite.

It is made from Lorica and has a Vibram sole. Vegetarian Shoes in Brighton and Ethical Wares ([ethicalwares.com](http://ethicalwares.com)) both produce vegan hiking boots. And all of the above confirm that the adhesives used are not of animal origin.

**Robert Jackson, Sheffield**





## Always look back

The most important issue on a guided walk is health and safety (*Your View*, winter, p21). Every now and then, leaders lose sight of those at the back by walking too fast. With big groups, it is not always possible for the leader and backmarker to keep one another in sight, particularly on certain terrains. This is where walkers in the middle have a responsibility to look back and tell the leader to wait. It never ceases to amaze me how few people ever look back. We all have a duty of care to one another. It is also surprising how few people carry a first-aid kit (which costs only a few pounds). I have used mine about 10 times in as many years on walks, and only once on myself.

**Brian Griffiths, Cheshire**

## Neither green nor pleasant

I welcome the Ramblers' decision to join other charities in calling for pavement parking to be made illegal (*Front Foot*, winter, p14). On a recent walk, I was forced to step onto the A38 several times, owing to vehicles occupying the footway. The UK needs to reconsider its approach to the design of new residential areas. Most new roads have been designed not to accept on-street parking, yet their configuration does not effectively prevent it. Front gardens have steadily disappeared to make way for off-road parking. On top of this, there has been a long-standing refusal by many highway authorities to adopt street trees combined with the persistent use of tarmac, rather than paving. The result is that most new residential developments are neither green nor pleasant to walk in.

**Phil Bisatt, Taunton**

## Support from Central Office

I was chairman of the Staffordshire Area of the Ramblers for seven years until the autumn, and in my final 'chairman's remarks' I made reference to the improvement in support and communication from Central Office. One of the most important innovations has been the appointment of an area support manager. I have had reason to work with the team on numerous occasions of late and have valued the support, advice and practical help it has given. In the past, Central Office has, at times, seemed remote from the everyday issues affecting groups and areas. The work of the team is going a long way to dispel this perception.

**George Greensides, Staffordshire Area**

## Let's get ready to ramble!

Here's my nine-year-old grandson, Michael, on his first five-mile walk with Stirling and Falkirk Ramblers. He was made very welcome and thoroughly enjoyed himself. You are never too young to start walking and he is looking forward to his next walk with our group.

**Mary Gallacher, Falkirk**



## Safe passage

We have often been on a country walk and found cattle in our path or at a field gate (*Ask the Experts*, winter, p78). We then have a decision to make on whether to cross the field or seek an alternative route. The Health and Safety Executive stated that, from 2000 to 2015, there had been 74 fatal attacks by cattle on individuals, and they have produced guidance notes for farmers. However, there is no need for walkers to face these problems. Walking near Moreton in Marsh, Gloucestershire (pictured below), we came across sections of walks diverted by fencing, stiles and gates around the perimeter of some fields, separating us from the cattle. There is an answer to this problem – it just needs implementing.

**Richard Coles, Cambridgeshire**



## WIN! BOOTS AND PADS

The sender of our star letter will win a pair of Keen Karraig boots (£160), built for technical ascents and backpacking trips on demanding terrain. The boots are made with a premium leather and performance mesh upper, while a high rebound PU midsole offers incredible durability and resilient cushioning, and a full-length shank provides stability and protection. [keenfootwear.com/en-gb](http://keenfootwear.com/en-gb)



Senders of the other letters published will receive Rite in the Rain environmentally friendly, all-weather notebooks. [riteintherain.com](http://riteintherain.com)

**Over to you...**  
Got something to say? Tell us at [walkmag@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:walkmag@ramblers.org.uk) or write to us at: **walk** magazine, Ramblers, 2nd Floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW. Letters may be edited.

Chris Hopwood, Cotswold Outdoor Expert

📍 Betws-y-Coed, Wales

# I am Chris

## This is my outdoors

“I’ve always been into the outdoors. I was just constantly walking the dog, playing out with friends or at the beach with family. My love for camping came along later when I started to extend those days out and stay out. I got to see more of Britain and that really exploded the possibilities. I didn’t realise we had all that in such close quarters.”

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Let's go somewhere

# Europe's undiscovered walking country

**It may be one of Europe's smallest countries, but Luxembourg packs a punch when it comes to dramatic scenery and award-winning hiking trails**

A warm breeze is coaxing life back into the trees and bushes that line the River Alzette. There is even a glimpse of blossom – spring is in the air.

One of the two rivers that meet in the heart of Luxembourg's capital, the Alzette and its tributary, the Pétrusse, have – over millions of years – carved deep gorges into the underlying rock.

These provided a fantastic natural fortification for the city's early settlers and quickly led to the establishment of the capital here.



## CITY TRAILS

Today, Luxembourg City is one of Europe's most scenic capitals – and the historic quarter and fortifications have been a World Heritage Site since 1994. Located around the Bock cliffs, it's well worth a visit. It's here that you will find the start of the circular Wenzel Walk (5.5km), one of the city's many clearly marked walks, that runs parallel to the river and then winds its way past the capital's cultural and historical highlights.

## FAIRY-TALE LANDSCAPES

There are more great walks to be discovered outside of the capital – in the Éislek, Moselle and Mullerthal regions. The Mullerthal Trail (left) is a must for walkers as this 112km path – split into three sections – traverses a fairy-tale landscape of rocky tors, mossy ravines and crystal-clear lakes. No wonder that the European Ramblers' Association gave the path a Leading Quality Trails – Best of Europe status.

The 159km Escapardenne Trail has also been granted this status. Divided into two main sections, the Lee Trail (53km) and the Éislek Trail (106km), this long-distance path crosses the Ardennes – a wooded plateau that covers parts of Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Germany. The Éislek, the area within Luxembourg, is

crisscrossed by river valleys, offering an almost Alpine hiking experience through steep, sloping forests and undulating mountain paths.

## SHORT AND SWEET

For those who prefer shorter trails, but don't want to miss out on Luxembourg's natural wonders, there are more than 5,000km of well-maintained signposted hiking trails. The 'Auto-pedestre' self-guided walking circuits are particularly suited to families, and there's also a whole series of railway station to railway station walks. Finally, the three Trauschleifen Dream Loops are superb circular trails close to the Moselle river valley. When walking, it is often possible to arrange luggage transport, guided tours and more.

## WALKING IN LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg has 332 hiking paths, 34 long-distance trails and seven pilgrim routes. A Luxembourg Card (one, two or three days, €13-28, 10% discount for over-60s), includes unlimited use of the Grand Duchy's public transport network and access to 79 museums and other attractions free of charge.

**More information: [visitluxembourg.com](http://visitluxembourg.com)**

# YOUR SHOTS

*Favourites from our 'social side of walking' competition...*

**LUNCH AT SOAR MILL COVE, SOUTH HAMS**  
BY CAROLINE CLEAVE



**BLUEBELL WOODS AT WITHERSLACK, SOUTH LAKE LAND**  
BY PAT BORLAND



**FAMILY HIKE**  
BY SARAH PARKER



**WINNER**

**OUR CLIMB TO THE WINDY TOP OF SGURR OF EIGG**  
BY FIONA TAYLOR



**MAGICAL EVENING WALK NEAR FIRLE BEACON, SOUTH DOWNS**  
BY SAMANTHA TUFFNELL



**A SPUR OF THE MOMENT MOUNTAIN CLIMB**  
BY KAREN CLAPP



**WINCLE, STAFFS**  
BY BARB CALLEAR



**MY TWO GIRLS, MUM, GRANDAD AND TEDDY THE DOG**  
BY KIMBERLY BEVAN



**A REST FOR US RAMBLERS**  
BY JOHN TICKNER



## WIN! A PAIR OF BARSKA GLADIATOR BINOCULARS

For this issue's competition, we'd like you to send us photos of your waterside walks - by the sea, river, lake or puddle! The sender of our favourite photo will win a pair of Gladiator Zoom Binoculars from Barska, which are designed for long-distance terrestrial and astronomical viewing. The variable magnification range of



the binoculars allows the viewer to scan a large field of view and then zoom in on the selected object for a greater detailed look. There's a zoom thumb lever for making quick and smooth magnification changes. Fold-down eyecups are incorporated into the eyepieces for comfort viewing with or without spectacles.

**How to enter**  
Enter online at [ramblers.org.uk/walkcompetitions](http://ramblers.org.uk/walkcompetitions) or send your photos with your name, address and contact details to: Your Shots, walk magazine, Ramblers, 2nd Floor, Carnelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW, by 10 April 2019. Entries may be used in Ramblers publicity. Full T&Cs online.

# One step ahead

**Walking-friendly neighbourhoods bring surprising benefits to our health and our environment. As we seek nominations for our annual awards, we ask how more of our towns and cities could become appealing places to explore on foot**

WORDS LUCY SAUNDERS AND NATALIE HOARE  
ILLUSTRATIONS HANNAH WARREN



While a dedicated ramble around the city might not be everyone's cup of tea, walking is, for the 83% of us living in towns and cities, a necessity when we're going about our daily lives, whether it's getting from home to the station, running errands around town, walking the dog or simply getting to work.

But what's your neighbourhood like for walking? Is it easy to nip to the shop to buy a pint of milk? Do you feel safe crossing the road? Is there easy access to green spaces and routes? If the answers are 'yes', why not put in a nomination to the Ramblers' annual Britain's Best Walking Neighbourhood award.

We know that a good walking neighbourhood is also a great place to live, to work, to grow up and grow old in. If you live in a walkable neighbourhood, you are less likely to suffer from poor air quality and noise pollution, and more likely to be active. You'll also probably know your neighbours.

It is the Ramblers' ambition to improve neighbourhoods across Britain for walking. But it has its work cut out. Recent research from the Department for Transport has shown that walking trips have declined by almost a fifth over the past decade. And a lack of exercise is having a massive impact on our nation's health.

According to a recent Public Health England report, more than four in 10 women (42%) and one in three men (34%)

in England are not active enough for good health. In Scotland, recreational walking is booming – up 13% in six years – yet almost two in every five people are still failing to achieve recommended activity levels. In Wales, more than a quarter of adults have fewer than 30 minutes of physical activity a week. This lack of activity has human and economic costs for the individual, communities and the health and social care system.

While all Ramblers will be vocal advocates of the benefits of going on a 'proper' walk, there's good evidence to suggest that even just a 10-minute stroll a couple of times a day can do us the world of good. So why aren't more of us choosing to walk outside our front doors? >





Lucy Saunders, a public health and transport specialist who developed the Mayor of London's Healthy Streets transport strategy, puts it down – in part – to our urban environments being unappealing or unsuitable for walking.

'There's a large body of evidence that shows we are a lot less active than we need to be. Everybody needs to be active every day of their lives to stay healthy. And that doesn't have to be something intensive like going to the gym; it's as simple as doing a few minutes of brisk walking at regular intervals,' she says. 'But it is something that many people find hard to build into their daily routines because the environment they live in is not one that is particularly welcoming to walk in.'

### Car culture

It is understandable why, in some areas, the car is the preferred option. Many of our towns and cities have been designed without putting pedestrians first. Perhaps, in such places, the infrastructure makes it difficult or dangerous to navigate on foot, or maybe it just isn't a very nice place to walk.

'We all need clean air to breathe. That should be a given. We wouldn't put up with a water supply that could not be relied on to be potable, and yet there are over 600

Air Quality Management Areas across the UK,' says Lucy. 'These are areas that are not expected to meet national air-quality objectives. Anywhere with lots of cars is likely to have unsafe particulates from exhaust fumes, tyre and brake wear.'

Let's be honest, it's hard to enjoy walking when traffic is roaring past or cars are being driven aggressively or discourteously.

'This is often a result of a street layout that suggests drivers have priority over

## ***'It's hard to enjoy walking when traffic is roaring past'***

walkers,' says Lucy. 'Speed limits are being reduced to 20mph in many communities to help make them feel much safer.'

Edinburgh is one UK city that has recently adopted a city-wide 20mph default speed limit, and there's currently a bill being consulted on in the Scottish Parliament that would make 20mph a default urban speed limit across Scotland.

This, she says, can be further enhanced by changes to the street layout that make it clear to drivers that they need to drive more slowly and courteously – through schemes

such as narrowing the carriageway and tightening the turns.

Essentially, it has a lot to do with spatial planning and quite high-level transport-planning decisions.

### Path to success

So how can we improve our towns and cities to encourage more people to walk?

'We need a wide enough footway, that's even and not cluttered with things like dustbins or road signs – and it needs to be clean,' Lucy says. Eliminating or reducing traffic noise is another crucial way to make neighbourhoods more appealing for walking. This can be achieved by slowing vehicle speeds, maintaining carriageway surfacing and using a low-noise surfacing. 'Although this can mean that people drive faster, so it's no panacea,' she explains.

Another key factor in making a neighbourhood more walkable is knowing where you're going.

'I would always prefer a layout that intuitively makes sense for finding my way, rather than endless signage,' says Lucy. This 'legibility' of a street layout can't easily be retrofitted into existing places, but many of our older towns and city centres already have it. Last year's winner of the Ramblers' inaugural Britain's Best Walking

## ***‘Streets need to be accessible and welcoming to all’***

Neighbourhood award, Hastings Old Town, is a perfect example, with a street network that is navigable but still invites curiosity.

Developed before the advent of the car, the Old Town is well designed for making short journeys on foot. The quaint streets are crisscrossed by narrow twittens – passages developed in Victorian times – which today form charming pedestrian routes between the main streets. And new measures have been implemented to try to prioritise pedestrians, including vehicle restrictions on some streets during certain times, installing and improving paving and widening footways, making the town even easier to navigate on foot.

### **Lively streets**

Many of the areas put forward for last year’s award were chosen because they offered something unique and interesting. If something is going on that piques our interest, we’re much more likely to get out there, wander about and have a look. In the Worcester suburb of Diglis, ‘There’s always something different every time you come,’ said the nominating Ramblers. In Stocksbridge, Sheffield, they said that ‘You

can come here every day of your life and see something different.’ In Newtown, Powys, Ramblers said there’s the chance of spotting an otter or a kingfisher while walking. In Salford, there’s new architecture popping up among the old, and in Hackney, a new shop or café might be opening. These all contribute to a rewarding urban walking experience.

‘Streets need to be accessible and welcoming to all,’ says Lucy. ‘In Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, a special effort has been made to improve the accessibility of the town for everyone, but there is still a long way to go in many places. A great way to make sure streets are welcoming to all and that the community gets out onto the street and uses it as a social space, is to initiate a community project like DG1 in Dumfries [nominated last year].’

And the benefits are not just for individuals, but also for their communities.

‘In reality, most people in the UK live in urban environments, even if that is a small town, and their best opportunity for everyday walking is going to be along their local streets as part of their daily routine,’ says Lucy. ‘While long leisure walks are a great additional health bonus, the kind of everyday “bread and butter” health benefits come from us finding ways to build a bit of walking into our everyday lives. I believe it’s important that we get our streets fit for purpose and walkable for people.’ ■



## **Walk this way**

Three neighbourhoods that prioritise people on foot

### **Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow**

The previously non-pedestrianised section of central Sauchiehall Street is no longer grey and traffic-dominated. In 2018 the street was reborn as a place for people, with planting, seating and a pleasant environment in which people walking feel they are being put first.

### **People Parking Bays, Hackney, London**

Parklets are a fantastic new community initiative in Hackney. Residents and community groups can apply to the council to convert a parking space on their street into a green area, with planting, seating, games and cycle stands. This project is low cost, quick and simple to put in place, and helps to transform local streets from being seen primarily as car parks to becoming the community spaces they used to be.

### **Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan**

Llantwit Major is the first town in Wales to join the Refill Scheme ([refill.org.uk](http://refill.org.uk)). This enables people to fill their water bottles free of charge at local shops – preferable to buying water, which has environmental impacts and is not always cheap or available. This scheme will see refill stations introduced along the Wales Coast Path to tackle plastic pollution.



### **Do you live in Britain's Best Walking Neighbourhood?**

*If your neighbourhood is walkable, green and welcoming, then you should put it forward for the Britain's*

*Best Walking Neighbourhood award. This is the Ramblers' annual award celebrating places that have been designed for walkers and encourage people to go about their everyday lives on foot. Nominations are open until Sunday, 17 March. It takes just five minutes. Simply fill in the form at:*

**[ramblers.org.uk/nominate](http://ramblers.org.uk/nominate)**

# Walk this way to the Isle of Wight

Put your best foot forward and head to the Isle of Wight for some of the UK's most exciting, diverse and breathtaking walks. With the Walking Festival and the bicentenary of Queen Victoria's birth in May, there's never been a better time to visit...



Just minutes from the South coast lies an Island waiting to be explored. This is a rambler's paradise, with some of the best beaches in the world, soaring Downs, ancient woodlands and strong connections with Queen Victoria who had a seaside palace here. The countryside is so diverse it's been called 'England in miniature' and there are walks for all levels of ability through the spectacular landscape.

## STEP ALONG TO THE WALKING FESTIVAL

Spring is the perfect time to visit – the daffodils and bluebells are out, and the baby red squirrels come out to play. From 4th-19th May, it's the Isle of Wight Walking Festival, sponsored by Warner Leisure Hotels. This is one of the country's biggest walking festivals, with around 100 free walks to choose from including over 40 new walks in 2019. Select your own adventure from a gentle walk for all the family; to the scenic but super tough Isle of Wight Challenge. All the walks are led by knowledgeable walk leaders and the

eclectic walks programme includes pig feeding in a working monastery; foraging for wild garlic; and visiting the site where Jimi Hendrix rocked the Island in 1970.

## TIME TRAVEL TO THE VICTORIAN ERA

Join in the celebrations marking the 200th anniversary of the births of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The Island is rich in Victorian charm. Osborne, Victoria and Albert's palace by the sea, is hosting a Beach and Woodland Walk as part of the Walking Festival. Victoria and Albert were lavish present givers, and there's a new trail and display around the house where you can see their gifts.

## YEAR ROUND ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Discover your walking inspiration on the Isle of Wight from the highest point of the Island, at St Boniface Down, to right down on the beach at Compton looking for dinosaur footprints. The Island is perfect for a walking getaway, with a vast range of accommodation options and



📍 Clockwise from left:  
Freshwater Bay; the  
view from St Boniface  
Down; walking  
towards Tennyson  
Down; Osborne  
House, Queen  
Victoria's palace

WIN an  
Isle of Wight  
holiday

**WIN A WALKING FESTIVAL STAY FOR TWO AT NORTON GRANGE COASTAL VILLAGE, YARMOUTH.**

Prize includes bed, breakfast and dinner, and ferry crossings with Wightlink.

To enter and for terms & conditions: [visitisleofwight.co.uk/walkingfestival](http://visitisleofwight.co.uk/walkingfestival)

great places to dine out on local produce including lobster, crab, milk, cheese, tomatoes and garlic.

### THE ACCESSIBLE ISLAND

The Island feels like a million miles away – but actually it's so easy to get to by ferry or hovercraft whether you come by car or on foot. Leave the car behind and get around by bus, bike and walking. The digital Slow Travel Guide to Wight, which is available from the end of March, offers eight new trails to explore. Go at your own pace and meet craftspeople, artists and food producers. So step to it – and bon voyage!

### FIND OUT MORE

- Discover more about the Isle of Wight Walking Festival and reserve your walk online at [isleofwightwalkingfestival.co.uk](http://isleofwightwalkingfestival.co.uk)
- Get a discount on your ferry ticket with a promotion code (see Wightlink box on the right).
- For wonderful walks, great places to stay, unusual things to do and information on the Slow Travel Guide, go to the official tourist board's website at [visitisleofwight.co.uk](http://visitisleofwight.co.uk)



## Ready to book your trip to the Island?

Whether it is for the Walking Festival or to discover the amazing trails on the Island at another time, Wightlink is your link to walking on the Isle of Wight.

Regular foot passenger and car ferries run round the clock from three terminals in Portsmouth and Lymington on the south coast.

With seamless train connections leading directly to Wightlink's ports, getting to the Island on foot could not be easier.

Step off the train, hop on a Wightlink FastCat and be on the Island in just 22 minutes. Or if you choose to bring your vehicle, the car ferry takes around 40 minutes.

Before you set sail, check out Wightlink's blog for lots of trip inspiration. You'll find plenty of information about the Island's attractions, experiences and accommodation choices, as well as stunning Island walks to challenge or refresh you.

On board, relax in the lounges and enjoy a cup of Island coffee and locally made cake, before arriving and lacing up your walking boots.

Victoria of Wight, Wightlink's new hybrid energy ferry



### SAVE 20% ON FERRY TRAVEL

**Save 20% on foot, car and motorcycle ferry fares to the Island during the Isle of Wight Walking Festival, between 3rd May and 20th May 2019. To book visit [wightlink.co.uk](http://wightlink.co.uk) and enter promotion code **WALK2019** at stage 4 of the booking process.**

#### Terms & conditions

1. This is a time limited promotional offer which can only be booked online and is non-refundable.
2. Offer is valid on foot, car and motorcycle products.
3. Fares are valid for bookings made until 20th May 2019 or until limit has been reached.
4. Travel must be taken between 3rd May 2019 and 20th May 2019.
5. Bookings are only valid from the Mainland to the Island (Isle of Wight).
6. We reserve the right to modify or cancel the offers at any time.
7. Tesco Clubcard Boost tokens will not be accepted as part or full payment of tickets.
8. Wightlink General Conditions for provision of Ferry Services apply and can be found at [www.wightlink.co.uk/terms](http://www.wightlink.co.uk/terms)

# TEN PLACES GRAND CANALS

Britain's waterways offer a 'linear national park', where walkers can enjoy wildlife, history and a huge network of traffic-free trails

WORDS PAUL MILES



## **F**oxton Locks, Grand Union Canal, Leicester Line

**ABOUT** Foxton Locks is a flight of 10 locks interspersed with reed-filled side ponds, where water voles have been seen. A steam-powered inclined plane (ramp) once hauled boats up and down the 75ft hill in 12 minutes, compared to 45 minutes through the locks. All that remains of this Victorian engineering is a grassy slope and former boiler house, now a museum.

**WALK IT** Foxton Locks is a 6km/4-mile towpath walk from Market Harborough – with a shorter and longer walk. The site has two car parks (sat-nav: LE16 7RA), a café and two pubs.

**FIND OUT MORE** [tinyurl.com/yaeopaxs](http://tinyurl.com/yaeopaxs)



## 2 Caldon Canal, Staffordshire

**ABOUT** This 27km/17-mile-long canal joins Stoke-on-Trent with rural Staffordshire. It was built to carry limestone from the Peak District and flints for the Potteries. Today, a steam railway chugs through the quiet Churnet Valley, while an occasional narrowboat putters along an aqueduct that crosses a branch of the canal, an 18th-century Spaghetti Junction of the waterways in bucolic surrounds.

**WALK IT** The Holly Bush Inn at Denford makes a convenient start and end point for a 6km/4-mile walk that follows the Froghall and Leek branches in a figure of eight, including crossing the Hazelhurst Aqueduct and passing three locks. Cross from one branch of canal to the other again on the small road near Deep Hayes Country Park.

**FIND OUT MORE**  
[tinyurl.com/ybp2cpj9](http://tinyurl.com/ybp2cpj9)



## 3 Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, Gloucestershire

**ABOUT** Gloucester's docks are the most inland in Britain. Tall ships still occasionally sail from the Severn Estuary along the 26km/16-mile Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, which was the world's broadest and deepest canal when it opened in 1827. The canal avoids a hazardous, meandering tidal stretch of the river, where the Severn Bore roars around 260 times a year.

**WALK IT** A circular 17km/10½-mile walk follows a loop of the Severn and a stretch of the canal towpath through Saul Junction, the junction of the Gloucester and Sharpness with the abandoned Stroudwater Navigation canal, now under restoration. There is a pub and a fine seafood restaurant with rooms providing views of the Severn Bore if you time it right. Buses run to Saul Junction from Gloucester.

**FIND OUT MORE** [tinyurl.com/y79k7awz](http://tinyurl.com/y79k7awz)





## 4 Falkirk Wheel and Antonine Wall, Forth and Clyde Canal

**ABOUT** Across the centre of Scotland, the 35-mile-long Forth and Clyde Canal roughly follows the route of the Antonine Wall, a Roman frontier begun around 142 AD. The best-preserved fort on the wall, Rough Castle, is near the Falkirk Wheel. This 35-metre-high rotating boat lift, opened in 2002, is revolutionary – the only one of its kind in the world.

**WALK IT** The 215km/134-mile John Muir Way includes a section of Forth and Clyde towpath. For a shorter stroll, where you can still take in the beauty of canal life, you can combine a section of towpath with the Antonine Wall for a scenic circular route of 7km/4½ miles. From Camelon rail station, the Falkirk Wheel is a two-mile walk along the Forth and Clyde Canal. You'll find parking at the Falkirk Wheel.

**FIND OUT MORE** [scottishcanals.co.uk/falkirk-wheel](http://scottishcanals.co.uk/falkirk-wheel)

## 5 Lancaster Canal, Lancashire

**ABOUT** Reaching Kendal in the Lake District, the isolated 'Lanky' was finally joined to the rest of England's inland waterways with the construction of the Millennium Ribble Link. Near Carnforth, this northernmost English waterway hugs the coast, with views to Morecambe Bay just a short walk away. Water lilies and other wild flowers flourish along this watery garden.

**WALK IT** Adventurous narrowboaters cross the Ribble Estuary to navigate 66km/41 miles of lock-free restored canal. From the limit of navigation at Tewitfield, on the Lancashire/Cumbria border, the Lanky continues for a quiet 23km/14 miles northwards. There is a bar and restaurant at Crooklands, halfway. A bus service connects Tewitfield to Kendal and Lancaster.

**FIND OUT MORE** [tinyurl.com/yarvgmk9](http://tinyurl.com/yarvgmk9)



### READER PANEL



'The Rochdale Canal is like a pedestrian motorway – no navigation required – and serves me well

for access and escape to the nearby hills. I once helped 'leg' a normally horse-drawn narrowboat through the UK's longest canal tunnel on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal – Standedge Tunnel [3¼ miles]. Definitely the ultimate canal walk.'

**Geoff Eldridge,**  
Rochdale Ramblers

## 6 Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal

**ABOUT** In the wooded valley of the River Usk, coursing through the Brecon Beacons National Park, this isolated canal is a haven. Quiet electric hire boats cruise its 55km/34 miles of navigation. Hill views appear around each towpath bend and footpaths lead to moor-topped summits with views of the canal, winding river and fine stone bridges across to small towns and villages, such as Llangattock.

**WALK IT** The 88km/55-mile Taff Trail follows the River Taff from Cardiff to Brecon, where it crosses the canal. There are rail stations at Pontypool and Abergavenny. The distance between the two, following the 'Mon & Brec' towpath, is about 24km/15 miles. The café at Goytre Wharf is a good halfway stop.

**FIND OUT MORE**  
[tinyurl.com/ka867uu](http://tinyurl.com/ka867uu)





## 8 Bridgwater and Taunton Canal, Somerset

**ABOUT** This 22.5km/14-mile-long rural canal was intended to form a route between the English and Bristol Channels. Now, this landlocked rural waterway is home to colourful narrowboats and the Somerset Space Walk – a scale model of our solar system, where one millimetre represents 530km. Maunsel Lock is home to the Sun (and information centre and café). Pluto is 11km/7 miles away.

**WALK IT** Taunton and Bridgwater are 11 minutes apart by train, both served by GWR trains from Bristol Temple Meads. Bridgwater station is 1.6km/1 mile from the canal basin (and its former junction with River Parrett). Taunton railway station is 0.8km/½ mile from the canal. A station-to-station walk, including the full length of the canal, amounts to 25km/15½ miles (and crosses the solar system twice).

**FIND OUT MORE** [tinyurl.com/y732exc9](http://tinyurl.com/y732exc9)

## 7 Oxford Canal, Oxfordshire

**ABOUT** Following the twisty contours of the land was 18th-century engineer James Brindley's modus operandi. The locks and lift bridges of the canal around Lower Heyford make for pleasing walking. Cross the River Cherwell into fields, beside an apparent ruin known as the Eyecatcher, for nearby 17th-century Rousham House, which has gardens open to the public.

**WALK IT** The Oxford Canal Walk is a 133km/83-mile walk connecting Oxford and Coventry along the towpath. A circular walk of 7km/4 miles around Lower Heyford combines towpath and rural footpaths. Heyford station is adjacent to the canal, with regular services between Oxford and Banbury. Oxfordshire Narrowboats – opposite the station – has a café.

**FIND OUT MORE** [tinyurl.com/ycvd5y9x](http://tinyurl.com/ycvd5y9x)



## 9 Pocklington Canal, Yorkshire



**ABOUT** At the foot of the Yorkshire Wolds, this nine-mile-long waterway is rich in wildlife, passing through seasonally flooded hay meadows – known as ‘ings’ – that attract migrating waterfowl and waders. Look out for dragonflies, damselflies, barn owls and otters. Only partly restored, the canal celebrated its bicentenary last year with the opening of a further two miles for boats.

**WALK IT** Pocklington Canal head is a 40-minute bus journey from York, followed by a mile’s walk. The towpath is mostly level but muddy in places. After nine more miles (14.5km) you reach the canal’s junction with the River Derwent near the hamlet of East Cottingwith. There are buses back to York from East Cottingwith. There’s a pub in Melbourne, two minutes’ walk from the canal’s small marina.

### FIND OUT MORE

[pocklingtoncanalsociety.org](http://pocklingtoncanalsociety.org)



## 10 Montgomery Canal, Shropshire and Powys



**ABOUT** A horse called Cracker tows a trip boat, *Countess*, along a quiet section of this partially restored canal in Shropshire. About 16km/10 miles south-west from the day-trippers, across the border in Powys, Wales, the 19km/12

miles and 11 locks between Arddleen and Berriew is arguably the most scenic stretch for walking. You pass through Welshpool and close to Powis Castle. Wildlife thrives along the canal, with otters and water voles often being spotted.

**WALK IT** Near Llanymynech, the Offa’s Dyke Path accompanies the Montgomery

Canal for half a mile. The Severn Way, a long-distance path of 338km/210 miles along the course of the River Severn, follows the canal towpath near Welshpool for a mile. Welshpool has a train station. Buses run between Berriew and Welshpool and between Welshpool and Arddleen.

**FIND OUT MORE** [tinyurl.com/yb6ubzj8](http://tinyurl.com/yb6ubzj8)

# Heaven in fell country

For a range of unique Lake District experiences, Ramblers Walking Holidays have got it covered – from their beautiful country house on the shores of Buttermere

The English Lake District is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful and dramatic walking areas in the UK. A total of 16 lakes and numerous generally smaller ‘tarns’ are squeezed between steep-sided mountains and glaciated valleys, resulting in the creation of England’s largest natural lake (Windermere) and its deepest (Wastwater), as well as its highest mountain, 978-metre Scafell Pike. No wonder the recent poll for ITV’s *Britain’s Favourite Walks: Top 100* revealed that seven of our top 10 walking destinations are found in or very close to the Lake District. Hassness Country House, a welcoming Lakeland retreat, is literally on the doorstep of several of them.

In 2017, the Lake District National Park became the UK’s 31st World Heritage Site – long-awaited recognition for the area’s natural beauty and distinctive farmed landscapes, as well as its inspiration to writers and painters, such as John Ruskin, William Wordsworth and JMW Turner.

Ramblers Walking Holidays, the official walking partner of the Ramblers, have been providing guided walks here and throughout Britain for over 70 years. Today, they offer over 200 reasonably priced guided walking and activity holidays around the world, and are committed to minimising their social and environmental impact by keeping groups small and by supporting a range of charitable causes at home and abroad. Any profits not required for running



📍 Above: Staff from Ramblers Walking Holidays and the Ramblers at Hassness. Right: The refurbished country house is used as a base for the walks

the business are invested back into a number of good causes, including the Ramblers’ Don’t Lose Your Way project, through the Ramblers Holidays Charitable Trust (RHCT).

In the Lakes, Ramblers Walking Holidays offer a range of experiences, for individuals or small groups, that showcase the best of the area – whatever your walking ability. Most are based at Hassness.

Tucked away on the remote shores of Buttermere with expansive views of the lake and the craggy fells beyond, Hassness has recently undergone a significant refurbishment of its facilities. All 11 bedrooms, with their picture-postcard outlook, have been refreshed with the addition of en-suite facilities to many of the rooms. The lounge and the dining-room areas have also been upgraded, and guests can enjoy regional, home-cooked specialities, such as slow-cooked Herdwick lamb, Cumberland sausage and damson



fruit tart – made with local ingredients. There’s also an honesty bar.

Using Hassness as a base, Ramblers Walking Holidays offer gentle strolls on the fells or more strenuous days on the summits, with walks led by experienced, friendly leaders. And if you want to try something different, why not choose the Navigation and Hill Skills or Mindfulness in the Mountains holidays? Or opt for the Great Lakeland Ridge Walks, Lakeland Explorer or Women’s Activity Week. All providing a memorable holiday, in a unique location.

## MORE INFORMATION

A three-night break at Hassness Country House costs from £260 per person, and includes most meals and a choice of two grades of walks with an experienced, friendly leader. [ramblersholidays.co.uk](http://ramblersholidays.co.uk). Call 01707 818938.

**Ramblers**  
Walking  
Holidays **R**

# Norman Ackroyd

The Leeds-born artist and Ramblers member is renowned for his distinctive etchings and watercolours – many capturing the wild beauty of the British Isles' coastline

WORDS REBECCA SWIRSKY

## Where did your fascination for wilder extremes that you capture in your etchings and watercolours begin?

When I was about six or seven, my father and I visited Bridlington. At the harbour, we got into a boat. The sea was extremely rough, so, on hitting a deep surge, the boat began to rock sharply. I had a taste, then, of the immense power of the sea. I was scared witless! And I thought, 'These islands are surrounded by this kind of thing.' Then, seeing the extreme islands off the coasts on maps, including the St Kilda archipelago (which lies 41 miles west of Benbecula in Scotland's Outer Hebrides), I had a strong urge to understand how it was for the people who lived there, surrounded by incredible rock formations, who had never seen a tree – a notion I found moving.

## St Kilda features widely in some of your work. Why does it inspire you?

Today, St Kilda is well protected. Its four main islands, Hirta, Dùn, Soay and Boreray, together with their adjacent stacks of Stac an Armin, Stac Lee and Stac Levenish, have

a coastline that is around 35km long. St Kilda's last 36 residents left the islands in 1930. The army is based there, and perhaps three or four cottages have been rewired for scientists who are looking at feral sheep and birdlife. Partly because of the dramatic sea cliffs, the entire archipelago became Scotland's first natural World Heritage Site in 1986. I consider it the British Galápagos.



## Have you passed on your love of wild nature?

Oh yes, indeed. I have a daughter who is a musician. Poppy and her partner, Joe – a skilled sound engineer – have accompanied me on trips to St Kilda, North Rona and the Flannan Isles. They come to record the gannets bustling about and crowing. (During the summer, St Kilda has the largest



📍 Clockwise from top: Norman's atmospheric etchings of Barra Head from Mingulay; and the haunting spectacle of Stac Biorach and Soay Stac, St Kilda; the remoteness of St Kilda inspires Norman's work; chartering a boat to best capture the landscape



seabird colony in the north-east Atlantic Ocean, with nearly one million birds.) They incorporate these sounds into beautiful music for their band, Hidden Orchestra. Together, we've visited really remote rocks. One of our most memorable experiences was witnessing the strange phenomenon of what locals call a 'glass sea', which happens about twice a year and is the consequence of a confluence of different currents hitting each other. In water that was smooth as oil, we witnessed hammerhead sharks.

#### So you've visited St Kilda many times...

Yes, to sleep on St Kilda – unreachable by telephone – is particularly special. It means you can be up for the sun. Seeing the sun rising and setting is important as it furnishes you with an intricate knowledge

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE

### > COUNTRY WALK?

Offa's Dyke is a spectacular walk following the English-Welsh border for 177 miles – a great frontier earthwork with uninterrupted views of Mercia and Wales.

### > CITY WALK?

Walking from where I live in Bermondsey [south London], past where the *Mayflower* left, to Canary Wharf. You can sense that history, and understand it.

### > VIEW?

I like getting up high on St Kilda, or any of the main islands on the west coast. With the seabirds and the occasional whale, you read it like a line of music. It's like witnessing a nature concert.

### > KIT?

A compass, a Tilley hat, deck shoes, which are good for slippery rocks, and my drawing book and pencils.

### > POST-WALK TIPPLE?

A warming Whisky Mac or a pint of Guinness.



of the mapping of St Kilda and the way it's laid out. Witnessing the sun begin to rise behind St Kilda's jagged, isolated sea stacks, the UK's highest, is spectacular. Stac Lee (which rises to 564ft above the North Atlantic) and Stac an Armin (which rises to 643ft) are huge volcanic cauldrons bursting out of the ocean, white with guano. St Kildans would harvest the gannets and great auks from Stac an Armin. They developed prehensile tools to get the eggs, so they were great cragsmen and climbers.

#### The weather can be rough in that part of the world – have you been caught out?

About eight years ago, I was stranded on St Kilda for nine or 10 days when the weather changed. I was about 72 or 73,

but I managed to survive. The boatman who dropped me off had given me some mackerel, I had tinned sardines and baked beans, plenty of tea, and a tap I could use for water at the Ministry of Defence tracking station. On the upper floor of a store built in 1780, from my comfortable bed and sleeping bag, I could look out onto a storm force 10 sea. It was wonderful. Incredibly productive. I did a set of 10 etchings just on St Kilda – lots of watercolours. There are traces of prehistoric houses on St Kilda, which show it was inhabited for 4,000 years. I was glad to get back to a bacon sandwich, though.

#### How has exploring our islands enriched your life?

We are blessed in this country. Many islands, now uninhabited, have become feral and are well protected. The bird colonies of Mingulay, which is part of the Bishop's or Barra Isles, are fantastic – the birds flourish like mad. If you see a gannet and a skua fighting in mid-air, well, it can be pretty vicious. The skua is the Wild West bird of the seas. Their eggs lie in nests in the grass – if you walk nearby, they will dive-bomb you. Then there's the vegetation growing through the villages – the wonderful flora and fauna, and the colonies of wild goats.

They've done it so well down the west coast of Scotland and Ireland. Some of these islands don't even have piers, so to access them, you find a fisherman who has a love of the sea and is in semi-retirement. They possess a depth of knowledge acquired over a lifetime: where to land, at what time and when to turn for home, so you charter their boat for three or four days. It's rather good.

I get handed around the coast of Britain from boatman to boatman – which suits me fine. It's like chartering an Atlantic taxi for a few days, going for the light and the sunsets. And when the seabirds get into the rays of the sun, they sparkle in the skies. I chartered a wonderful boat off Cape Wrath, the most north-westerly point in mainland Britain. I had one of the world's best breakfasts on that boat – fresh mackerel, straight out of the sea, cooked at 5am on the boat's gimbal stove, and eaten in a butty with butter. Nothing better!

*Norman has submitted work to the Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition, 10 June–12 August, [royalacademy.org.uk](http://royalacademy.org.uk)*

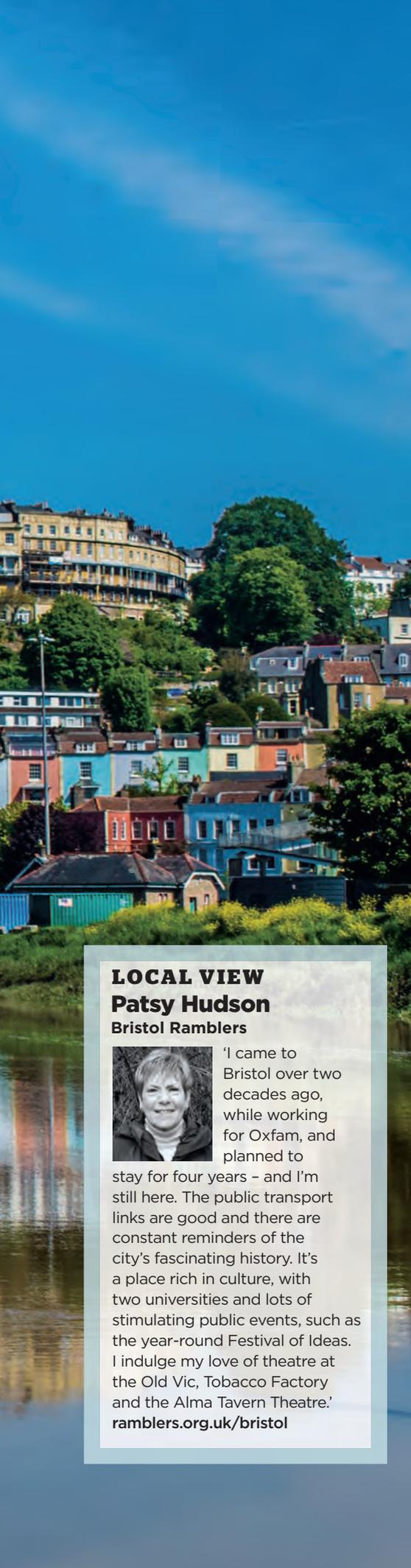


**DISCOVER**  
**Bristol**

*Insider knowledge from local experts*

WORDS ANDREW McCLOY & PATSY HUDSON

**Surrounded by superb walking country in all directions, Bristol is not only a handy gateway to the Mendips, Quantocks and Cotswolds, but it's also a fantastic destination in itself. The historic and largely traffic-free harbourside offers world-class attractions and waterside refreshment stops, while the city's rolling green spaces provide plenty of panoramic viewpoints**



### Springtime flora

Only four miles out of Bristol is Prior's Wood, where the slopes are covered in springtime bluebells and wild garlic – a magical sight and wonderful smell.

### Top trail

An evening walk around Bristol Harbour is great for both the wildlife and human activity on the water, plus the views of two city icons: Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge across the gorge and his iron ship, *SS Great Britain*.



### Harbourside food and drink

Overlooking the harbour is the Watershed Café & Bar (above) and nearby places include the Nova Scotia pub and Brunel's Buttery (which has the best butties ever!).

### Ancient sites

On the edge of the Mendips, to the south, is the Iron Age hillfort of Dolebury Warren. Plus, there's Stanton Drew standing stones, as well as Maes Knoll, which is possibly part of the Wansdyke early medieval defensive earthworks.

### Seasonal sight

The city of Bristol has an incredible amount of green space and there are stunning viewpoints at every turn. Bristol Ramblers organises urban walks on summer evenings. Venturing out of the city, there's stunning countryside in all directions, from the Cotswolds and Wiltshire Downs to the Mendips and Quantocks, not to mention the Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons across the Severn Estuary in Wales.

### High points

The long climb to the top of Cabot Tower (below), in a public park on Brandon Hill, rewards you with superb views over the city and across to Dundry Hill, the high point to the south of Bristol.



### Favourite museum

We The Curious science museum has experiments and interactive displays for younger visitors. The M Shed tells the history of Bristol, but my favourite is the Bristol Museum with its collection of Egyptian artefacts, stuffed animals, art and a beautiful Romany caravan.

### Wildlife highlight

A pair of peregrines nest on the steep-sided edge of Clifton Down, bordering the Avon Gorge. I've watched the parent birds flying with their new offspring at their sides.



### Festival fun

Held in May, Bristol Walk Fest is the UK's largest urban celebration of walking and includes history trails, urban exploring, walking sports and vigorous uphill hikes. Visit [bristolwalkfest.com](http://bristolwalkfest.com)

**LOCAL VIEW**  
**Patsy Hudson**  
 Bristol Ramblers



'I came to Bristol over two decades ago, while working for Oxfam, and planned to stay for four years – and I'm still here. The public transport links are good and there are constant reminders of the city's fascinating history. It's a place rich in culture, with two universities and lots of stimulating public events, such as the year-round Festival of Ideas. I indulge my love of theatre at the Old Vic, Tobacco Factory and the Alma Tavern Theatre.'  
[ramblers.org.uk/bristol](http://ramblers.org.uk/bristol)

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY, ISTOCK, THEBRISTOLNOWAD

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You can't beat it



## Whiteadder Reservoir & Priestlaw Hill, East Lothian

**DISTANCE** 11KM/7 MILES **ASCENT** 276M/905FT  
**TIME** 3 HOURS **TYPE** HILL AND MOOR

NAVIGATION LEVEL  
**MODERATE**

FITNESS LEVEL  
**MODERATE**

PERFECT FOR  
**WILDLIFE**

NUMBER OF STILES  
**NONE**

To download this route and hundreds of others, visit [ramblers.org.uk/routes](http://ramblers.org.uk/routes)



### Plan your walk

**WHERE** A circular walk from Whiteadder Reservoir to the summit of Priestlaw Hill.

**START/END** Lay-by, north-western edge of Whiteadder Reservoir (NT643642).

**TERRAIN** Hill paths and tracks and minor roads.

**MAPS** OS Explorer 345; Landranger 67.

**GETTING THERE** There is no public transport to the start. East Coast Buses to Haddington. Colin's Cabs (01620 825825, colins-cabs.business.site) from Haddington to Whiteadder Reservoir.

**EATING & DRINKING** Goblin Ha', Gifford (01620 810244, goblinha.com).

**SLEEPING** Tweeddale Arms Hotel, High Street, Gifford (01620 810240, tweeddalearmshotel.com).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Edinburgh iCentre, 3 Princes Street (0131 473 3868, visitScotland.com).

**GUIDEBOOK** *The Pentland Hills, Midlothian and East Lothian: 40 Coast and Country Walks* by Keith Fergus (£6.99, Pocket Mountains, ISBN 978 1907025655).

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP** East Lothian Ramblers and Hillwalkers (01620 894596, ramblers.org.uk/east-lothian).

The Lammermuir Hills, which rise to the east of Edinburgh, are not quite as popular as the Pentland Hills and consequently have a much wilder air. Walking within the Lammermuirs also offers a keen sense of history and, as spring arrives, a spectacular array of wildlife. A wonderful circular route, along clear paths and tracks, links Whiteadder Reservoir and Priestlaw Hill via the ancient Herring Road

ROUTE BY KEITH FERGUS

**1 START** The route begins from a lay-by (room for six cars) near the north-western edge of Whiteadder Reservoir, beside a cattle grid on the B6355, eight miles south-east of Gifford. Follow the access road for Priestlaw Farm along the western fringe of Whiteadder Reservoir. Birdlife on the water includes pochards, shelducks and great-crested grebes. In winter, barnacle and pink-footed geese may be spotted.

**2** After 650m, turn R onto a track for 'Herring Road to Lauder' and continue as it rises gently towards Penshiel. Just before the farm, turn L through a gate from where the track heads south across a windswept area of moorland. This is a section of the Herring Road that ran for 45km between Dunbar and Lauder. Its heyday was during the 18th and 19th centuries, when fishwives carried huge creels of herring from Dunbar to the markets in Lauder. It was also used by people bringing home salted herring to be eaten in winter. Follow the route, enjoying nearly 3km of easy walking,

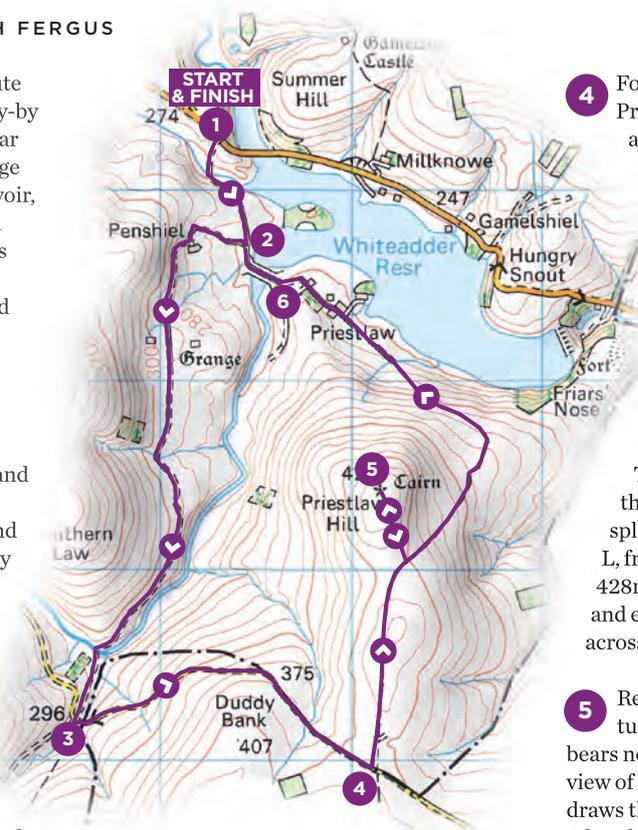
with wonderful views of Whiteadder Reservoir and Spartleton Hill. Eventually, the track crosses a bridge over the fast-flowing Faseny Water, then goes through a gate. A short rise passes through another gate to a minor road.

**3** Keep L and follow this quiet road on a steady climb for 2km to a track on the L signed for 'Garvald and Whiteadder Reservoir'.

**4** Follow this north towards Priestlaw Hill, with views on a clear day opening out as far as the Cheviot Hills. The moorland is home to lapwings, grouse, kestrels and even hen harriers. The track then descends gently as it veers north-east, around the eastern slopes of Priestlaw Hill – but just as it curves R, look out for a grassy track on the L. This rises steadily towards the summit of Priestlaw Hill, splitting on the approach. Keep L, from where a path leads to the 428m top, marked with a cairn, and extensive views stretching across the Scottish Borders.

**5** Return to the main track and turn L. A gradual descent bears north-west, where a superb view of Whiteadder Reservoir draws the eye to Spartleton Hill. After the track drops steeply, go through two gates onto a road that passes through Priestlaw.

**6** In turn, the road crosses a bridge over Faseny Water, then returns to the outward-bound route, from where it is a simple return to the start.



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*Karen Thomas, Chippenham*

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*Carol Doyle, Surrey*

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*Anne Bird, Bristol*

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*Mr & Mrs Bailey-Webb, Warsash*

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*Jason Boyd, Havant*



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## Peckforton Hills, Cheshire

**DISTANCE** 12KM/7½ MILES **ASCENT** 468M/1,535FT  
**TIME** 4 HOURS **TYPE** HILL AND WOOD

↓ To **download this route** and hundreds of others, visit [ramblers.org.uk/routes](http://ramblers.org.uk/routes)

 NAVIGATION LEVEL **LEISURELY** | 
  FITNESS LEVEL **LEISURELY** | 
  PERFECT FOR **VIEWS** | 
  NUMBER OF STILES **3**



### Plan your walk

**WHERE** Circular walk from Bickerton Hill, Cheshire.

**START/END** Bickerton Hill National Trust (NT) car park in Pool Lane (SJ503530).

**TERRAIN** Lanes, woodland paths and tracks. Take care when crossing the A534.

**MAPS** OS Explorer 257; Landranger 117.

**GETTING THERE** The NT car park is 1.6km south of the A534 at Gallantry Bank. Follow signs for Bickerton, then take Goldford Lane beside the church. Car park is another 1km, up the track on right beside a duck pond, opposite Pool Farm. No useful public transport.

**EATING & DRINKING** The Bickerton Poacher, Bulkeley (01829 720226, [bickertonpoacher.co.uk](http://bickertonpoacher.co.uk)).

**SLEEPING** The Bickerton Poacher (as above).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Tourist Information Centre, Nantwich Civic Hall, Market Street (01270 303150, [nantwichtowncouncil.gov.uk](http://nantwichtowncouncil.gov.uk)).

**GUIDEBOOK** *Walks in West Cheshire and Wirral* by Jen Darling (£8.99, Northern Eye, ISBN 978 0955355721).

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP** South Cheshire (07711 284599, [ramblers.org.uk/south-cheshire](http://ramblers.org.uk/south-cheshire)).

A switchback route that threads through the wooded hills and heaths at Bulkeley and Bickerton, and incorporates part of Cheshire's Sandstone Trail. There are magnificent views of the Clwydian Range mountains, along with veteran trees and drifts of wildflowers. The huge panoramas also reveal distant castles, and there's an Iron Age hillfort to investigate

ROUTE BY NEIL COATES

**1 START** Descend the car park track and turn R along the lane. In 200m, fork R up the gravelly track. Past 'Newfield' house, use handgate (R) into NT land. Walk the woodland path L to a three-way split; take the middle option gently uphill, presently edge L on a wide heathland path to a ridge-top wooden bench and Maiden Castle hillfort's interpretation board. Views to the Welsh mountains are superb.

**2** Bear R up rough steps to join the Sandstone Trail (ST) heading north – observe yellow 'S' waymark discs and fingerposts for Beeston/Bulkeley. This skirts steep bluffs, in 900m passing a memorial known as Kitty's Stone on Bickerton Hill, and then meanders (some steps) 1km down through woodland (ST waymarks) to Goldford Lane at Bickerton's Holy Trinity Church.

**3** Go straight over the adjoining crossroads; progress up to the main road. Cross to the 'No Through Road' opposite. Some 120m past Walnut House is a sharp walled corner (L) and fingerpost (R) for Coppermine Lane (copper was mined locally). Take this path; turn L in 50m along the uneven fenced way, presently past lower pastures, through to Coppermine Lane (450m).

Head L up this; beyond Rawhead Cottage, it levels between fields.

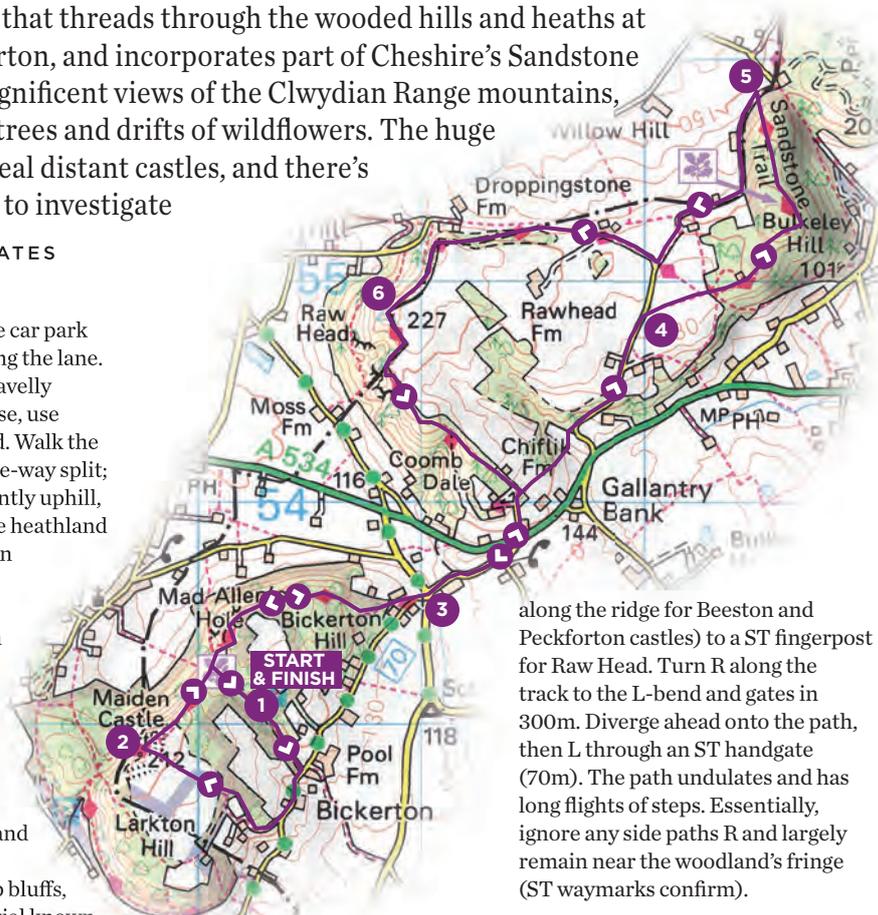
**4** In 250m, turn R at wooden fencing (waymarked) to reach woodland. Obey ST fingerpost for Bulkeley Hill, rising steeply through woods. Path levels and weaves near the lip of sheer slopes, with views to the Peak District. Passing through a grove of ancient chestnut trees, the ST eventually drifts L down uneven steps to reach a woods-edge track.

**5** Turn L and follow this for 1km, past secluded houses (look back

along the ridge for Beeston and Peckforton castles) to a ST fingerpost for Raw Head. Turn R along the track to the L-bend and gates in 300m. Diverge ahead onto the path, then L through an ST handgate (70m). The path undulates and has long flights of steps. Essentially, ignore any side paths R and largely remain near the woodland's fringe (ST waymarks confirm).

**6** Beyond Raw Head trig pillar, the path presently progresses via steep steps and sublime viewpoints, eventually passing Chiflik Farm (900m) to drop back along the lane to the main road. Cross to return to Holy Trinity Church. Trace the ST back up through the woods again. Just beyond Kitty's Stone, curl round to a 'Lowland Heath' board; descend the short gully R, then drop L to the car park.

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## Flasby Fell, Yorkshire Dales

**DISTANCE** 16.5KM/10 MILES **ASCENT** 307M/1,007FT  
**TIME** 4½ HOURS **TYPE** FELL, FIELD AND CANAL

NAVIGATION LEVEL **EASY** | FITNESS LEVEL **MODERATE** | PERFECT FOR **VIEWS** | NUMBER OF STILES **12**



### Plan your walk

**WHERE** Circular walk from Gargrave, via Flasby Fell and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

**START/END** Gargrave rail station (SD932535).

**TERRAIN** Field paths, moorland tracks, country roads and canal towpaths. Lots of stiles, and some paths can be muddy and uneven.

**MAPS** OS Explorer OL2; Landranger 103.

**GETTING THERE** Northern trains to Gargrave station (0800 200 6060; [northernrailway.co.uk](http://northernrailway.co.uk)).

**EATING & DRINKING** Old Swan Inn, Gargrave (01756 749232; [old-swan-inn.co.uk](http://old-swan-inn.co.uk)).

**SLEEPING** Gargrave has plenty of hotels and B&B accommodation, including the Old Swan Inn (as above).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Skipton Tourist Information Centre (01756 792809, [welcometoskipton.com](http://welcometoskipton.com)).

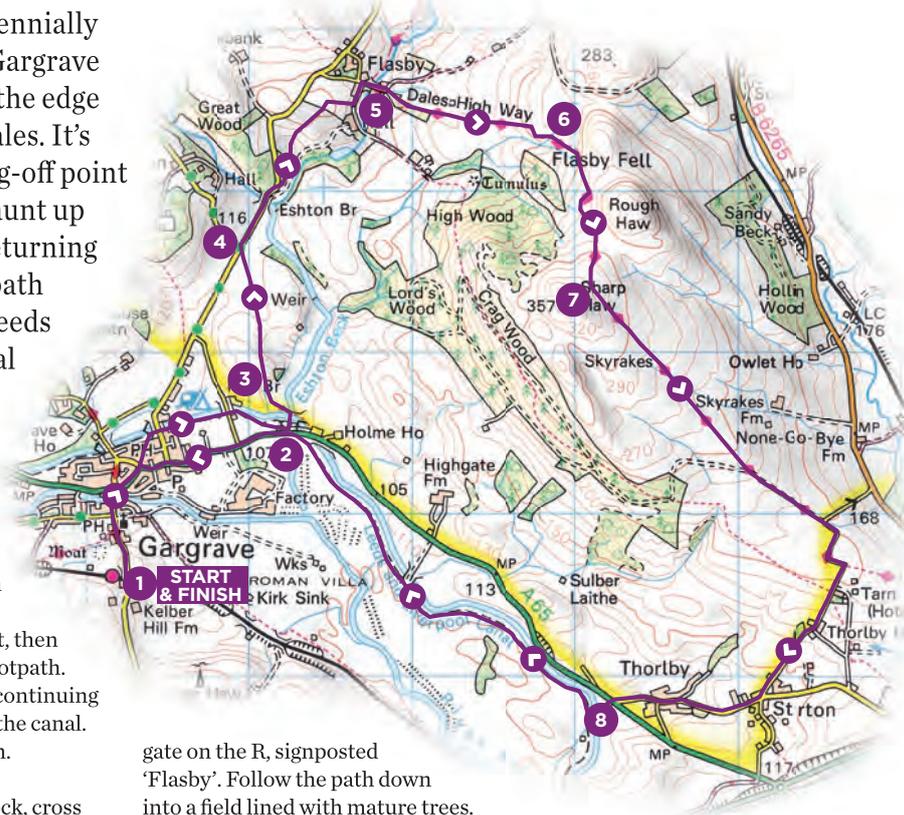
**GUIDEBOOK** *Walking in the Yorkshire Dales: South and West* by Dennis and Jan Kelsall (£12.95, Cicerone, ISBN 978 1852848859).

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP** Craven (01943 876713, [ramblers.org.uk/craven](http://ramblers.org.uk/craven)).

The pretty and perennially popular village of Gargrave is perched right at the edge of the Yorkshire Dales. It's the perfect jumping-off point for a brisk spring jaunt up onto Flasby Fell, returning via a leisurely towpath bumble along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal

ROUTE BY  
**JOLY BRAIME**

- 1** **START** Turn L out of Gargrave station onto Church Street. Cross the river, then turn R. At the Old Swan Inn, turn L down North Street, then immediately R down a footpath. Cross Swire Croft Road, continuing past the tennis courts to the canal. Turn R along the towpath.
- 2** At Holme Bridge Lock, cross the canal and double back along a grassy track. Cross a couple of stiles, then take a small footbridge into the fields. Aim for the L corner of the copse ahead. Cross the stile, then follow the edge of the wood. Cross another stile by a gate.
- 3** Aim diagonally across the field and cross a stile in the opposite corner. Turn L along the fence and follow it along, crossing a stile by a metal gate. Continue along the other side of the fence. Cross the field, aiming for the drive to imposing Eshton Hall. Look out for a stone stile in the wall.
- 4** Turn R along the lane. Cross the bridge, stay on the road past the lodge, then go through a metal



gate on the R, signposted 'Flasby'. Follow the path down into a field lined with mature trees. Stick to the fence on the R and follow it all the way along until you cross a stile. Cross another (rickety) stile on the R by a signpost, then follow the field edge down to the road.

**5** Turn L onto the road, then R at the junction. Cross Flasby Beck, then ignore vehicle tracks to the R and L, heading instead through a wooden gate straight ahead. Pass through two gates along a muddy track. When you hit a wide field at the edge of the fell, make for a metal gate in the wall part way up.

**6** Follow the blue-topped posts over Flasby Fell. As you approach Sharp Haw you can either stick to the bridleway or take a short (signposted) detour to the top.

**7** The path down off the fell is fairly obvious. At a signpost, bend L along a smart vehicle track and continue down to the road. Turn R and follow the road down into Stirton. At the crossroads, turn R and continue along to the A65. Cross over and head down the signposted byway opposite.

**8** Turn R along the towpath. At Holme Bridge Lock, you can pick up the road back into Gargrave.

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## Canaston Bridge, Pembrokeshire

**DISTANCE** 16KM/10 MILES **ASCENT** 366M/1,200FT  
**TIME** 4½ HOURS **TYPE** WOOD AND RIVER

NAVIGATION LEVEL  
**MODERATE**

FITNESS LEVEL  
**MODERATE**

PERFECT FOR VIEWS

NUMBER OF STILES  
**13**

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### Plan your walk

**WHERE** Canaston Bridge, Pembrokeshire.

**START/END** Take the turning off A4075 signed to Blackpool Mill and immediately go R to park.

**TERRAIN** Undulating. The cool, enclosed paths are good for hot summer days but can be muddy in winter. There are gates on the outward journey and stiles on the return.

**MAPS** OS Explorer OL36; Landranger 158.

**GETTING THERE** Buses 381, Tenby to Haverfordwest, and 322, Carmarthen to Haverfordwest (both Mon-Fri). Nearest rail station: Narberth.

**EATING & DRINKING** The Bush Inn, Robeston Wathen (01834 860778, closed Mondays except bank holidays).

**SLEEPING** Canaston Oaks, Canaston Bridge (01437 457992, [canastonoaks.co.uk](http://canastonoaks.co.uk)).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Pembroke Library and Information Centre, Commons Road (01437 541254, [pembrokeshire.gov.uk/visitor](http://pembrokeshire.gov.uk/visitor)).

**GUIDEBOOK** *Walking in Pembrokeshire* (£12.99, Dennis and Jan Kelsall, Cicerone, ISBN 978 1852849153).

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP** Pembrokeshire Ramblers (07787 527222, [ramblers.org.uk/pembrokeshire](http://ramblers.org.uk/pembrokeshire)).

The joys of superb woodland walking, and the intimate riverside experience of the Eastern Cleddau, with its beautiful bridges on the return route, are only outshone by the views. The bonus is the surprise of medieval Llawhaden Castle

#### ROUTE BY LEN BANISTER

**1 START** Go along a narrow lane signed 'Llawhaden', past a house. Go under the A40. Turn L along a road, R at a fingerpost to a bridleway. When confronted by gates, go R along field edges. In a later field, follow the bank that contours the hill, funnelled to a gate above a spring. Continue between farm buildings, go R on track, soon forking L. Go through two gates, eventually on a track alongside the Eastern Cleddau river. You then reach a lane.

**2** Turn L. At sharp L, go R uphill joining a drive. At the junction go R. You will then reach Llawhaden Castle. It was initially an earth and timber castle announcing Norman power in the 12th century; the defences were later refortified in stone by the bishops of St Davids, starting with Bishop Thomas Bek (died 1293), who established the nearby village. Today, the castle is largely ruined, but the gatehouse, which would have intimidated anyone seeking entry, still radiates the prestige of the castle's occupant. Go L of the castle on a moat-side path, ignoring R fork and guided by

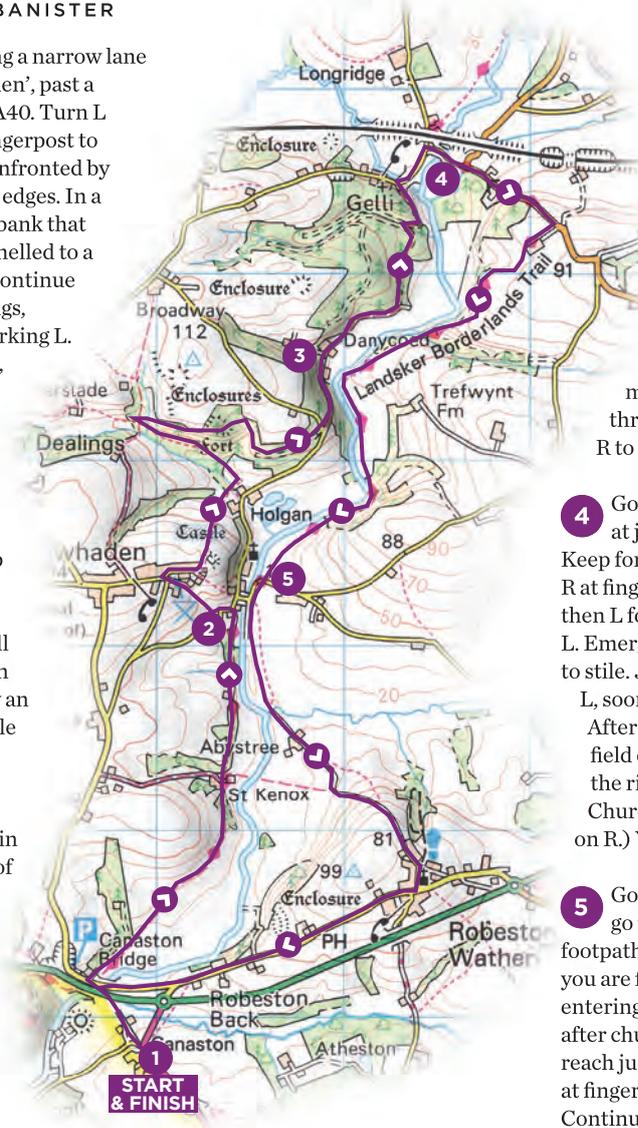
waymarkers. Emerge on a steep field down to another marker and double gate. After two more gates, go R over bridge. Follow boardwalk, then L over

bridge with stream L. Eventually, reach junction. Go R back on yourself on a wide forest track (a short diversion L takes you to Holgan's Iron Age fort). You will then reach a lane.

**3** Cross to drive opposite. Keep forward between houses and farm buildings. At marker, leave main track up L through gate. At T-junction turn R to lane.

**4** Go R over Gelli Bridge. Swing R at junction (before railway). Keep forward uphill; near top go R at fingerpost. Cross stile by barn, then L following curve of hill to stile L. Emerge from wood, along R edge to stile. Join wider track coming from L, soon swinging L over bridge. After metal kissing gate, follow R field edges. The path now mimics the river's course. (See St Aidan's Church, a listed building, over on R.) You then reach a lane.

**5** Go R. Don't cross bridge; go forward, forking L on footpath that rejoins bridleway. Soon, you are following surfaced lane entering Robeston Wathen. Go R after church, pass the Bush Inn, reach junction, and go R. Turn L at fingerpost, then under A40. Continue to start point.



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## Braunston, Northamptonshire

**DISTANCE** 7.5KM/4¾ MILES **ASCENT** 68M/223FT  
**TIME** 3 HOURS **TYPE** CANAL

NAVIGATION LEVEL **NOVICE** | FITNESS LEVEL **EASY** | PERFECT FOR **HERITAGE** | NUMBER OF STILES **1**



### Plan your walk

**WHERE** Circular walk from Braunston, Northamptonshire.

**START/END** Parking on High Street in Braunston (SP539661).

**TERRAIN** Canal towpaths, tracks and quiet lanes.

**MAPS** OS Explorer 222; Landranger 151 and 152.

**GETTING THERE** Nearest rail stations are Long Buckby (30 minutes by taxi) and Rugby (20 minutes by taxi).

**EATING & DRINKING** Three pubs and a community café in Braunston (two pubs directly on the walk); and a café on board a narrowboat (07940 973529) next to the Stop House.

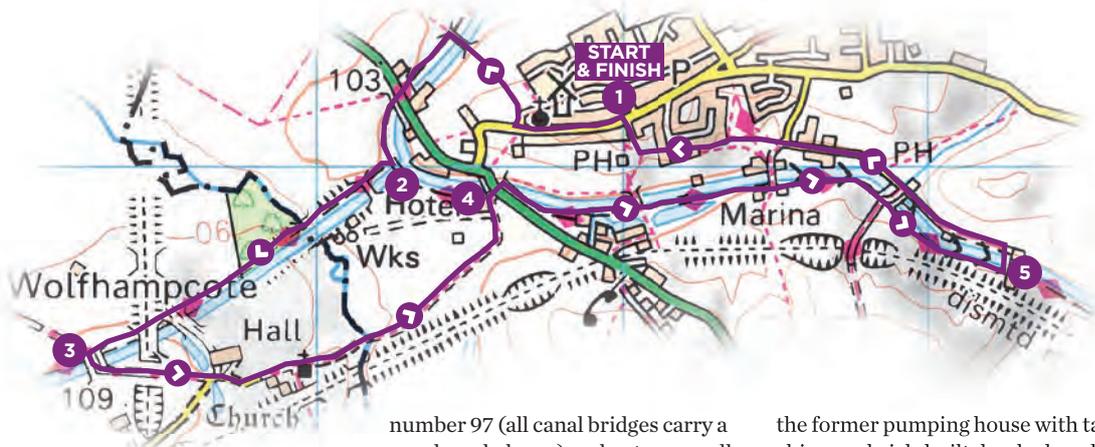
**SLEEPING** Self-catering at Southfield Cottage (07881 504757, [southfieldcottage.co.uk](http://southfieldcottage.co.uk)). A former windmill offers unusual accommodation with a view (01788 220178, [braunstonmill.co.uk](http://braunstonmill.co.uk)). Lodge Farm B&B (01788 522982, [lodgefarmrugby.co.uk](http://lodgefarmrugby.co.uk)).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** [braunston.org.uk](http://braunston.org.uk)

**GUIDEBOOK** *Walking Close to Daventry* by Clive Brown, (£2.50, ISBN 978 1907669545).

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP** [ramblers.org.uk/daventry](http://ramblers.org.uk/daventry)

This walk explores the fascinating heritage of the Oxford and Grand Union Canals, passing cast-iron bridges, a flight of locks and a number of historic buildings. The 'Spaghetti Junction' of our inland waterways, Braunston has plenty of colourful narrowboats as well as a tall church overlooking the marina that's known as 'the cathedral of the canals'



ROUTE BY **ROGER BUTLER**

- 1 START** Walk along High Street towards the church and turn R on Church Lane. Take the footpath gate on L as lane bends R and walk down the field, through another gate, to reach the canal and brick bridge. Take time to view the old ridge and furrow cultivations – you will see that the canal cut right through them 250 years ago. Pass through two gates to cross the bridge, then immediately go L through another gate to meet the towpath. Turn R, walk under the A45 and continue to the fine pair of cast-iron bridges at the canal junction, where fingerposts point the watery routes to London, Coventry, Birmingham and Oxford.
- 2** Cross the bridges and then walk back under the second bridge to join another towpath, with cottage on L. Walk to the next brick bridge, with large ramps once used by canal horses, go across and continue along the broad towpath. Pass under bridge

number 97 (all canal bridges carry a numbered plaque) and enter a small wooded cutting.

- 3** Leave the towpath by the steps next to bridge number 98, cross a stile and go through a gate to walk over the bridge. Go L on a good track, over an old railway cutting and look out for the original line of the Oxford Canal – now a reedy channel – near the farm at Wolfhampcote. Join a tarmac track, pass medieval St Peter's church on R and continue ahead on the rough track with the obvious earthworks of a deserted medieval village on L. Continue through the fields, pass through a gate, cross the A45 and rejoin the towpath.
- 4** Turn R and pass narrowboats and the information centre at the Stop House (usually open Fridays). Walk over another cast-iron bridge, with views to the marina and historic boatyard, and continue to pass under bridge number 1. Cross the timber footbridge (12 steep steps each side) and continue to a cluster of historic buildings, including cottages,

the former pumping house with tall chimney, brick-built dry dock and boat-building wharf. Walk under bridge number 2 to admire the first of six locks, completed in the 1790s. Continue to bridge number 5, next to Top Lock Cottage. (From here, you can continue for another 500m to view the entrance to the 1,865m Braunston canal tunnel.)

- 5** Cross the canal and follow the track through an avenue of plane trees, from where you will now be looking back down onto the locks. Join lane at Admiral Nelson pub and continue ahead until sharp R bend. Take path ahead through small gate, walk over field to next gate and pass through another small gate. Carry on along tarmac path, with houses on R, and go straight over next narrow lane. A tarmac path continues to meet Nibbits Lane – turn R to return to High Street.

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## Stamford, Lincolnshire

**DISTANCE** 10.25KM/6½ MILES **ASCENT** 25M/82FT  
**TIME** 3 HOURS **TYPE** TOWN AND COUNTRY



NAVIGATION  
LEVEL  
**EASY**



FITNESS  
LEVEL  
**LEISURELY**



PERFECT  
FOR  
**HERITAGE**



NUMBER  
OF STILES  
**2**

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### Plan your walk

**WHERE** Circular route in and around the historic town of Stamford.

**START/END** Cattlemarket car park in Stamford (TF028068).

**TERRAIN** Good paths and tracks; roads and lanes.

**MAPS** OS Explorer 234; Landranger 141 and 142.

**GETTING THERE** Good bus connections and Stamford rail station is next to the start of the walk.

**EATING & DRINKING** Plenty of pubs, cafés and tearooms.

**SLEEPING** Gwynne House B&B (07747 615675, [gwynnehouse.co.uk](http://gwynnehouse.co.uk)); the George Hotel (01780 750750, [georgehotelofstamford.com](http://georgehotelofstamford.com)); the Green Man (01780 753598, [grainstorebrewery.com/retail/green-man-stamford](http://grainstorebrewery.com/retail/green-man-stamford)).

**VISITOR INFORMATION**

Stamford Tourist Information Centre, Stamford Arts Centre, 27 St Mary's Street (01780 755611, [stamfordtouristinformation.com](http://stamfordtouristinformation.com)).

**GUIDEBOOK** *Stamford in 50 Buildings: Celebrating 50 Years of a Conservation Town* by Chris Davies (£14.99, Amberley Publishing, ISBN 978 1445672823)

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP**

Stamford (01780 755681, [ramblers.org.uk/stamford](http://ramblers.org.uk/stamford)).



John Betjeman once described Stamford as 'England's most attractive town'. This walk explores the countryside next to the River Welland and the old canal, before the glorious stone architecture of the town centre is discovered. Here, Tudor, Stuart and Georgian buildings cluster around a medieval street pattern

ROUTE BY **ROGER BUTLER**

**1 START** From the car park, walk east along Station Road. Turn L at the junction to admire the views from Town Bridge (pictured above) and then walk back to turn L on Water Street. Walk through the riverside park and continue to the junction with Barnack Road. Turn L on the pavement for almost 1km, with the wall to Burghley Park on R.

**2** Turn L on a good track heading to a railway crossing with gates (take care crossing the line). Immediately turn R on a path signed as the Torpel Way. Follow this, straight ahead, through trees for 2km (several woodland areas on L provide public access to the riverbank – look for signs by the path). The path bends slightly L by a pylon and runs along a grassy embankment, with field on R; after 150m fork R to a kissing gate onto the lane. Turn L and cross the old stone bridge.

**3** Turn immediately L through a small gate and join the line of the former canal towpath. The depression on R marks the old channel – built as early as the 1660s and linking Stamford with Market Deeping, 11km to the east. Continue ahead for 1.8km, with Uffington Park on R, to meet a kissing gate next to a footbridge over the canal bed.

**4** Leave the canal and turn L, with old pasture on R, to a footbridge with stiles. Go straight over the next field towards the river, turn R by the allotments and join a track, with tall new wall on R. Walk onto the footbridge on L for views of the weir and a sculpture of a crocodile. Return to the track, continue past Hudds Mill and bear R up to the road. Turn L for 200m, fork L onto Priory Road at the roundabout and pause to visit the medieval St Leonard's Priory on L.

**5** You are now back in the town – there are many options but the following route takes in many of the important buildings and landmarks. Keep straight on to join St Leonard's Street and at the T-junction turn R along St George's Street. Follow it, then St Paul's Street, round to Star Lane and bend L at the top to Broad Street. After 150m, turn L on a pedestrianised walk, go L at the end; turn R down Maiden Lane and then R again at St Mary's Street. Explore the cobbled passage around St Mary's Church (one of 12 in central Stamford), return to St Mary's Street and turn R up St John's Street to an open square.

**6** Continue round to All Saints' Street and look out for narrow Mallory Lane on L, where there is a display of old photographs. Walk down to Sheep Market and carry on down Castle Dyke, where the last remains of the castle can be seen. Turn R onto Bath Row, take the second footbridge on L and enjoy the views across the Town Meadows. Walk east to view the river then take the footbridge on south back to the car park.



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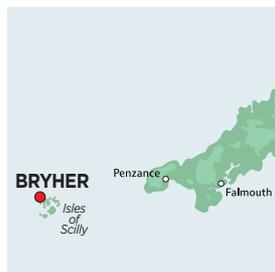


## Bryher, Isles of Scilly

**DISTANCE** 7KM/4½ MILES **ASCENT** 37M/120FT  
**TIME** 2 HOURS **TYPE** COAST

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NAVIGATION LEVEL **EASY** | FITNESS LEVEL **MODERATE** | PERFECT FOR **VIEWS** | NUMBER OF STILES **1**



Although only a mile and a half long by a mile wide, Bryher, the smallest inhabited island of the Isles of Scilly, is surprisingly good for walks thanks to its indented coastline. Visit during certain low tides and you can extend the round-island distance by walking across exposed sandbars to the neighbouring island of Tresco, with its spectacular Abbey Garden

ROUTE BY PAUL MILES

### Plan your walk

**WHERE** A circular walk around virtually car-free Bryher.

**START/END** Fraggles Rock Bar (SV881154).

**TERRAIN** Coastal path, rocky and thorny in places; narrow concrete lanes.

**MAPS** OS Explorer 101; Landranger 203.

**GETTING THERE** There are daily passenger ferries to Bryher from St Mary's and Tresco. Tresco Boats (01720 423373, [tresco.co.uk](http://tresco.co.uk)). Travel to the islands from Penzance/Land's End/Newquay/Exeter by ferry, plane or helicopter (01736 334220, [islesofscilly-travel.co.uk](http://islesofscilly-travel.co.uk)).

**EATING & DRINKING** Hell Bay Hotel (01720 422947, [hellbay.co.uk](http://hellbay.co.uk)).

**SLEEPING** Bryher Campsite ([bryhercampsite.co.uk](http://bryhercampsite.co.uk)).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Isles of Scilly Tourist Information Centre, Porthcressa Bank, St Mary's (01720 620600, [visitislesofscilly.com](http://visitislesofscilly.com)).

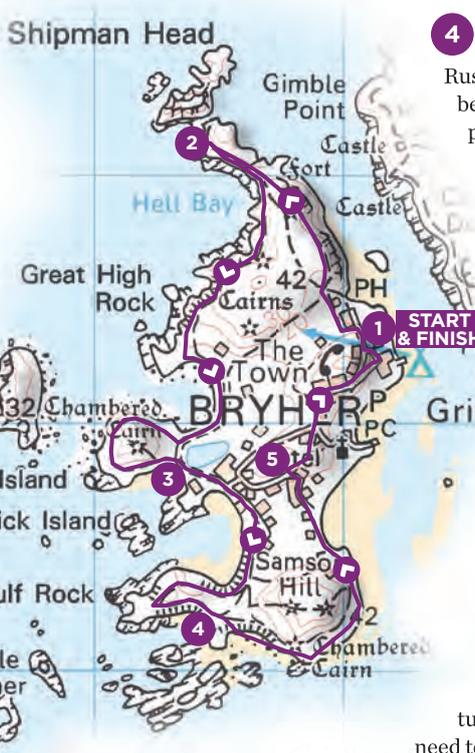
**GUIDEBOOK** *Walking in the Isles of Scilly* by Paddy Dillon (£8.95, Cicerone, ISBN 978 1852848064).

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP** West Cornwall (01736 740542, [ramblers.org.uk/west-cornwall-penwith-kerrier](http://ramblers.org.uk/west-cornwall-penwith-kerrier)).

**1** **START** From Fraggles Rock Bar, head up dirt track, away from beach. After a few metres, turn R following handwritten signpost to Shipman Head. After a step-through stile, continue ahead on grassy path. Walk to the northernmost point (not counting an inadvisable scramble to Shipman Head, a protected bird-nesting area).

**2** Head south past aptly named Hell Bay, bearing the brunt of Atlantic waves. There are 1,000 wrecks around the shores of the Isles of Scilly. Far out to sea on this western side you may see Bishop Rock Lighthouse, the most westerly point of the islands. Continue following coast to Great Popplestones. Join beach for about 15m before joining a sandy track that runs between dunes and Great Pool, the result of islanders' peat-cutting days. Follow a narrow bracken-edged path to the end of the headland of Gweal Hill, from where you may spot seals.

**3** After rounding headland, turn R over a low stone wall to rejoin the sandy track. For a refreshment break, turn L uphill, then L again to reach Hell Bay Hotel. Otherwise, continue following the coast, past an



**4** Keep following coast, heading onto white sand of Rushy Bay, then back onto path, between old stone walls. You pass a boatyard with kayaks for hire and Veronica Farm with an honesty stall of fudge. Keep on the track – now concrete – ignoring the first (dirt) junction.

**5** At a T-junction, turn R. You pass the Community Centre, a handy rainy-day bolthole, with toilets and board games. Continue into 'Town', with art gallery, shop and post office. (The Royal Mail van clocks up just two and a half miles in its daily round.) After shop, turn R at T-junction. If you need to catch a returning ferry from the high tide embarkation point of Church Quay, follow signed footpath to R across field. Otherwise, a crab sandwich may beckon from Island Fish. You are now near Bar Quay, where passenger ferries embark at low tide. Turn L to Fraggles Rock Bar and the campsite.

artist's studio. The building is a converted gig shed, once home to a typical wooden rowing boat – or gig – whose crew would guide ships into harbour. After the studio, continue following the coast path. The headland of Healthy Hill is a real beauty, with lichen-covered, wind-carved rocks – perfect picnic spots. Look out for easy to spot Droopy Nose Point. On the south side of the headland is a play area of flotsam and jetsam.

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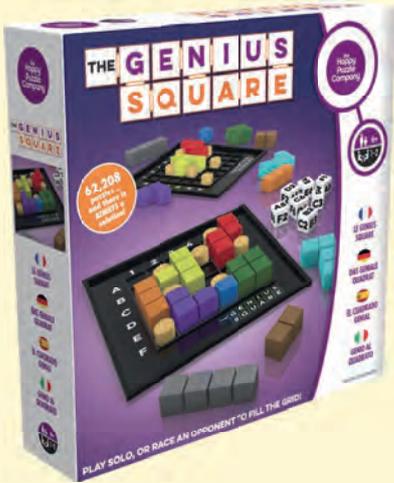
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## Pagham Harbour, West Sussex

**DISTANCE** 9.5KM/6 MILES **ASCENT** 5M/15FT  
**TIME** 3 HOURS **TYPE** COAST

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NAVIGATION LEVEL **EASY**

FITNESS LEVEL **LEISURELY**

PERFECT FOR **WILDLIFE**

NUMBER OF STILES **NONE**



### Plan your walk

**WHERE** A circular walk on the eastern edge of Pagham Harbour.

**START/END** St Thomas à Becket Church at Pagham (SZ883975).

**TERRAIN** Beach and harbour, lanes and farmland. Walk needs to be completed on a falling tide. Check tides: [metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/tide-times](http://metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/tide-times).

**MAPS** OS Explorer OL8; Landranger 197.

**GETTING THERE** Rail stations at nearby Bognor Regis and Chichester, with Stagecoach bus 600 running between Bognor Regis and Chichester via Pagham. By car: from the A27 at Chichester, follow the signs to Pagham.

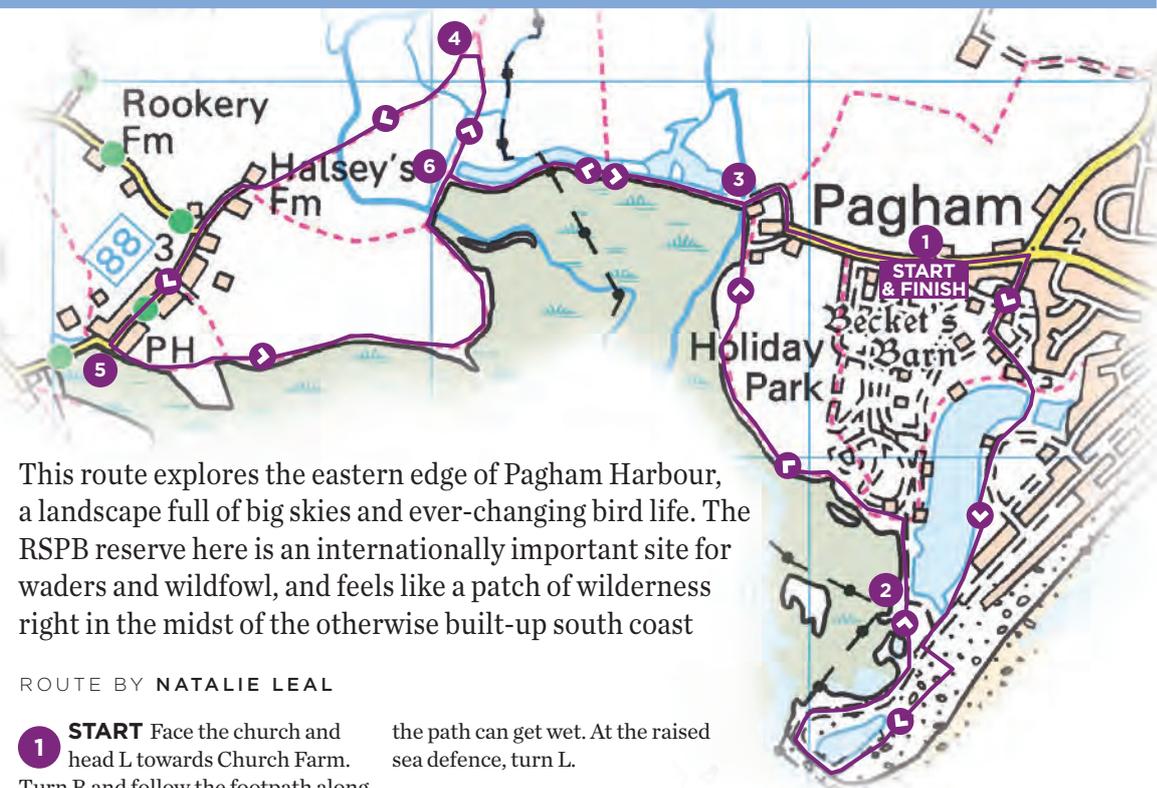
**EATING & DRINKING** Crab & Lobster, Sidlesham (01243 641233, [crab-lobster.co.uk](http://crab-lobster.co.uk)).

**SLEEPING** Crab & Lobster (as above). Offers B&B rooms and self-contained cottage.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** RSPB Visitor Centre, Selsey Road, Sidlesham.

**GUIDEBOOK** *Pathfinder Guides: West Sussex and the South Downs - Outstanding Circular Walks* (£12.99, Crimson, ISBN 978 0319090787).

**LOCAL RAMBLERS GROUP** South West Sussex (02392 788664, [ramblers.org.uk/south-west-sussex](http://ramblers.org.uk/south-west-sussex)).



This route explores the eastern edge of Pagham Harbour, a landscape full of big skies and ever-changing bird life. The RSPB reserve here is an internationally important site for waders and wildfowl, and feels like a patch of wilderness right in the midst of the otherwise built-up south coast

#### ROUTE BY NATALIE LEAL

**1 START** Face the church and head L towards Church Farm. Turn R and follow the footpath along the road through the caravan park. At the roundabout, take the road signposted 'Lagoon Field', then follow a spur between two caravans and turn L onto the public footpath. Just before a brick wall, go R down to a wooden footbridge crossing a lagoon. Continue across the shingle, keeping the lagoon to your R and the beach ahead. Turn L onto the boardwalk, then R following the banked path around the spit.

**2** Once around the spit, take the left-hand footpath between the lagoon and the harbour. Continue L at the T-junction, keeping the caravans to your R, then at a fork go L along the lower edge of the harbour. Follow this for approximately ¾ mile with the hedgerow to your R. This section is best done on a falling tide as

the path can get wet. At the raised sea defence, turn L.

**3** Walk past the old Salthouse and continue over a sluice, then straight ahead along the North Wall. This gives fine views across the whole harbour. After approximately 400 yards, a path forks to the R. Ignore this and continue straight ahead winding around the harbour edge. The path soon narrows and comes to a T junction – turn R. Follow the path through the bushes, then through a metal gate into a field. The footpath continues away from the harbour, but it's best to go straight ahead here, following the hedge on your L, then through the gate.

**4** Continue along the grassy path, keeping the hedge on your R, then through the next kissing gate and over a ditch. Walk straight ahead towards a small wooden gate. Go past the houses onto a driveway, then

through another gate. At the lane, turn L and walk down to Sidlesham Quay.

**5** Here, turn L, walking along the edge of the salt marsh for around ¾ mile. Continue along the raised path as it loops round, with the open harbour to your R. At the T-junction by the bushes, go R.

**6** Walk back along the North Wall until you return to the Salthouse. Continue past a farm paddock and houses, following the path as it bends to the R. This track soon joins a lane, which can be followed back up to the church.

**Report a path problem**  
Via the Pathwatch app or at [ramblers.org.uk/pathwatch](http://ramblers.org.uk/pathwatch)

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**THE BIG WALK**

# *Northern Lights*

Trace the North East's industrial past along the Tyne and Wear Heritage Way, a long-distance loop that takes in a wealth of engineering marvels, from lighthouses and bridges to historic waggonways

WORDS MATTHEW JONES  
PHOTOGRAPHY ELLIE CLEWLOW



📍 The imposing St Mary's Lighthouse, Whitley Bay



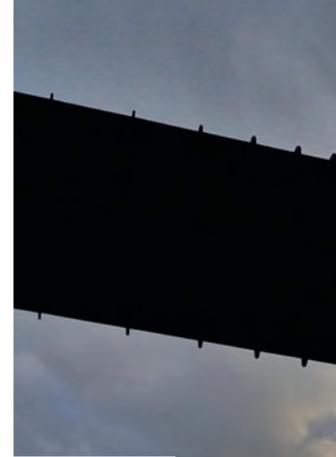
Something smells fishy as I step out along the waterfront in North Shields. It is a chilly morning and the dim light of dawn lends the sky a soft blue pallor. But nothing sinister is afoot – the whiff in the air is simply the characteristic odour of Fish Quay, home port of the Tynemouth fishing fleet. I pass a tangle of ropes, nets and buoys as trawlers bob at their hawsers along the quay. An oily black cormorant and a large gull watch my progress with an air of lofty detachment, perched silently on a warehouse roof. Even at this early hour, the first customers of the day are busy scanning the fishmongers' stalls, stocked with catch that comes 'fresh off the boats in under 10 minutes', as one chalked sign proudly reads.

This area marks the start of the first stretch of the Tyne and Wear Heritage Way, an 80-mile loop split into nine sections. It begins at the mouth of the Tyne and heads northwards along the coast, before leading inland to encircle a swathe of the North East. The return follows the River Wear to Sunderland, revisiting the coast at Roker Pier before tracking north once again to finish at South Shields. Along the way, it traces the rich historic and industrial heritage of the area, often following the old waggonways that were once used to carry coal to the river, where it was ferried in keelboats to Newcastle for onward transit. The route also takes in a series of engineering marvels, from lighthouses and bridges to a unique heritage railway. These sites are interspersed with sprawling country estates, wooded valleys and long, sandy beaches.

## Industrial past

It seems appropriate that the trail both begins and ends at the sea, given the area's historical association with shipbuilding. It is also apt that the route includes stretches of both the Tyne and the Wear, two great rivers that were conduits for commerce and industry. Indeed, the North East played a defining role in Britain's industrial past. At various periods in history, it has produced salt, glass, bleaches and dyes, wooden and iron ships and, of course, coal. The growth of such commercial activity proved to be catalysts for change – bringing prosperity to the area and driving innovation in science, engineering and technology.

Yet the decline of many of these industries is also a well-known part of the story of the North East. As they dwindled, the region suffered – causing economic slumps, mass unemployment and resulting deprivation. Shipyard losses in the early and mid-20th century caused huge upheaval, while the residual impacts of the pit closures of the 1960s, 70s >



and 80s are arguably still being felt today. Fortunately, recent investment and regeneration of key areas have brought new vitality to parts of the North East, driven by the resilience and resourcefulness of local communities.

In many ways, the story of the region is mirrored in the history of the path itself. The original concept for a long-distance heritage trail was the brainchild of the former Tyne and Wear County Council. It proved a useful addition to the path network. However, when the council was abolished in 1986 and replaced by five metropolitan boroughs, the route gradually fell into disrepair.

'It was basically forgotten – it just disappeared,' explains Mike Webber, chair of Northumbria Ramblers. 'Then, almost three years ago, some of our volunteers were discussing local heritage and someone mentioned the sad state of the way. So we decided to look at it, and the project grew from there.'

## Testing times and new life

The route's transformation, culminating in an official relaunch last year, has been the result of a lot of hard work allied with effective collaboration between Ramblers volunteers, local authorities and landowners. There were, of course, some testing times. 'Our first challenge was getting the different rights of way officers on side,' says Mike. This involved liaising with highway authorities from five different boroughs, as well as the county councils of Northumberland and Durham. 'Fortunately, thanks to our volunteers, Northumbria Ramblers had pretty good relationships with them already, so it was a case of building on those existing relations in order to grow support for re-establishing the route.'

The entire trail was surveyed in order to assess its condition and path maintenance was undertaken to ensure it was walkable again. This included cutting back vegetation and installing new marker posts, coordinating all the work with landowners. New Heritage Way roundels were designed, produced and placed along the trail. 'The aim was to try to ensure that every section of the route could

📍 Clockwise from left: A sea stack at Marsden Beach; Hagg Bank Bridge's latticework; a detour to the Angel of the North; a shipbuilding mural; the Instagram-worthy Herd Groyne Lighthouse; a wooden coal waggon at Causey Arch; Bede Memorial Cross detail; George Stephenson's birthplace

be walked easily in either direction, with public transport links at each end,' says Mike. To promote the route, a dedicated website was built, which includes free downloadable route guides to each of the nine sections.

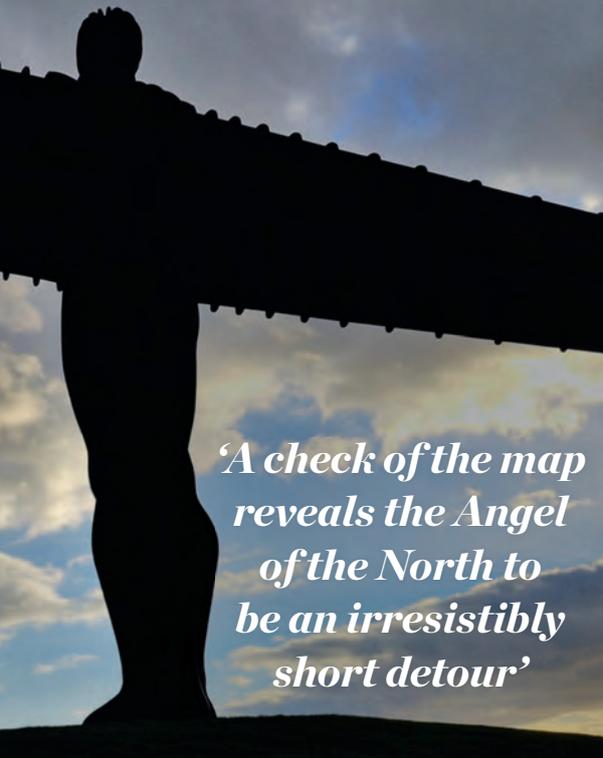
On this new trail, high above Tynemouth, stand two conspicuous landmarks, clearly visible almost from the start of the route. The first is a monument to a British naval hero who is one of Newcastle's most famous sons – Admiral Lord Collingwood, Nelson's second in command at the Battle of Trafalgar. I walk up its stone steps flanked by four cannons from Collingwood's flagship, *HMS Royal Sovereign*, and gaze up at the imposing statue of Collingwood, noting his rather haughty expression.

Indeed, famous sons are a recurring theme of the walk. A later section visits the humble cottage where railway pioneer George Stephenson was born and lived as a young boy. The path here follows the route of the Wylam Waggonway, which passes directly in front of the cottage. As I gaze into the lower floor window, where the Stephenson family lived – all sharing a single room and even just one bed – I wonder whether the young

George's spirit of invention was perhaps inspired by the sight of men and horses hauling coal waggons along its rails. Further on, the walk visits Washington Old Hall, a picturesque manor house set in beautiful gardens that was the family seat of the ancestors of George Washington, first president of the United States of America.

Just north of Whitley Bay, I visit St Mary's Lighthouse, situated on a rocky island that is linked to the mainland by a short concrete causeway, which is submerged at high tide. This is the first of several Instagram-worthy lighthouses along the coastal sections of the route, at Roker Pier, the re-erected lighthouse in Roker Cliff Park and Herd Groyne – as well as the famous Souter Lighthouse,





*‘A check of the map reveals the Angel of the North to be an irresistibly short detour’*



the world’s first purpose-built electric lighthouse. They are testament not just to the importance of shipping in the North East, but also to the treachery of this coastline.

The route is punctuated at regular intervals with other extraordinary feats of engineering, from monuments to bridges. They include impressive Causey Arch, the oldest surviving single-arch railway bridge in the world, which was completed in 1726 to carry horse-drawn coal waggons to the River Tyne. The trail also visits Hagg Bank Bridge, a Victorian ironwork railway bridge that employed what was, for its time, a cutting-edge design consisting of three curved metal spans and a latticework of rods and girders.

Midway along the trail, a few miles south of Gateshead, I spot a true icon of the North East on the horizon. It’s the unmistakable silhouette of the Angel of the North, Antony Gormley’s 20-metre steel sculpture that stands sentinel over the surrounding landscape. Though the Heritage Way doesn’t actually visit the Angel, a quick check of the map reveals it to be an irresistibly short detour. Some half an hour later, I am standing beneath its outstretched wings. It’s even more impressive up close. What does it stand for? I wonder. Gormley has said that its meanings are multiple, but that it is partly a focus for hope. In this way, it stands proudly as an emblem of the post-industrial resurrection of the North East.

There are plenty of pockets of nature to enjoy on the Heritage Way, too, even close to major urban populations. As I work my way up the coast, walking along the busy promenade, I spot oystercatchers wading in rockpools, as well as lapwings, redshanks and sandpipers. Heading inland through the steep-sided

woodland valley of Holywell Dene, I see a graceful egret and a grey heron stalking the banks of the burn, while stands of hazel, birch and beech are home to a profusion of smaller birds.

This section is one of Mike Webber’s favourites. ‘There’s a community organisation called Friends of Holywell Dene, who do a great job of looking after that area through conservation projects. It makes lovely walking in spring and summer.’ For Mike, it also sums up the appeal of the trail as a whole. ‘It links a lot of the heritage and countryside in this area together, which is ultimately why the route evolved in the first place. But it’s also simple, straightforward, mostly flat walking, which is accessible via public transport. So it’s an easy way for local people to get more active, but also has lots to offer for visitors to the North East.’



### Walk it!

**TIME/DISTANCE** North Shields to South Shields via Seaton Sluice, Burradon, Ponteland, Wylam, Thornley Wood, Beamish, Washington village and Roker Pier; 129km/80 miles; up to nine days.

**MAPS** OS Explorer 316 and 308; Landranger 88.

**ACCOMMODATION** Newcastle upon Tyne is the best base for walking the trail. Choose from budget B&Bs to luxury hotels. [newcastlegateshead.com/accommodation](http://newcastlegateshead.com/accommodation)

**FURTHER INFO** [tynewearheritageway.org.uk](http://tynewearheritageway.org.uk)

### Looking to the future

With the first anniversary of the Heritage Way’s reopening on 31 May, Northumbria Ramblers are keen to emphasise their commitment to the future of the route. They continue to monitor the state of the trail, informed by walkers. ‘We’ve had plenty of feedback,’ says Mike. ‘And even the grumpy comments are helpful, as it means we can look at specific sections really critically, with a view to making continual improvements to waymarking and so on.’ They are also working with local interest groups and community volunteer organisations such as the Friends of Holywell Dene as part of a stewardship scheme. ‘We really want to safeguard the trail’s future,’ says Mike. ‘So the intention is to work with local groups and walk each section twice a year to look out for any path problems or other issues.’ ■



DESTINATION

# Andorra

The remote trails of the Andorran Pyrenees have seen refugees, smugglers and spies pass through the mountains. Today, the challenging Crown of Lakes circuit is opening up the area to hardy hill walkers

WORDS JOLY BRAIME

📍 Strenuous walking in Andorra's high country is rewarded with powerful landscapes

**T**he joke goes that Andorra is one part Shangri-La, one part Heathrow Airport. Set in the Pyrenees between Spain and France, this pocket-sized

principality has two contrasting personalities.

The first is that of an unashamedly brash tax haven and duty-free shopping mecca. Motoring across the border from Spain, you leave the EU customs zone and are immediately greeted by a spooling chain of vast roadside superstores flogging cut-price cigs and booze. Tobacco fields line the humid valley sides, and towns like Encamp and Escaldes-Engordany are an unsightly tangle of high-rise ski hotels and luxury apartments that by rights ought to have seen the town planners shot at dawn. But then you start to walk uphill and Andorra becomes something very special indeed. As one member of our group put it, 'There's just nowhere like it in the Pyrenees.'

### The Coronallacs

My own introduction to Andorra's high country came courtesy of five strenuous days tramping the Coronallacs circuit – a relatively new route that takes in some of the country's most powerful mountain landscapes. Literally translated as Crown of Lakes, it's essentially a circumnavigation of this microstate, avoiding the more populous valleys and making tactical use of the charismatic mountain huts that dot the area. Mine was a small-group trip organised by Ramblers Walking Holidays, but you could also tackle the route independently if you've got decent Spanish and plenty of hillwalking experience.

These mountains are high, handsome and remarkably empty of people. The slack lift cables, scarred slopes and shuttered kiosks of the ski resorts are confined to relatively small areas, and for the most part there's not another soul in sight – save the occasional marmot bolting for cover. We swam in cool mountain lakes, ate our lunch in wildflower meadows and dangled our sore feet in icy streams.

'You see why I keep coming back,' smiled Helen, one of our two guides, who's been leading trips in Andorra for years.

### The land of in-between

Andorra is well known for its skiing, but as a destination for summer walking holidays, this majestic area of the Pyrenees still flies largely below the radar.

Wedged between Spain and France, Andorra's status as a border region has been central to its history. In the mid-20th century, waves of refugees crossed in both directions – first Spaniards fleeing the Spanish Civil War, then >



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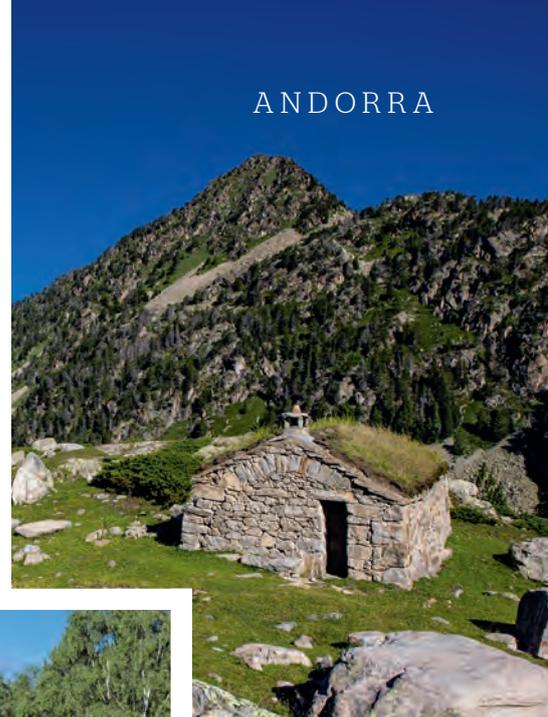


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📍 Clockwise from top left: absorbed in the mountain views; Cabana de Setut near the start of the route; a stream crossing makes a welcome contrast to uphill trekking; Refugi de Juclà, one of four shelters. Below: cool mountain lakes are perfect for a swim

people seeking sanctuary in neutral Spain after the Germans invaded France. It was also used by various Second World War resistance networks, and there are plenty of stories of brave-hearted Andorrans guiding vulnerable travellers to safety. Uncomfortably, there are also whispered tales of refugees who picked less scrupulous escorts, and of unmarked graves in the mountains.

As you thread your way along the rugged, sometimes half-invisible trails – trying not to think too much about the vultures wheeling overhead – there’s a haunting feeling that you’re kicking at the boot heels of all those who have travelled these same paths in search of sanctuary. Though, as it happens, not all of them have sought safety – some have just been after a quick buck.

Andorran taxes on naughty things are famously low, and with cigarettes less than half the price of those in Spain or France, there’s good money to be made shifting cartons across the line on the sly.

Interestingly enough, while this cut-price vice is undoubtedly fattening Andorran wallets (both legally and otherwise), it doesn’t seem to be having a corresponding effect on the nation’s arteries. In fact, Andorra has one of the highest life expectancies in the world,

and the only way I can explain this is that the relentlessly hilly terrain must keep everyone fighting fit.

### The only way is up

Andorra has walking routes to suit a range of fitness levels, but it’s worth being clear that the Coronallacs circuit is a challenging jaunt. In five days, we clocked up 92km (57 miles) and a fearsome 6,500m (21,325ft) of ascent. Most days featured a good 10 hours of walking, and some in the group reckoned it was at least as demanding as the Haute Route or the Tour du Mont Blanc.

In a world of plush hotels and baggage transfer vans, walking holidays can be as gentle as you like, and of course that can



only be a good thing. All the same, there’s something to be said for genuinely hard tours, and it’s grand to see companies offering these kinds of trips – particularly when they’re branching out into lesser-known areas.

It’s a curious facet of tougher walks that when your lungs and legs are working hard, the everyday concerns that clutter your mind recede a little and your immediate surroundings come into pin-sharp focus. In the case of the Andorran Pyrenees, that might be the smell of wild thyme crushed under your boot heel, the delicate purple tracery of the marsh orchids by the path, or the calls of the alpine choughs overhead (which I always think sound a bit like the ray guns from *Flash Gordon*). Even the simplest stew tastes delectable after a long day of taxing ascent, and when you lay your head down on your bunk in the communal dorms, the dreams come easily. Until the snoring starts, that is.

### The joys of hutting

‘I didn’t sleep much last night,’ said one group member drowsily, reaching for a breakfast roll at the Comapedrosa hut.

‘Oh, yes, you did,’ observed another, breaking into a grin as the snorer put two and two together and clapped their hand over their eyes in embarrassment. >



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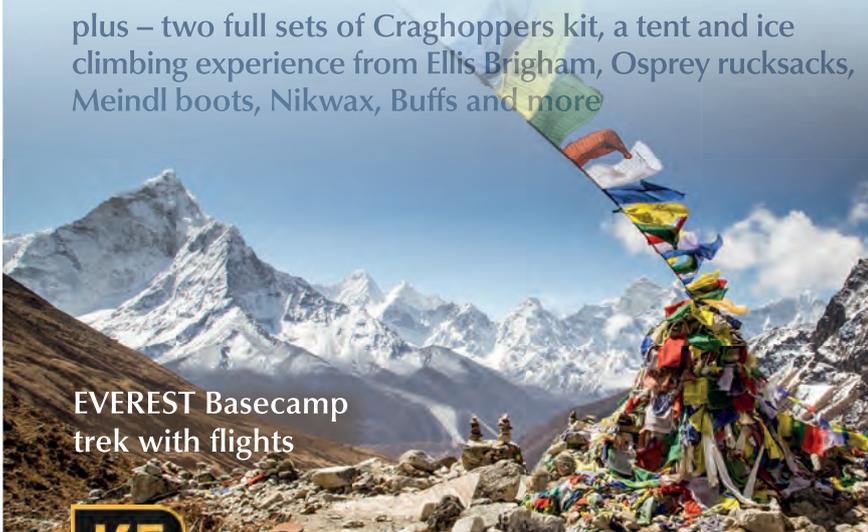


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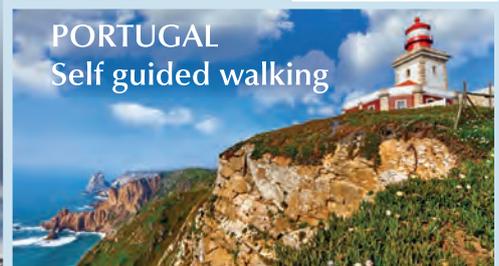
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📍 Clockwise from top left: the circuit is a botanist's delight; Refugi del Comapedrosa; the turban-like flowers of the exotic Pyrenean lilies; horses grazing in the tranquillity of the foothills

I hadn't been hutting in years, and I'd forgotten how easily people rub along when they need to. The asceticism of huts feels somehow appropriate in these high, remote places, and you have to make friends fast when you're packed in eight to a dorm. Each 'refugi' on the Coronallacs was different, from the smart, Scandi-style new-build of the Refugi de l'Illa to the isolated Juclà shelter, where a handwritten sign in the dimly lit dining room proclaimed in Spanish, 'There's no Wi-Fi. Talk to each other instead.'

As we arrived at the huts at the end of each day's walking, we'd generally start by stretching out in the open air with

boots off and cold beers in hand. Dinners were served at long wooden tables and usually consisted of thick vegetable soups, followed by rich, oily meat stews and carafes of rough red wine.

One of the great pleasures of a group walk is that you get to share stories of everyone's adventures, and you discover that the people sitting around you have all kinds of useful expertise in subjects like history, botany and geology.

Even if you don't know anything at all about rocks (I don't, as it happens), you can't help noticing the frequent changes going on under your feet as you walk the

Coronallacs trail. The look and feel of the terrain is forever shifting, and an obliging geologist in the group explained that this is because Andorra is in the Axial Zone of the Pyrenees, meaning that it displays folded geology.

## Magical moments

The jumble of different rock types, coupled with the constant seesaw of the elevation profile, means the trail is a delight for botanists, too. My favourites were the tall yellow gentians, the dainty purple snowbells peeking from the brown grass at the melt line, and the turban-like yellow flowers of the flamboyant Pyrenean lilies.

One afternoon, as we lolled on the grass after yet another steep climb, our local guide, Spaska, prodded at an alpine pasque flower, its once-delicate white petals now warped into a dry, spiky seedhead. 'I find this flower is like life itself,' she said, wistfully. 'When you are young, you are beautiful, and then one day you are like this.'

A challenging walk in the Pyrenees is full of these profound little moments, and the Coronallacs circuit is one of the best trips I've done in ages. The long days and fierce elevation profile mean it's not for everyone, but if you're hill-fit and up for an adventure, then this extraordinary route might be just what you're looking for. ■



## Walk it!

**TIME/DISTANCE** The Coronallacs trail is a five-day route, covering 92km (57 miles) in the Andorran mountains. Four nights end at staffed huts. Independent travellers need to book huts and meals in advance. You can fly into Barcelona or Toulouse.

**TRAVEL** Ramblers Walking Holidays (01707 331133, [ramblersholidays.co.uk](http://ramblersholidays.co.uk)) offers the Andorra Mountain Trek package from £1,360 per person (next tour leaves 24 July), including return flights to Barcelona, minibus transfers and six nights' full-board in hotels/mountain huts.

**FURTHER INFO** [visitandorra.com/en](http://visitandorra.com/en)

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MICHI BÜCKERS WITH THE NEW TRAIL 30. Michi is a certified mountain and skiing guide and Deuter brand ambassador. He started his career as a road bike racer. Today his list of outdoor sports is long and he loves to combine all of them.



**H**ow do you know when a walk has been the walk of your life? For many, it has been from the day the walk starts, at the beginning of a long-anticipated and prepared-for journey. But my walk was neither anticipated nor prepared for.

I was hiding under the stairs when I decided to walk. I hadn't carefully considered walking 630 miles with a rucksack on my back. I hadn't thought about how I could afford to do it, or that I'd be wild camping for nearly 100 nights, or what I'd do afterwards. It just seemed like the best response to the hammering of the bailiffs at the front door.

It was the end of one of those weeks that happen to someone else. A financial dispute with a lifetime friend had led to a court case that lasted for three years, culminating in my husband, Moth, and me being served with an eviction notice from our home of 20 years. Two days later, a doctor sat on the edge of his desk and told Moth that he had a rare neurodegenerative disease, for which there was no cure and no treatment. He was going to die. My world and all that kept me stable slipped from beneath my feet. But as the bailiffs waited to change the locks, to shut us out of our old lives, I spotted a book in a packing case that I had read decades before, about a man who walked the South West Coast Path with his dog [*500 Mile Walkies* by Mark Wallington]. In that moment, I saw the chance to follow a line on a map, and we desperately needed a map, something to show us the way.

Within weeks of losing our home, we got off the bus in Minehead, Somerset, and very quickly found that backpacking when you're 50 isn't the same as



## MY WALK OF LIFE

# RAYNOR WINN

**After losing everything and receiving a devastating diagnosis, my husband Moth and I sought solace in a 630-mile walk**



📍 Clockwise from top left: Raynor with her husband, Moth; all their belongings packed into two rucksacks; the wilderness became their home

when you're 20. The first days took their toll on muscles and joints, but we had a greater problem than a few aches and pains. The small amount of money we had to live on each week rarely bought enough food, and very quickly hunger came to overshadow any other physical problem. Despite that,

every day we packed the tent and walked on, homeless, ill and hungry, and slowly the calmness of the open horizon began to seep in.

Wild camping allowed us to live as one with the incredible natural environment we walked through. We were drawn on, across rain-soaked headlands,

sun-beaten beaches, deep wooded valleys and sheer exposed cliffs, trapped between the domestic world on one side and the endless movement of the sea on the other, in a strip of wilderness that became our home. The path follows an ancient weathered landscape rich in wildlife that, like us, was driven to live at the edge of the land. Opening our tent flaps each morning, we never knew what we would see outside: deer sleeping by the tent, thousands of ladybirds hatching into their first flight, or headlands appearing one by one as the sun rose through a foggy morning.

We began the walk in a state of anxiety and despair, fearing what the future might hold. But as we walked, we realised those thoughts were slipping away, and each step became the reason to take the next and the next. We reached Land's End in a howling gale of horizontal rain and driving sand. Every other walker had abandoned the cliffs and found safety, leaving us alone at the edge of the Atlantic. We had only a Mars bar and a few £1 coins left to sustain us, yet as we sat in our tent with just two sheets of wet nylon between us and Canada, we knew what our walk was giving us. A life when we thought ours was over and the strength to look to the horizon with hope.

That was five years ago. We now live in Cornwall, where the coast path passes the front gate. Moth and I still walk on the cliffs every day, and although his health isn't as good as it was, he has finished a degree and has just graduated in his cap and gown.

*Raynor Winn is a long-distance walker and writer. Her book about the 630-mile journey, *The Salt Path* (£9.99, Penguin), was shortlisted for the 2018 Costa Biography Award.*

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Our experts Oli Reed and Minnie Burlton pull the latest lightweight, packable waterproofs out of their daypacks and put them to the test

## Men's picks

### Haglöfs LIM Proof Multi Jacket

£160 [haglofs.com](http://haglofs.com)

+ Stylish, waterproof and weighing less than 240g, this summer shell ticks all the boxes. It's roomy enough for a base layer and mid-layer combo underneath, and has nice features such as well-placed zipped hand pockets.

- Hood, cuffs and waist are elasticated but not adjustable.

**VERDICT** An excellent summer shell at a decent price but the weight savings come with a slight loss of functionality and there's no adjustment in key areas.



4/5

### Salewa Puez Aqua 3 Powertex

£90 [salewa.com](http://salewa.com)

+ A great-looking jacket made from a 2.5-layer Powertex waterproof fabric that can handle everything from showers and wind to torrential downpours.

Nice streamlined design with a well-fitting elasticated hood, plus adjustable cuffs and waist. It packs down easily inside its own hood.

- The hood can't be fully adjusted.

**VERDICT** Like most Salewa gear, the look and feel is great, with a nice body-hugging fit. For the price, you're getting an exceptionally high-performing and well-featured jacket.



4.5/5



### Mammut Meron Light

£329 [mammut.com](http://mammut.com)

+ Built for the mountains, the Meron Light is a durable three-layer waterproof jacket with a Gore-Tex Active lining. It has a nice athletic fit; a

tough, fully adjustable and protective hood; adjustable wrist cuffs and two large external zipped pockets compatible with rucksack waistbands and climbing harnesses.

- There's no adjustment on the waist, the price is high and there's a jump in weight at 357g.

**VERDICT** Ideal if you want a summer waterproof that can handle all terrain and all weather, but you pay for it with a huge hike in price compared to others on test.



4.5/5

### Outdoor Research Helium II

£155 [outdoorresearch.com](http://outdoorresearch.com)

+ Super-lightweight at 180g, it scrunches down small into its own internal pocket. It's 100% waterproof, with fully taped seams, an adjustable hood and waist, zipped chest pocket and reflective logos.

- Non-adjustable wrist cuffs, the material rustles and it has a fiddly main zip.

**VERDICT** Designed to be stashed in your pack and pulled out in a downpour, it works best as an emergency layer rather than something you'd wear for a day of brutal weather.



3.5/5



## PACKABLE OVERTROUSERS



### Berghaus Paclite overtrousers

£110 (Men's)

They weigh less than 230g, have a waterproof Gore-Tex lining and are perfect in heavy rain. The trousers have venting zips, but not much ankle or waist adjustment.



### Sprayway Hydrolite Rainpant

£90 (Men's)

Weighing 335g, these trousers have a roomy fit and a thick 2.5-layer fabric that can withstand heavy downpours. Easily adjustable.



### Vaude Yaras Rain Zip Pants II

£130 (Men's)

These are heavy at 370g but have a 2.5-layer waterproof fabric that can handle the elements. They have full-length side openings, adjustable ankle cuffs, and reflective details.



### Sprayway Berbak Rainpant

£110 (Women's)

These versatile rain pants have Velcro cuffs at the hem, and knee-to-hem zips. The inside waist belt is made of soft microfleece. Simple and functional, but with no inner pockets.



### Berghaus Paclite overtrousers

£110 (Women's)

These are lightweight and comfortable, and have excellent breathability. The two-way side zips give further ventilation, and the trousers come in short and regular lengths.



### Rohan Vapour Trail overtrousers

£95 (Women's)

Lightweight, compact and easy to pull on, these trousers performed well in soggy conditions. They have an adjustable elasticated waist, an inner pocket and Velcro cuffs.

### Vaude Simony 2.5L II

£195 [vaude.com](http://vaude.com)

+ Fully waterproof and windproof, with a great set of features. You get two external pockets and one internal pocket, zipped underarm ventilation for hot days, a well-fitting and adjustable hood, plus fully adjustable cuffs and waist. It's also comfortable and looks great.

- Negatives are hard to find, but a supplied stuff sack would be a nice addition.

**VERDICT** The clear winner. Not just because it's a great summer waterproof with every feature you'd need, but also thanks to its eco-friendly footprint and sustainable fabrics.



5/5

### Berghaus Hyper 140

£180 [berghaus.com](http://berghaus.com)

+ Brand new for spring, this is by far the lightest jacket on test and perfect for walking, running and cycling in summer. The weight of 138g is incredible for a 2.5-layer waterproof. It has two external zipped pockets and a supplied stuff sack that lets you pack it down to the size of an apple.

- Thin material with very little insulation, plus no adjustment on hood, cuffs and waist.

**VERDICT** So small it could fit in your pocket, so perfect for days with just a risk of rain, but quite a lot to spend on a back-up emergency layer.

3.5/5



Get more online...

Read full reviews of all these jackets at [ramblers.org.uk/gear](http://ramblers.org.uk/gear)

## Women's picks

### Sprayway Kelo

£150 [sprayway.com](http://sprayway.com)

+ A generous hood with a wired peak and adjustable volume and sizing that allows good visibility. There are two zipped hand pockets and adjustable cuffs and hem. It's a simple, minimalist jacket without any weighty or unwanted features. All seams have been carefully sealed and the waterproofing has been faultless so far.

- I found the arms a tad on the short side when stretching forward.

**VERDICT** The Kelo offers a good balance of lightweight versus robust protection.



4.5/5

### READER PANEL



'It would be rare to go out without waterproofs in my pack. In terms of a jacket this varies according to the season, but I'm delighted to have found a pair of short-length Berghaus waterproof overtrousers which I use all year round. Many waterproof trousers can't be shortened and are not easy to find locally and I make a point of shopping locally whenever I can.'

**Maud Jones,**  
Carmarthen & District Ramblers



4.5/5

### Helly Hansen W Verglas 3L Shell

£260 [hellyhansen.com](http://hellyhansen.com)

+ This is an all-round jacket with a high level of protection. Unlike many lightweight jackets, it has pit zips to increase its ventilation. A good length and a generous helmet-compatible hood. It also has adjustable cuffs, drawcord hem and volume and sizing adjustment on the hood. Two well-positioned pockets.

- This is the most expensive in the women's review, but it is a more substantial product than a simple lightweight jacket.

**VERDICT** It's pared down with no unnecessary features, but it is a robust and durable three-layer jacket.



4.5/5



### Berghaus Women's Paclite 2.0

£150 [berghaus.com](http://berghaus.com)

+ A good-length jacket that reaches the top of the thighs and is roomy enough for movement and extra layers. A good fit and a sleek look. It has all the essentials: adjustable hood; two zipped pockets; decent metal zip; hem adjustable cord; and Velcro cuffs. It's windproof, waterproof and has a high degree of breathability.

- The hood doesn't roll or fold away. I prefer a two-way zip, but this is a lightweight jacket so perhaps that's asking too much...

**VERDICT** For a lightweight jacket, I found this really delivered on packability and yet it coped admirably well with heavy showers.

### Rab Kinetic Plus

£180 [rab.equipment/uk](http://rab.equipment/uk)

+ We love the stuff sack and the gloriously soft and stretchy material. Super comfortable and there is no danger of any rustling noise as you move. Generous long sleeves and jacket length. It has two large zipped pockets, superb fitting hood with wired peak and an elastic inner lining. Simple yet functional zip tags.

- The slim fit will not suit everyone.

**VERDICT** An ultra-lightweight, beautifully designed jacket. It's high-quality and exceptionally versatile. The soft shell was surprisingly waterproof and I look forward to seeing how it endures over the next year or two.



4.5/5

## Montane Minimus Jacket

£179.95 [montane.co.uk](http://montane.co.uk)

+ Weighing in at just 163g (UK 12), this is a super-lightweight jacket that you would barely notice in your pack. For its weight, it is surprisingly well fitting and has some great features, including adjustable cuffs, internal and external hooks, wired peak and a volume and sizing adjustable hood, reflective patches and a drawcord hem.

- The jacket makes a distinct rustling noise as you move, and is expensive for the protection it gives you.

**VERDICT** This is an excellent back-up layer to stash in your pack. It is an exceptionally lightweight jacket, but you may need a repair kit if you snag the lightweight material.



4/5

## Regatta Leera III

£70 [regatta.com](http://regatta.com)

+ The Regatta Leera III has simple but effective elasticated cuffs and hood bindings. The jacket gives sufficient protection against showers, and features include smooth-running zips with easy-to-grab pull tabs.

- I'm not a huge fan of the shiny shell-suit style. There's no adjustment available on the hood, and I didn't find the breathability as good as the other jackets tested here.

**VERDICT** This is a basic lightweight jacket that should give protection against summer showers.



3/5

### Packable waterproof jacket comparison guide

Your at-a-glance guide to the main features of these waterproof jackets and how they compare with each other.	FABRIC	POCKETS	SIZES	WEIGHT	RATING
<b>MEN'S</b>  Berghaus Hyper 140 £180	Hydroshell Elite 2.5L	3 zipped	XS-XL	138g	3.5/5
 Haglöfs LIM Proof Multi £160	Haglöfs PROOF 2.5L	2 zipped	XS-XXL	237g	4/5
 Mammut Meron Light £329	Gore-Tex Active	2 zipped	S-XXL	357g	4.5/5
 Outdoor Research Helium II £155	Pertex Shield	2 (1 zipped)	S-XXL	180g	3.5/5
 Salewa Puez Aqua 3 Powertex £90	Powertex 2.5L	2	S-5XL	307g	4.5/5
 Vaude Simony 2.5L II £195	Ceplex Green 2.5L	3 zipped	S-XXL	296g	5/5
<b>WOMEN'S</b>  Berghaus Paclite 2.0 £150	Gore-Tex Paclite	2 zipped	8-20	292g (UK 12)	4.5/5
 Helly Hansen W Verglas 3L £260	Helly Tech Professional 3-layer fabric construction	2 zipped chest	XS-XL	389g (M)	4.5/5
 Montane Minimus £179.95	PERTEX Shield +	1 zipped chest	8-16	163g	4/5
 Regatta Leera III £70	Isolite 5000	2 zipped	8-20	280g (UK 12)	3/5
 Rab Kinetic Plus £180	Proflex	2 zipped	8-16	270g (UK 12)	4.5/5
 Sprayway Kelo £150	Gore-Tex	2 zipped	8-18	282g (UK 12)	4.5/5

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# ASK THE EXPERTS

*Whether you've got a question on gear, health or paths, our experts are here to help*

## OUR EXPERTS



**Robyn Stephens** is the Ramblers' policy and advocacy support officer for England and Wales.



**James Austin** is a Ramblers delivery officer who oversees group walks and the Ramblers' digital tools.



**Ed Wilson** is the volunteering coordinator for the Ramblers.



**Oli Reed** is an outdoor writer and blogger. He reviews men's outdoor gear for walk.



## PATHS

### Make the grade

**Recently, we undertook a review of our ABC walk grading system in an attempt to make it less hierarchical and to provide improved walk descriptions, particularly for newcomers. Our concern is that the ABC system tends to reinforce divisions. Quite a few members who walk between the grades find themselves pleasantly surprised. Why the lack of 'cross-pollination'? Wendy Britton**

**James Austin** While the Ramblers does have a central grading system, many groups also maintain their own. These systems are rarely identical, and what counts as an A-grade walk in one group may be a B-grade walk in another. Ultimately, grades are simply a tool to give an impression of what a walk will be like. No matter how tightly you draft the grades, there will always be grey areas – the difference between a C+ walk and a B- walk will be narrow. When listing walks, try not to worry about giving it the perfect grade, and if you're a prospective walker, don't dismiss walks just on their grading – you might be pleasantly surprised.

## GEAR

### Long and short of it

**Why are waterproof breathable jackets getting shorter? The UK climate often favours walking in a waterproof top and shorts, but it's important that the top covers the shorts. I'm struggling to find a long replacement for my 26-year-old Gore-Tex top. Daniel Vulliamy**

**Oli Reed** It's true. The trend these days is for shorter



waterproof jackets, with many walkers keen to save weight and bulk in their packs. There are still some excellent options, though, if you do want a longer waterproof. I've used both the Páramo Alta III and the Rohan Ascent (left) quite a lot over the past year and, although they're heavier than most modern jackets, they're both excellent choices. Also, check out the Berghaus Hillwalker Long and the Craghoppers Kiwi Classic.

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## PATHS

### The curious case of the invisible bull

**Our local farmer has a permanent ‘bull in field’ sign on one of his stiles. According to local knowledge, the field has never had a bull in it. The sign is there just to deter ramblers from crossing his land. Is this legal? Surely the sign should only be displayed for the duration that a bull is there? He has also put barbed wire on the outside of his fence instead of the inside, to keep his animals in. *Bryan Baker***

**Robyn Stephens** If there is no bull, then the sign would be misleading and unlawful and the council should take immediate

action to remove it. The Government’s Health and Safety Executive advises farmers to display signs informing the public when a bull or cows with calves are being grazed. They suggest a triangular yellow sign with a black band around the outside, showing a bull or bull’s head with ‘bull in field’ text. If barbed wire is likely to injure people on the outside of the fence and the path is particularly narrow, then it would be classed as a nuisance, which you can report to the highway authority and, under section 164 of the Highways Act, notice can be served on the landowner to remove it.

## HEALTH

### Mobility problems guide?

**I have recently been diagnosed with cerebellar ataxia, which affects my balance. I can only walk on broader, even paths, although I can manage some descents and ascents. I can still walk about 14 miles but I’m nervous about trying new routes in case I get into difficulties. Does anyone produce a guide to walks for people with mobility problems? Would it be possible for the Ramblers to lead walks that I could go on? I really want to carry on walking! *Mary Daykin***

**James Austin** The Ramblers’ mission is to help everyone, everywhere, to go walking, no matter what their level of ability. Unfortunately, we don’t presently produce a walking guide for people with mobility problems. However, I’m sure your local group would be delighted to welcome you on their led walks. If you’re concerned about



whether a walk is suitable, you can contact the walk leader beforehand to find out more. If you need a carer with you, they can also accompany you on a walk without being required to join the Ramblers – although you would still need to join following your three taster walks.

## GEAR

### Hot footed

**Can you advise me on walking boots that do not have an inner waterproof membrane (ie Gore-Tex type)? I’ve owned four pairs of boots/shoes with a ‘breathable’ membrane but have found my feet get hot, despite wearing the thinnest walking socks.**

*Gareth Daws*



**Oli Reed** The answer can get quite long and complicated because tests often show that leather boots containing a waterproof lining are no more hot, humid and sweaty than those without. The key thing if your feet often overheat on walks is to avoid boots made up of lots of layers and synthetic materials, which aren’t very breathable. If you’re determined to avoid a waterproof or Gore-Tex lining, take a look at the Meindl Borneo 2. They aren’t cheap at £230 but are made from waxed Nubuck leather and are unlined, so they could be a great solution for you.

## HEALTH

### Full disclosure?

**David Johnston (*Ask the Experts, winter, p77*) raises an important point: how much should walkers know about their fellow walkers’ health issues, especially visitors from other groups? *Marie Kennedy***

**Ed Wilson** There is no compulsion for an individual to disclose a health condition, regardless of the implications it may have on the walkers – and it’s important to remember this type of disclosure would be regarded as sensitive. However, the walk leader does have a duty of care to everyone on the walk. With this in mind, a walk leader should mention at the start of the walk that anyone with a health condition that may affect their safety on the walk can approach them confidentially if they wish. We also advise that walkers keep an In Case of Emergency (ICE) card on them stating any medical conditions they have, in the event of an emergency. These are available from the Ramblers for free (call 020 3961 3300 or email [ramblers@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:ramblers@ramblers.org.uk)).

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## MASTERCLASS

# GO IT ALONE

There's a special freedom in walking on your own and being at one with nature, but solo walkers need to be aware of the practicalities

WORDS ANDREW McCLOY



**A**t the Ramblers, we know only too well that walking is a highly sociable activity, a great shared experience that provides ideal exercise for the body and soul alike; but there's no doubt that walking on your own can be highly rewarding, too. For some, it's simply about personal development and empowerment, a test of stamina, self-organisation and navigation skills, while for others a solo journey allows for a far deeper connection with the surrounding landscape and natural world. Peace and solitude can sometimes seem at a premium in our hectic modern lives, but walking at your own pace and entirely in your own time has an enormous therapeutic effect.

Chris Townsend, who has backpacked solo on many epic long-distance trails, including the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail in North America, is clear why he usually walks on his own: 'Just the presence of another person changes the feeling of the walk and the connection with the wild. Alone, I see more, notice more. The details of the world become clear.' In his seminal

guidebook on how to backpack, he vividly describes the 'heightened awareness' that often comes with solo walking.

Walking on your own, wherever you choose to do it, offers the chance to discover and extend yourself as a person. We all have our inhibitions, perceived failings or phobias, whether it's because we're afraid of heights, or of getting lost, or are scared of the dark. Perhaps, too, many of us are uncomfortable with the thought of being alone, but according to Gillian Denham from



📍 Above: Chris Townsend walking in the Fannichs on the Scottish Watershed – being alone helps him feel connected to the wild

Blackheath Ramblers, who walked 246 miles of the Wales Coast Path on her own last year, going it alone can be a very convivial experience. 'I found that being on my own made me more accessible for people to talk to – and vice versa. When I stopped at a café for lunch, people wanted to talk to me about what I was doing and where I had been. I also chose to stay at youth hostels so that I could meet and chat to other people in the evenings, including other solo walkers.'

'Walkers are such friendly people, always greeting each other, and connected by this common interest. It's lovely to share experiences in this way.'

However, despite the camaraderie, Gillian also loved being completely alone on the trail. 'Going at your own pace, choosing your own detours, seeing more wildlife – in practical terms, your time is all your own and there's no joint decision-making or any need to compromise.'

Taking the first few steps on the path to solo walking can be a liberating experience, but what planning do you need to do to make sure it works out?

READER  
PANEL

'Solo is also much better for sharing the wilderness with the wildlife. The rules for my adventures are mine alone. That

is the true essence of being a solo traveller. I've climbed more than 1,000 big hills. There are no pressures from anyone but the demands of nature. I'm not overwhelmed by adversity because solo you learn to deal with whatever fate and bad weather delivers next – alone!

**Geoff Eldridge, Rochdale Group**

## Checklist for solos

- **Start gently** First-timers should begin with an easy route, where you can hone your outdoor skills and be likely to see other people.
- **Do your homework** Plan ahead, get a sense of where you're going and what you might face, check the weather forecast and think about escape routes.
- **Pack the essentials** – especially for emergency situations. But don't weigh yourself down unnecessarily.
- **Be a competent navigator** Use GPS only as a back-up to basic map and compass skills.
- **Be prepared for emergencies** Carry a phone, torch, whistle and, in remote places, a personal locator beacon.
- **Share your plan** Tell people where you're going and that you've returned safely.
- **Keep a diary** to record your thoughts and experiences.

balance between the essential – such as a decent first-aid kit, high-energy emergency food and perhaps a bivy or survival bag – and the unnecessary – such as too much clothing or spare cooking gear. A national park ranger in the Peak District once told me that he regularly picks up jettisoned gear from Pennine Way walkers who have clearly set off carrying far too much. Apparently, the most common items he comes across are lightweight tents and tins of baked beans.

Just as for any walk into remote or mountainous country, there are safety precautions to consider. Spend time not just plotting your route beforehand to get a feel for the location from books and maps, but also consider likely escape routes. Is there a plan B if something unexpected happens and you have to change your route? Study weather forecasts, know what time the sun sets and consider possible natural hazards. What would you do if you found yourself still walking



when darkness fell, for instance, or what's the best course of action if you're caught outdoors in a thunderstorm?

Much of the advice for solo walkers, especially on more adventurous walks, is simply common sense, but when you're on your own everything is amplified. For example, you can't rely on your partner or another group member to take a compass bearing – it's down to you to get it right. A GPS or mobile phone is all very well, but >

## PLANNING AHEAD: GEAR, SKILLS AND KNOW-HOW

Whether you're planning a weekend outing or a month-long expedition, decent preparation is essential. But if you're doing it on your own, taking the right equipment is also vitally important. Although walking the South Downs Way in the summer will be rather different from tackling the Scottish Highlands in winter, for the solo explorer there's no one to turn to if you've forgotten to pack something. The trick is to find the

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## Essential kit for a solo walk



### Chris Townsend

**Comfortable trail shoes** My current favourites are the Altra Lone Peak 4.

**Pacerpoles** As well as providing stability and support while walking, they hold up my tarp.

**Tilley hat** It's kept the sun and rain off on every long-distance walk I've done for nearly 30 years.

For more details about Chris Townsend's solo walks, go to [christownsendoutdoors.com](http://christownsendoutdoors.com)



### Beth Wickes

**Walking poles** They help me ascend steeper areas, take the weight off my legs when going downhill, and give stability over rough or slippery ground, especially in windy weather.

**Garmin Forerunner 35 GPS watch** I love to see where I've walked and the mileage I've covered.

**Ordnance Survey mapping data** Routes can also be downloaded in case of poor reception. A bonus is that it doesn't drain the battery, either.

Follow Beth's progress around the coast at [bethfootforward.co.uk](http://bethfootforward.co.uk)



if the battery runs out or there's no signal, then you must still be able to navigate accurately. Since online mapping or location data can be very battery-hungry, it's probably wise to consider carrying a portable 'battery bank' to charge your phone in out-of-the-way locations.

However, don't let any of this put you off. If you've always relied on someone else to read the map and work out the route for you, now is the opportunity to acquire new skills. Learning to navigate your way successfully in the countryside is a rewarding experience. There are a number of good instruction books, as well as map and navigation courses, that can help.

### TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

Not only will you have to be certain of where you're going, but you'll also have to make your own decisions on timings and route choices, including weighing up potential risks. Again, if you're comfortable in the outdoors and have thought it all through, there's no reason why you should be worried. Indeed, for many first-time solo walkers, the confidence-building and personal development involved is incredibly satisfying. However, it still means knowing your limits and weighing up situations carefully. Chris Townsend offers

the following advice: 'Follow your instincts – if a situation feels wrong, it's probably for a reason. Challenging terrain such as scrambles, snow and especially river crossings can be more dangerous on your own, particularly as there's nobody to help if you run into bother.'

Solo walkers should carry some means of emergency communication, whether it's a whistle, torch, phone or – if you're in the mountains or really remote country – a flare or a personal locator beacon. And, in addition to carrying a well-equipped first-aid kit, it's also worth knowing some first aid, such as how to strap up a damaged limb or treat a bee sting or tick bite. >



Top and above: Map-reading skills and a plan for when darkness falls are both essential

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## FIRST STEPS ON YOUR OWN

If you haven't walked very much on your own before, then start gradually and build your experience and confidence over time. It might be a good idea to plot a hillwalk or a trail that's slightly familiar to you, or perhaps choose a route where it's likely that you'll meet other people at some point. Start slowly and develop your solo skills along the way, even if it means keeping in sight of other trailwalkers for a bit, just to get some self-assurance. Also make sure that you tell someone where you're going and, just as importantly, let them know when you've finished safely. Filling out a route card beforehand, a practice still drummed into Duke of Edinburgh's Award expedition groups, is a good idea both for working out a realistic route and providing a safety net if the unexpected happens. Freedom and spontaneity as to where you go and when is certainly why many people prefer walking on their own, but it's important to take responsibility for your actions, too.

For people new to solo walking or travelling, another way to help build confidence and experience is to join a small walking holiday group, where there is flexibility to learn new skills and develop independence. There are also companies that offer self-guided walking trips, where they make some of the arrangements for you. And female members of the South West Coast Path Association can enjoy access to their solo walkers' network, which puts women in touch with other women walking the national trail.

## SAFETY, CONFIDENCE AND RISK-AWARENESS

Although we perceive that women on their own are safer walking in the countryside than in an urban environment, there are safety precautions that can still be taken wherever you may be and for any type of walk. As well as obvious communication devices, such as a whistle, phone or torch, some women carry personal alarms to use in a worst-case scenario. But how real is the risk? Beth Wickes, from Stourbridge Ramblers, is currently on a solo charity walk around the entire British coast, and says she's always aware of her surroundings,



but not to the point of being overly concerned. 'I work on the basis that most people don't want to harm anyone, and I think it's so unlikely I'd stumble on one who did while walking in the countryside that I'd be incredibly unlucky to be attacked. If I were a man, would people call me "brave" for walking alone? We're conditioned to think that the world is a dangerous place to explore as a single woman, but is it worse than for single men? I don't think so.'

One general piece of advice in terms of personal safety – which applies equally to lone men and women – is not to walk while listening to music through earphones. Not only will you be unable to hear people (or animals) approaching, but you'll drown

out the natural sounds around you – and it can make you seem antisocial should you encounter fellow walkers.

Solo walking may not be for everyone, but there's plenty of testimony both from men and women who have walked by themselves that captures the empowering feeling of being more in control, building new skills and developing physical and mental stamina, plus a heightened awareness of the natural world. Then there's the opportunity for deeper reflection and an appreciation for life that those of us who walk regularly know all about. Many solo long-distance walkers, myself included, find that keeping a diary to record each day's walking can quickly turn into a more profound, insightful and lively personal commentary on all manner of things.

Beth Wickes jokes that part of the reason she embarked on a solo walk around the British shoreline was to escape housework, but as she steadily makes her way around the south-west coast, it's clear how much she's enjoying the freedom of walking by herself. 'It's nice not having to think about whether my walking speed suits someone else and therefore having to adjust my natural pace, plus I like the flexibility to stop when and where I like without having to consider whether it fits in with fellow walkers. Above all, I enjoy the peace simply to get lost in my own thoughts.' ■

## Inspirational reads

*Journey Through Britain* by John Hillaby.

*The Backpacker's Handbook* by Chris Townsend.

*Wild: A Journey from Lost to Found* by Cheryl Strayed.

*The January Man: A Year of Walking Britain* by Christopher Somerville.

*Gulfs of Blue Air: A Highland Journey* by Jim Crumley.

# walk directory

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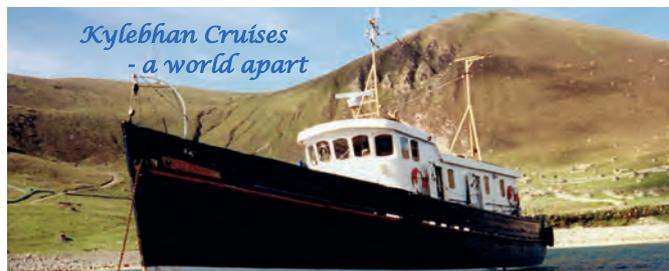
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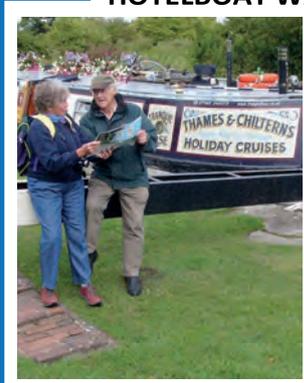


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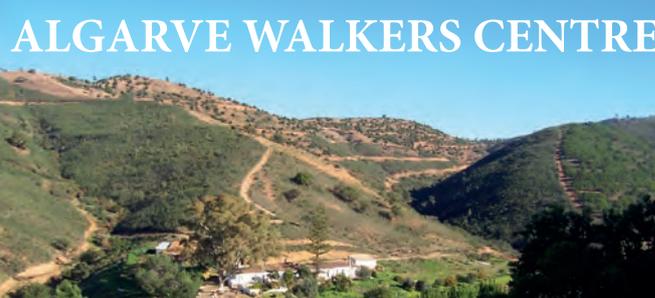
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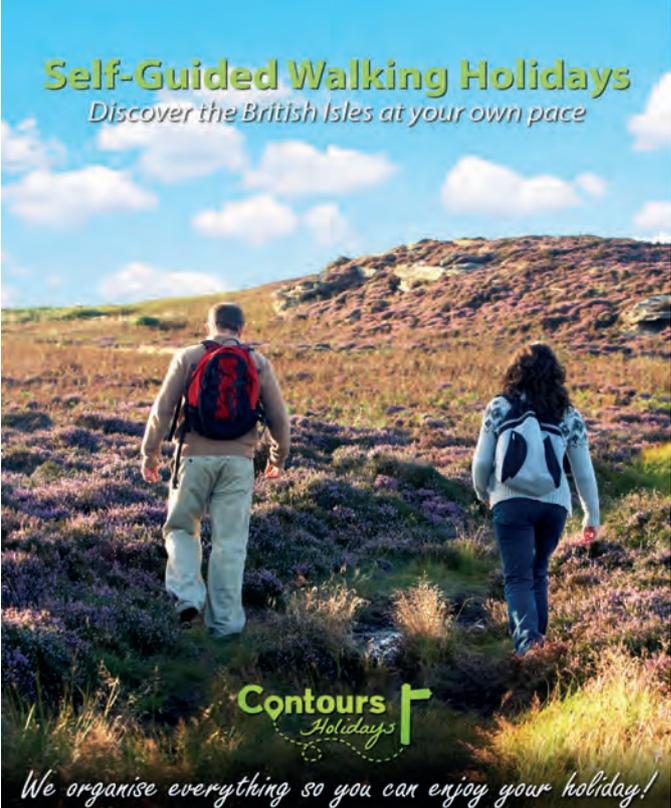
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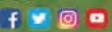
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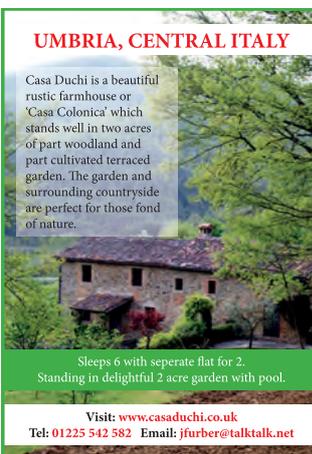


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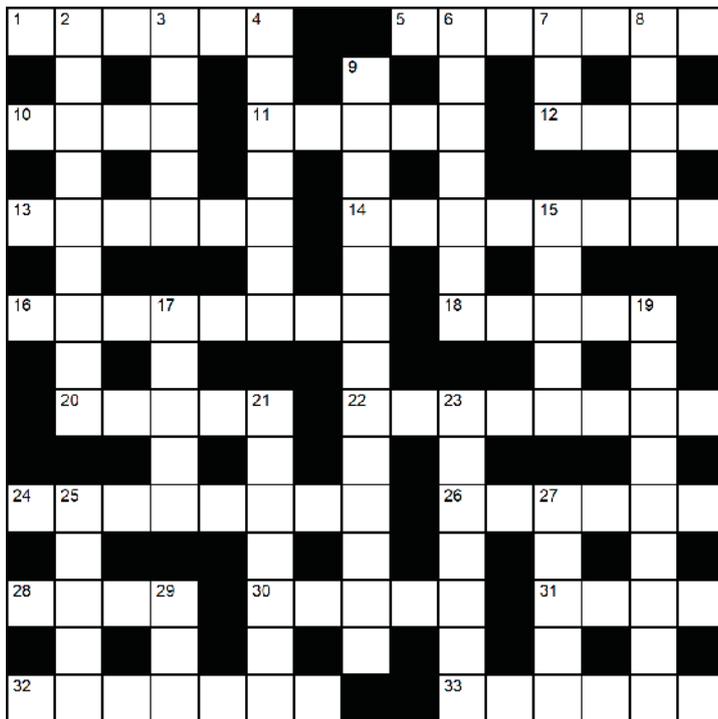
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## Spring 2019 crossword clues

### ACROSS

- 1/31** Cumbrian fell near Windermere - there's road to be fixed (6,4)
- 5** Wiltshire's prehistoric hill - ancient city guarded by sibyl perhaps (7)
- 10** River in South Downs NP, part of broad urbanisation (4)
- 11** Permission to make tracks? (5)
- 12** One barely seen on Dorset's Studland Beach? (4)
- 13** Reached, having circled river, imitation cave (6)
- 14** Carmarthenshire town makes Allen ill! (8)
- 16** NT estate on Cape Wrath Trail - very hot, no going back (8)
- 18** Daring to remove one lace guide? (1-4)
- 20** Disdainfully reject a spit of land at mouth of Humber Estuary (5)
- 22** Resort on the Solent Way - turns at houses (8)
- 24** Bachelor damaged Scottish area, location

- of Ben Nevis (8)
- 26** See **7 Down**
- 28** Durham's river - Don! (4)
- 30** As a Blue Flag beach must be... carbon spare (5)
- 31** See **1 Across**.
- 32** Walks aimlessly west and, er, south (7)
- 33** See **29 Down**

### DOWN

- 2** Aerobic team's indicators of byways open to all traffic (3,6)
- 3** Regrettably ringing a white heron (5)
- 4** 50-year-old Shropshire town with new 50-mile LDP contributing to hostel for day-trippers (7)
- 6** Anger over country location of Burren Way (7)
- 7/26** Bold men on rambling a Munro on West Highland Way (3,6)
- 8** Cumbrian village starts to resent Yorkshire Dales access land (5)
- 9** Walter setting off for Roman road from London to Wroxeter (7,6)

- 15** Town on the London Loop, in Westminster, I thought (5)
- 17** Hard-going, an Irish body of water, when left becomes right! (5)
- 19** Sickly looking rural route in the countryside? (5,4)
- 21** Lake District fell bans car touring (3,4)
- 23** Contradictory description of the Downs? (7)
- 25** Some Gaelic includes name for an NT waymarker (5)
- 27** Impressive cliffs in County Clare, more rocky around top of headland (5)
- 29 & 33 Across** Lakeland fell consists of loose rock in primary colour (3,6)



### Over to you...

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### How to enter

Post completed crosswords and your name, address and telephone number to: **walk** Crossword, Ramblers, 2nd Floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW.





## MY PERFECT DAY

# CLAIRE TOMALIN

**The award-winning biographer walks every day and believes it keeps you alive and helps beat writer's block**

INTERVIEW REBECCA SWIRSKY

### Where would you wake up on your perfect day?

The trouble is, at 85 years old, I can think of a great many places. Last year, my husband Michael [the playwright Michael Frayn] and I enjoyed five days of sunshine in Northumberland. After breakfast, we would walk for three miles to Bamburgh Castle. It was pure heaven – you saw no one, just endless sea and sky.

### What's your favourite walk?

As Michael and I are lucky enough to live just outside Petersham village in south-west London, there are a great many local walks to enjoy. My favourite is delightful for introducing friends to the Richmond area, mixing hill, woods, meadow, public gardens and river – then home.

### Who's your ideal walking companion?

Always my husband. Our many shared interests include a love of walking. He'll urge me, 'Come on!' when I'm feeling lazy. I do think walking keeps you alive. I believe we have two doctors, our left foot and our right foot, and I attribute daily walking to neither of us needing a walking stick.

### What has struck you about your biographical subjects' walking habits?

Well, Dickens was the great walker – he absolutely had to walk 12 to 15 miles a day. I also believe he wouldn't talk on those walks, even when he was with a friend. Getting gout was terrible for him – walking became painful and difficult. Jane Austen liked to holiday in Lyme Regis. Her sister was her great walking companion. And I made a TV film about Hardy in Dorset and Cornwall. Following in Hardy's footsteps, with his descriptions of the landscape in



📍 Clockwise from top: Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland; the moors near Sheffield; Claire has written a biography of Dickens, a great walker

my mind, was a lovely experience. It's hard to imagine Hardy's novels without him having been a walker; his writing is so bound up in the landscape.

### Do you think walking has helped your writing?

Absolutely. Sitting constantly in your study, you can get stuck

with your writing. Walking is a very good way to emerge from a block. It sets your mind 'walking' as well as your body.

### While boarding at Dartington Hall in South Devon, you were free to wander in the gardens...

That was a huge privilege. Not

many children may expect to be taught in such circumstances. I remember walking around the great gardens, talking about Keats, Austen and Shakespeare with my English master, Raymond O'Malley. Today, I enjoy visiting their literature festival, as being there brings back such happy memories. It's very important for children to understand that there is free space. There have always been children who have never got out of the cities. The inequality of our society is terrible and remains terrible. So I was extremely lucky.

### Have you passed on your love of walking?

I think so. My oldest daughter, Jo, lives in Sheffield and we spend most of our time together out walking on the moors. My youngest daughter lives in Cookham [Berkshire] and she and I also just walk and walk. As a consequence, my grandchildren enjoy walking. Both my parents were great walkers.

### Tell us about a particularly memorable recent walk or experience in the outdoors.

On our final day of walking in Northumberland, we ended the walk by strolling out onto the pier at Berwick. It was cold and windy, and I wished I'd brought a jacket. When we reached the far end, we had the huge reward of watching a mass of dolphins leaping in the water. It was a marvellous way to end our time in Northumberland. Michael and I have done so many walks in the past year. I really don't know what I'd do if I couldn't walk. It seems like an essential daily activity for us.

*Claire has recently published her memoir, A Life of My Own (£9.99, Penguin).*



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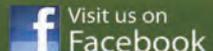
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