



1001 WALKING TIPS

**NAVIGATION, FITNESS, GEAR
AND SAFETY ADVICE FOR
HILLWALKERS, TREKKERS
AND URBAN ADVENTURERS**

paul besley

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introduction

It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble.

It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.

– Mark Twain (attributed)

I hope you picked this book up because you have started walking. I'm meaning the kind of walking that you long for after a heavy week at work. The kind of walking where you can let go of 1,001 things of little consequence and immerse yourself in a landscape of significance.

This book is for the beginner and for those who want to extend their walking to horizons further away. It is designed to help you move from the garden to the mountaintop. It begins at your front door with those first steps of leisurely walking. In recent years, walking has moved down from the hills and mountains and into our own local countryside and urban landscape. Exploring our own immediate environment is a good place to start walking, as there is no need for transport or specialist equipment. What the walker gets is a new outlook on their own terrain, and the stirrings of greater adventures.

To move from the local and urban to the countryside and high places requires a developing skill set. Walking in this new landscape requires no specialist skills; everything is attainable for any individual if you have the capacity to learn and be taught.

Some learning is best done with others. Navigation skills and using a map and compass are key skills for the outdoors, and there are plenty of resources and educators who can help anyone develop and improve the use of these basic tools. A skill set for the hill – call it hillcraft – encompasses every aspect of being outdoors, and more often than not being outside on the hill is where we learn. For instance, what to wear is often best learnt on the job. What works for one person does not necessarily work for another. In fact, the expertise of appraising and making up your own mind is one of the best skills to learn. The 1,001 walking tips in this book come from my own personal experience. Some I have learnt on courses, many were taught by more experienced walkers, and the majority are from my own knowledge of almost 50 years on the hill.

Walking is a superb way of keeping fit. It is a low-cost activity that gives a high return for a lifetime. I had two aims when I set out to write this book. The first was to show the beginner and aspiring master the way forward to having a lifetime of days out walking. The second was to underline that the goal of walking is to return home safely. The summit will always be there another day. If the book achieves those two aims, it will have been a success.

Happy safe walking!



Scout, the perfect walking companion.



Looking out from Wilderness Gully to Dove Stone Reservoir.





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BASICS (1-105)

'There comes a time on every walk where it all makes perfect sense and there is no place you would rather be and nothing you would rather be doing.'



Switch on your outdoor muscles and switch off from the stresses of daily life.

BASICS (1-105)

THE GOLDEN RULES (1-5)

1. Always tell someone where you are going. Not the person with you, but someone at home, a friend, your mum, the YHA manager. Tell them when you expect to be back, and what to do if you aren't. Write it down. Write your phone number down too.

2. Plan and prepare. Where to go. How to get there. What to do if things go wrong.

3. Always have a map and compass and know how to use them. Have the skills and experience to go where you want to go. Have enough food and drink for the whole day and a little bit more.

4. Wear appropriate clothing for the terrain and weather conditions. Happy feet begin with good quality socks and footwear. Don't forget the waterproofs.

5. Treat the landscape with respect, as though you are a guest. Take a phone but switch it off. Save the battery and enjoy the peace. Have fun. Be happy.

THINGS TO REMEMBER (6-28)

6. At the start of a walk, switch on the outdoor muscles in body and mind. Leave the hometown muscles just inside your front door.

7. If with others, talk about the day, what you will see, how long you will walk before stopping, when and where you will have lunch. Take out a map and look at the landscape around you before you set off from the rendezvous point. Use this time to engage your mind and body. Tick off the things you need to be prepared for: rough terrain, water, steep ascent or descent, exposure. Develop a mental storyboard of what you will see and encounter on the route.

8. When setting out on a walk, keep personal items such as car keys in a safe place where they won't be disturbed throughout the day. A good place to keep car keys is in the inner pocket of the rucksack lid, where there should be a clip to safely attach them to. Don't open this pocket again until you get back to the car.

9. A £10 note slipped into the back of a phone case or deep inside a pack can be a gift in an emergency. Always keep a tenner as a backup.

10. Don't forget midge cream. Especially in Scotland.

11. Keep hydrated during the walk. This is perhaps the number one piece of safety advice. Staying hydrated can stop the mind from becoming confused and the body from breaking down, and allows the post-walk restorative process within our bodies to be more effective.

12. Stop regularly for a snack and a drink. Intervals can be a personal thing, but planning a break every one or two hours in your day will help sustain your walking and make it much more enjoyable.

13. Put snacks in a pocket that is easy to access to allow you to graze on them without having to remove your pack.

14. If you find you need to keep taking your pack off to get at items, really consider where those items should be stored. And whether those items should be carried at all.

15. Be mindful of mixed-use trails with bikes and horses. Try to mostly stay on the left and don't wander all over the trail. Keep aware of what is behind you. And be nice. Say hello. Smile. It's good for you!

16. Fit a falconry bell to your dog's collar so that you can always hear where they are.

BASICS (1-105)

17. Learn to walk at your natural pace. I learnt this lesson when on my first long-distance walk. After a few days, I realised that I had a natural pace and that if I kept to it, I could walk more easily for longer and not tire myself out.

18. Keep a pace that enables you to hold a normal conversation with people, even if going uphill – breathing acts as a natural metronome to our efforts. If walking in a group, the pace should be that of the slowest person.

19. If faster people leave others behind, all that happens is the faster group has to wait. And probably won't get invited on the next walk.

20. Unless you are on a challenge walk, or need to get somewhere for public transport, it isn't a race. Stop and enjoy the views.

21. Never walk with your laces undone. This is a recipe for disaster.

22. When walking downhill, keep the centre of gravity over your feet. Don't lean, as this can cause you to slip and fall backwards, or stumble forwards.

23. You are generally more susceptible to injury coming down than going up. It is very rare for someone to fall going up a hill, but common for people to stumble and trip going down a hill. Take your time; rest if necessary.

24. Most slips and trips happen towards the end of the walk when people are relaxing and looking forward to the pub or getting home. They stop paying attention to what their feet are doing. Never walk while looking at your phone. This is another recipe for disaster.

25. If you stumble, stop. Stand up straight and take a minute to let your body and mind reset. Trying to recover by rushing on will only end in another stumble.

26. Look back occasionally. The view will be different and will quite often be a surprise.

27. The best kind of walking is where you walk into the landscape, allowing the space to envelop you, helping you to become part of the environment. As this happens, you usually become silent as the nature of your position reveals itself to you.

28. There comes a time on every walk where it all makes perfect sense and there is no place you would rather be and nothing you would rather be doing. This is the golden time. And it is an emotional place. Nothing else matters at that moment. This is what walking is all about.

WEATHER (29-48)

29. Walk in all weathers. A rain-sodden walk can be miserable, it's true, but if you are used to it – and in the UK, who isn't? – you can develop your clothing and gear system to enable you to cope with it in relative comfort. Walking in heat requires more fluids, protection and a slower pace. Learn to spot signs that you need to stop or change something about you or the walk.

30. Cold and rain affect our mood drastically when outdoors. This is something worth getting used to, and there is plenty of opportunity in the UK. Walk in poor weather, even if it is just around the local streets. Do it for a long period, a few hours, and note how your mood changes. Then work out what you need to do to keep the mood positive and upbeat.

31. Walking on a dry summer day is very different from walking in a winter storm across a featureless moorland. Both can be just as rewarding, but one needs a different mindset from the other. The only way to train your mind to accept both types of experience is to immerse yourself in those environments.

32. Walk into the hills cold by wearing fewer layers than you have with you. That way you won't sweat and get clammy and uncomfortable, and stink, and spend the rest of the walk trying to dry out your skin and clothing.

33. Vent regularly. Let the heat escape, even in winter, before it turns into moisture and you begin to cool too rapidly.

34. Hyperthermia can kill. Learn how to deal with it should someone begin to overheat. Cooling and shade are a must to start the process of bringing the temperature down.

35. Hypothermia can also kill. In cold and especially wet weather, make sure no one is suffering. The symptoms include shivering, cold, slurred speech and confusion. It can come on quickly and in the most benign of situations. I once had a walking companion suffer from early onset hypothermia as we walked up the Cut Gate bridleway in the Peak District on a fairly calm and reasonably warm day.

36. When you stop in cold weather, try to find somewhere out of the wind. If ascending to a mountain summit, stop before you reach the top to keep out of the cold, driving wind. As soon as you stop, put on another layer or switch to an insulation jacket and air the one you have been wearing, then switch back when you begin walking again.

37. A small umbrella can be useful for those intermittent showers that last a few minutes. It saves you taking your pack off and donning waterproofs, only to have the rain stop shortly afterwards. Remember to dry out the broly when the rain stops, and don't use an umbrella in high winds. It won't work.

38. If you wear spectacles and you have driving rain running straight into your face, that will affect visibility. But it will also affect your mindset, which can have serious consequences should you have to endure these conditions for an extended period in a more remote area. Assess what is happening and collect it as data. Develop new strategies to deal with the conditions so you are comfortable in the environment. For instance, wear contact lenses, or a peaked cap under your hood to deal with rain.

39. I used to wear contact lenses because I got sick of not being able to see in wet weather, until one day when winter walking on a Scottish mountain the wind blew one lens out, leaving me with only one good eye, which I thought at the time was a real problem. I started to tentatively walk off the hill with the party I was with, but I realised I could see the map clearly without my reading glasses, and I could also see the landscape clearly. What had happened was my brain had done the maths and worked out that by combining both images, depending on the distance I was focusing at, I could have crystal-clear vision. Apparently, this is well known to mountaineers, but was a revelation to me.

40. Testing out your gear will pay dividends. Pay attention to leaks, body warmth, ease of use and cooling effect in heat.

BASICS (1-105)

41. Sunblock is a must, at least factor 50. The wind that is blowing cooling air across the moor won't protect you from sunburn, which can be severe.

42. In the UK the prevailing wind is from the west. On windy days, walking into the wind may impede progress and cause vision to be lost as the eyes stream. It may be useful to have protective eyewear to keep the eyes clear.

43. Always keep an eye on the time and the weather.

44. Take note of where the sun is in relation to the horizon to give you a sense of when the day will be closing in.

45. What happens if you don't make it off the hill in time? Try it one night in safety, having first let someone know where you are and that you are OK. Stay out, gauge how it feels, see what you need to have with you to make it a less inhospitable experience. Then make any changes and repeat until you have a way of surviving in relative comfort and safety.

46. Learn how your gear functions. If it is going to hammer it down with rain, pack waterproofs. Or maybe don't, if you want to find out how not having waterproofs affects your mind and body. Does having a peaked baseball cap help visibility? Do over-trousers stay up when they are sodden? Does that cold trickle down the back mean you have a leaky jacket or do you need to pay more attention to how you use the item?

47. Identify what gear works for you and stick to it. Don't become a hostage to each new fad or gadget that comes along. And we all do.

48. If you want to prepare yourself for the Pennine Way and know that at some point you may well get bad weather, really bad weather, it's a good idea to begin conditioning your mind, body and gear to it. Watch the weather forecast and when you spot some bad weather, plan a walk along a route that is well known to you. Think about the effects the weather will have on you, and try to develop strategies for dealing with it before you set off.

WATER (49-58)

49. After periods of heavy rain, rivers and streams will be running high and with force, so plan to avoid crossing these without a bridge when looking at a route.

50. Never cross raging water by foot. Always use a bridge or find an alternative route.

51. When crossing streams and rivers, undo the buckles on your pack, so that should you stumble and fall you can release the pack to stop it tipping you over to drown.

52. Always use walking poles when crossing a river. Make sure you have three points of contact before moving position. Choose a crossing point where the water is not raging and look for a calm pool, even if it means getting more of your leg wet.

53. Try to keep boots dry when crossing a wide, deep river by taking them off and tying the laces around your neck so that they hang over your shoulder. Roll your trousers up, take your socks off, step firmly in bare feet into the water and slowly work your way across. At the other end, dry your feet on a towel and put your socks and boots back on.

54. Whenever rivers and streams are low and you have the choice between a bridge or a ford to cross them, choose the ford. It's much more fun.



Stepping stones at Chee Dale in the Peak District.

55. Take care when using stepping stones after high water levels, as they can be slippery.

56. When there is a line of people waiting to use stepping stones, and water levels are low, just walk through the water. It makes you look hard and very experienced. Even if the water is flooding your boots. (Wear gaiters.)

57. Don't enter water in a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It may be that some rare species, for instance the English native crayfish, is living there.

58. When walking along a river, look out for dippers, water voles and dragonflies.

FEET (59–65)

59. Foot placement is just as important when walking as it is in climbing. Get used to feeling how your foot feels when it is on firm ground. When moving over boulder fields, slopes or scree, a firmer boot will give more stability than one that is flexible.

60. Rub feet and other bits in a small amount of Vaseline to prevent chafing.

61. If you feel a hotspot on your feet while walking, stop immediately and check what is going on. The start of a blister can be alleviated by adjusting lacing or applying blister plasters.

62. If you have a long descent, adjust your lacing so your foot doesn't keep sliding forward in your footwear and ramming your toes against the end of the toe box.

63. When you stop in warm weather, take off your boots and air those feet and socks.

64. Sticking your feet in a cold stream at the end of a day is a great way to revitalise tired feet.

65. If your toenails are bruised and blackened at the end of a day's walking, trim your nails or get boots that fit your feet, or both.

FITNESS AND TRAINING (66–105)

66. Walking is our first great achievement. The one where we did it. Those first few toddler steps open a vast new world of discovery and connection. We continue the journey for many years, until we get our first car and then the connection begins to stretch, and we start to lose the feel of the landscape. Our journeys become about time and speed and metal and plastic, and how we think others perceive us because of what we drive and where we live and work. Getting back to walking reconnects us with the adventure of life.



Practise your balance by moving over uneven terrain.

BASICS (1-105)

67. Walking is good for health and the planet. It is low-cost and sustainable, needs no special equipment to begin, can be done anywhere and at any time, and has low impact on the environment.

68. If you are just taking up walking as an activity, be realistic about your fitness levels. It is a simple equation: the fitter you are, the more you will get out of walking. Work on fitness daily. A simple morning routine of stretches can free muscles and bones from their night-time strictures.

69. If you are new to walking, take things easy at first. A walk around the block can be an enjoyable experience, especially in summer, when the gardens are full of flowers and people are out and about wanting to talk and socialise.

70. Have a walking friend, someone who you can meet up with, go for a walk with, have a coffee and a chat with. The mental health benefits of something as simple as this are beyond estimation.

71. When heading out into the countryside for your first walk, choose one that is popular, has interesting features and is near to any transport connections. A walk across challenging Rannoch Moor is probably not the one to choose.

72. Skill fade is an issue after being away from the outdoors for any period. As you move back into the hills, begin slowly in a safe environment to prevent any serious incidents.

73. Learn how to walk. Weight over the centre of gravity, just below the sternum, posture upright, balance evenly distributed. Posture is important. Being bent over, folding under the weight of a heavy pack, will restrict movement and breathing. Walking upright helps the body get more oxygen and takes strain away from the back and legs.

74. Limber up before a walk. Warming the muscles and bits of stretchy tissue makes walking more comfortable and helps prevent injury. Have a basic warm-up routine, doing stretching exercises, loosening those joints, relaxing those shoulders.

75. Strength and flexibility are the key to a good physical walk. The demands placed on a human body differ greatly depending on the terrain you are going to cover; a basic level of fitness is a good foundation.

76. The more we exercise, the stronger the nerve connections become. These help to fire groups of muscles when we need them on the hill, keeping us safe as we move through a landscape.

77. A ‘couch to 5K’ programme is a great way to build up mileage, stamina and strength.

78. Running is good for stamina. Going uphill with a pack on requires more than strength – it needs a good cardio system. Running can give you this.

79. Balance is important when moving over uneven terrain. One way to assess how good you are at balancing your body is to walk over rough terrain while going up a steep slope – a scramble section, a rocky slope below an escarpment, or a decent boulder field with not too many leg-breakers. Practise moving up and down the area with your arms folded across your chest. This brings your core into play a lot more and will reveal just how in balance you are.

80. Balancing on one foot really helps me to see how well my core is doing. Raising a knee while doing it intensifies the sense of lack of balance. Obviously, I don’t do this on a knife-edge ridge or at the top of the stairs.

BASICS (1-105)

81. Slacklining is a great way to build balance and core strength. Try it out in the garden and see how it improves your ability to move more easily over difficult ground.

82. Once you are moving, you want to keep moving. Develop your fitness, skills and equipment to ensure you don't have to keep stopping.

83. Formulate a simple exercise regime for everyday use that concentrates on keeping the limbs supple and free from any mechanical restriction in movement. Leg raises, exercises of the torso, arm and shoulder exercises, and rotational exercises all help with keeping the body elastic.

84. Working on core strength is one of the keys to allowing you to move through more exhilarating terrain and keeping the body from becoming tired too soon. The glutes, the big curve of your bum, are where the power should come from for walking. This makes it easier on the rest of the body. Choose some exercises that fire these up. You can feel the effect almost immediately as you start walking from the glutes and not the lower back. Work on your lower back and hips. Try to get as much movement into these as possible.

85. For free workouts to help you exercise safely, watch the Fitness Studio videos on the NHS website (www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio).

86. Having a good aerobic system will help enormously for those big hill days. If you are setting out to walk where there will be lots of ascent and descent, train for it. Find a steep hill, one where you might have to use a hand occasionally. Fill your pack with water bottles and do hill reps. Start by walking up at your normal pace. Don't stop but keep going, even if it hurts. Time yourself, then repeat a few times. By taking the average time, you will get a baseline. Gradually add weight as you begin to beat your baseline. Keep a record of your times and use this log to assess your aerobic fitness.

87. If you need a serious improvement in fitness, think about teaming up with an instructor or a group.

88. Use a heart-rate monitor to track your progress. Knowing your resting heart rate (RHR) and maximum heart rate (MHR), you can set training and recovery heart rate targets.

89. Keep a logbook of walks and training to show progression. Make notes on what worked, how you felt and what you might change.

90. Mental resilience and a pragmatic approach are probably the greatest and strongest assets to have. You can only build resilience by doing it, by being in the storm. There is no other way.

91. The ability to bounce back from some adversity, like going the wrong way or getting caught in bad weather, can make a big difference to a day out.

92. Once you have the basic skills of navigation firmly in your mind and hands, the rest is about how you train your mind and body to deal with new landscapes and environments. Learning how to navigate a featureless landscape in a winter storm can only be taught by doing that. But it would be foolish to make that the starting point of a walking career. You need to build up to it.

93. Conditioning requires a slow, methodical process of engagement with a given environment – hot or cold, wet or dry. It is about working out what is happening to the body and mind, and developing strategies and mechanisms that allow you to fully function in those conditions. This takes time and practice.



Navigational tools.