

Foreword

Christine Elliott

Writers the world over have extolled the virtues of Britain's landscape, which offers thrilling choices to suit your walking preferences: gentle countryside, dramatic hills and mountains, awe-inspiring antiquities and breathtaking modern sculpture await the walker's discovery. During each season there is a vista rich with flora and fauna. To punctuate your walking, Britain welcomes its on-foot explorers through a community of character-filled towns and villages, brimming with delightful refreshment and accommodation options. Whether you know it or not, we walkers also benefit from decades of campaigns to save and reinstate footpaths and to protect the countryside. Most recently, the British government introduced a statutory right to walk in huge areas of land that were previously out of bounds. So, traditions and history underpin the recreation and activities you are about to enjoy.

With the right to access millions of acres of uncultivated countryside and inspiring landscapes, come responsibilities as members of a world-wide fellowship of walkers. Intuitively, we all know that the world's resources are under threat from our overly disposable culture and lifestyle. Henri-Frederic Amiel wrote that, 'Any landscape is a condition of the spirit'. That being so, walking in an environment where you can 'get away from it all' brings a welcome break from career or lifestyle pressures. However, the walking environment is about much more than the ground on which we place our steps. Our endangered environment has become the urgent global issue, joined up in what is arguably the greatest-known threat to humanity and earth – climate change.

The fact that global warming dominates the political radar confirms there is no room for complacency. Yet what the Ramblers' Association's president describes as a huge 'elephant trap' is at our feet: energy choices in how we live our lives, especially transport. Which of us hasn't travelled by car to reach an otherwise inaccessible walk? Or enjoyed a marvellous holiday that involved air travel? We may only have 10 years in which to halt and reverse otherwise inexorable climate change. However, the environmental cost of air travel is huge and there is great pressure to restrict carbon-selfish practices.

It is as unrealistic and impractical to expect humankind to relinquish cars and planes as it is to pretend we can tackle global warming without making real sacrifices. The Ramblers' Association is keen to use shared travel to connect our communities with the pleasures of the outdoors. To help conserve the environment we love, each of us can make personal lifestyle choices, so that our children and theirs do not pay for the luxury of the last-minute culture.

Meanwhile, have a wonderful experience as you enjoy the best of outdoor Britain. Nathaniel Howe was right to say that, 'Leisure is the time for doing something useful'. You will not only be walking, you will be walking for our world.

Christine Elliott is chief executive of the Ramblers' Association, Britain's largest and most active national walking organisation.

The Walks	Duration	Difficulty	Best time	Transport	Summary	Page
Southern England						
London & the Southeast						
The Jubilee Walkway	3-4hr	easy	all year	bus, train, tube	A fascinating walk through the streets of ancient and modern London, taking in many popular sights along both sides of the River Thames	54
The Centenary Walk	6-7hr	easy	all year	train, tube	An eclectic mix of ancient forest and urban parkland, with historical highlights and some fine pubs for sustenance	59
The Thames Path (East)	6 days	easy	all year	train	Take the main artery to the country's heart, ticking off Britain's best-known sights along the way	64
Wessex						
The Clarendon Way	9-11hr	easy	Apr-Oct	bus	A long but straightforward walk on good paths and tracks, through woods, farmland and villages, and over rolling hills	74
The Kennet & Avon Canal Path	4-5hr	easy	Apr-Oct	train	A flat and easy waterway walk through delightful countryside with a good taste of Britain's early industrial heritage	80
The Ridgeway (West)	3 days	easy	Apr-Oct	bus	A popular and straightforward national trail through high, rolling chalk hills and farmland, with great views and a rich historical background	83
The Thames Path (West)	6 days	easy	all year	train, bus	A classic and pleasurable river-side walk through beautiful English countryside and past fascinating historical sites	88
Dartmoor						
A South Dartmoor Traverse	7-8hr	moderate	all year	train, bus	A sweeping hike over high ground, past evocative historical sites, burial mounds and Bronze Age hut circles	99
A North Dartmoor Circuit	5-6hr	moderate	all year	bus	An exhilarating walk through wooded valleys into the heart of the open moor	103
The Cotswolds						
The Cotswold Way	7 days	easy-moderate	all year	train, bus	A jaunt through picture-book English countryside, tracing the spine of a steep escarpment	109
Bourton & the Slaughters	6hr	easy	all year	bus	Delightful walking through farmland and rolling hills, passing chocolate-box villages	118
Southern England Long-Distance Paths						
The South Downs Way	8 days	moderate	all year	train, bus	Follow the ancient chalk and flint highway along the ridges of rolling downs, past picture-perfect villages and prehistoric sites	123
The South West Coast Path (Padstow to Falmouth)	14 days	moderate-demanding	Apr-Sep	bus, train	Inspiring, sometimes strenuous coastal walk along cliff tops and beaches and past cheerful resorts	133
Northern England						
The Peak District						
The Edale Skyline	5¼-7½hr	moderate	Mar-Oct	bus, train	A circular walk on hills and ridges, across open moor and farmland, with marvellous views	154
The Limestone Way	2 days	easy-moderate	Mar-Oct	bus, train	A long but easy-going route, winding through valleys and farmland and neatly avoiding busy areas	158
The Yorkshire Dales						
Wharfedale & Littondale	5-6hr	easy-moderate	Mar-Oct	bus	A fantastic circular walk through classic Dales scenery; hilly, but not too strenuous	168
The Three Peaks	9-12hr	demanding	Mar-Oct	bus, train	Walk through high Dales country, with some sections of lower farmland for respite	170
The Dales Way	6 days	moderate	Mar-Oct	bus, train	An excellent walk, over some hills, but mainly through some of the most scenic valleys in northern England	174
The Lake District						
The Fairfield Horseshoe	5-7hr	moderate	Apr-Sep	bus	Classic mountain circuit with fine, open walking and wonderful views	189
Helvellyn & Striding Edge	5-6hr	moderate-demanding	Apr-Sep	bus	Top-quality route up a fine Lakeland peak; one section requires the use of hands	192
Dovedale & Fairfield	5-7hr	moderate-demanding	Apr-Sep	bus	A hard but varied and very rewarding walk, with some very steep ascents	195

The Walks	Duration	Difficulty	Best time	Transport	Summary	Page
A High Street Circuit	6-8hr	moderate	Apr-Sep	bus	A long day out in the mountains, with open vistas, excellent views and generally easy paths	196
A Scafell Pike Circuit	5-6½hr	moderate-demanding	Apr-Sep	bus	A hard and serious walk but, with the right conditions, among the finest and most rewarding	197
The Cumbria Way	5 days	moderate	Apr-Sep	bus, train	An excellent route through the heart of the Lake District, keeping mostly to valleys with a few high and potentially serious sections	201
Northumberland						
Hadrian's Wall Path	7 days	moderate	Apr-Sep	bus, train	A fascinating walk through history – clear and easy to follow, strenuous in parts, with many sites of interest	213
A Northumberland Coast Walk	5-6½hr	easy	Apr-Sep	bus	A beautiful coastal route via pretty fishing villages and imposing medieval castles	229
Northern England Long-Distance Paths						
The Coast to Coast Walk	12 days	moderate-demanding	Apr-Oct	train, bus	Spectacular cross-country hike, following in the footsteps of Wainwright	237
The Cleveland Way	9 days	moderate	all year	bus, train	A national trail through the spectacular North York Moors, with grand views, picturesque ruins and dramatic coastline	252
The Pennine Way	16 days	moderate-demanding	Apr-Oct	train, bus	Classic national trail along Britain's central mountain spine	261
Wales						
The Brecon Beacons						
Brecon Beacons Ridge Walk	7½-9½hr	moderate	Apr-Sep	bus	A top-class walk mostly through high, open country with steep ascents and fantastic views	283
Pembrokeshire						
Pembrokeshire Coast Path	15 days	moderate-demanding	Apr-Sep	bus	Straddling the line where Wales drops suddenly into the sea, this is one of the most spectacular routes in Britain	291
Preseli Hills & History	6-8hr	moderate	Apr-Sep	bus	A delightful walk through varied scenery – farmland, open moorland and wooded valleys – with great views of the coast and a historical flavour	304
Snowdonia						
A Snowdon Traverse	5-7hr	moderate-demanding	May-Sep	bus	A high, dramatic, rewarding and relatively straightforward mountain walk on clear paths	311
Tryfan & the Glyders	5-7hr	demanding	May-Sep	bus	A classic mountain walk through otherworldly scenery, with steep ascents and descents, and rough and slow going on the high ground	315
A Carneddau Circuit	4-6hr	moderate	May-Sep	bus	A classic route with straightforward walking through a relatively quiet area	319
Wales Long-Distance Paths						
The Glyndŵr's Way	9 days	moderate	Apr-Sep	bus, train	The newest national trail samples such Mid Wales' pleasures as working farmland, gentle valleys, thick pine forests and bleak, beautiful moorland	324
The Offa's Dyke Path	12 days	demanding	Apr-Sep	bus, train	A popular national trail along the varied and historically rich terrain of the Wales–England border	333
Scotland						
Central Highlands & Islands						
The Ptarmigan Route	4½-5hr	moderate	Apr-Oct	ferry	Magnificent views of Loch Lomond from the popular summit of Ben Lomond	347
The Cobbler	5-5¾hr	demanding	Apr-Oct	bus, train	Summon your courage to scramble to the top of one of Scotland's most famous peaks	350
A Goatfell Circuit	6-7½hr	moderate-demanding	Apr-Oct	bus, ferry	Steep, rocky ridges lead to the Isle of Arran's spectacular highest peak	354

The Walks	Duration	Difficulty	Best time	Transport	Summary	Page
Ben Nevis & Glen Coe						
Ben Nevis	6-8hr	moderate-demanding	May-Sep	bus	Enjoy the camaraderie on Britain's most famous climb, to the country's highest summit	360
The Road to the Isles	6½hr	moderate	Apr-Oct	train, bus	Long, remote walk along a historic route from wild Rannoch Moor to spectacular Nevis gorge	365
Buachaille Etive Mór	5½hr	moderate-demanding	Apr-Oct	bus	A classic walk along the ridges and over the peaks of a Glen Coe landmark	370
The Cairngorms						
Cairn Gorm High Circuit	4hr	moderate-demanding	May-Sep	bus	An outstandingly scenic mountain walk across a vast alpine plateau	376
Chalamain Gap & the Lairig Ghru	6hr	moderate-demanding	Apr-Oct	bus	Britain's finest mountain pass, between spectacular, glacier-carved mountains	379
The Western Highlands						
The Five Sisters of Kintail	6¾-8hr	demanding	May-Oct	private	Classic, immensely scenic ridge walk far above long, deep glens	386
Beinn Alligin	6-8hr	moderate-demanding	May-Oct	private	An exciting mountain circuit with stunning views of the Torridon mountains	390
Slioch	7½hr	moderate-demanding	May-Oct	bus	Scenic ascent of a fine peak on the threshold of the Great Wilderness	393
Isle of Skye						
Coast & Cuillin	8hr	moderate	Apr-Oct	bus	Spectacular coastal path leads into the heart of the Black Cuillin mountains	400
Bruach na Frithe	6-7hr	moderate-demanding	May-Oct	bus	Straightforward climb to stunning views of the Black Cuillin ridge	404
Scotland Long-Distance Paths						
The Southern Upland Way	9 days	moderate-demanding	Apr-Sep	bus, train	Long and challenging roller-coaster walk across the country	408
The West Highland Way	7 days	moderate	Apr-Oct	bus, train	Britain's most popular long-distance path, past Loch Lomond to Ben Nevis	418

Walk Descriptions

This book contains 52 route descriptions, ranging from six-hour strolls through to multiday megawalks, as well as suggestions for other walks, side trips and alternative routes. Each route description has a brief introduction outlining the natural and cultural features you may encounter, plus extra information to help you plan your walk, such as transport options, the level of difficulty and time-frame involved, and any permits that are required.

All the routes we describe pass through national parks and scenic areas. The multiday walks tend to be linear, while many of the day walks are circular. For all routes we include information on camp sites, mountain huts, hostels and other accommodation, and point out places where you can obtain water and supplies.

TIMES & DISTANCES

These are provided only as a guide. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include stops for snacks, taking photographs, rests or side trips. Be sure to factor these in when planning your walk.

Distances are provided but should be read in conjunction with the altitudes you expect to reach, as significant elevation changes can make a greater difference to your walking time than lateral distance. In this book we have reflected the rather wacky British system of mixing imperial and metric measurements. In route descriptions, daily distances along footpaths are given in miles, with some kilometre equivalents, while distances of less than half a mile are given in metres and heights of mountains are given in metres. When converting from one to the other, we have usually rounded up or down to the nearest half-mile or 0.5km. This may give rise to small inconsistencies between measurements, but nothing significant.

In most cases the daily stages are flexible and can be varied. It is important to recognise that short stages are sometimes recommended because of difficult terrain in mountain areas, or perhaps because there are interesting features to explore en route.

The times given in this book reckon on most walkers going at about 2.5mph (4km/h), with an extra hour for every 300m to 500m of ascent. This gives walking times that allow for a few short stops (eg for map reading), but not for long stops (eg a good pub lunch). It also assumes good weather. If you prefer to linger longer, or there's a chance of bad weather (always a possibility in mountains), then you should add extra time – about 10% for straightforward walks and up to 50% for serious mountain routes. If you are carrying a heavy load, then your speed will drop even more.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between walks. Our authors use the following grading guidelines:

Easy – A walk on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes, usually over short distances on well-travelled routes with no navigational difficulties.

Moderate – A walk with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.

Demanding – A walk with long daily distances and difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding and periods of scrambling.

DIRECTIONS

Throughout the walk descriptions we have used general compass bearings (eg 'head northwest', or 'aim east away from the river'). Precise compass bearings have been used rarely, and only where necessary.

The terms 'true left' and 'true right', used to describe the bank of a stream or river, sometimes throw readers. The 'true left bank' simply means the left bank as you look downstream.

THE LONG & THE SHORT

There are two main types of walk in this book. Day walks have been chosen as the best examples in each region. They are usually circular, and we give details of where to stay before and afterwards. The route is broken into natural stages, such as from a village to a mountain pass, from the pass to the mountain summit, then from the summit back to the village.

Long-distance path (LDP) descriptions in this book are divided into daily stages, each ending at a place with accommodation, usually a hotel, B&B or hostel (often a choice of all three – plus camping), as is usual in Britain. Obligatory wilderness camping – because there's simply no B&B or hostel – on LDPs in Britain is very rare. In LDP descriptions in this book, suggestions are given for different stages so you can adjust the daily mileage to suit your own ability.

Planning

This edition of *Walking in Britain* is for visitors from overseas looking for a single book that covers the whole country. It's also for people living in British eager to explore their own backyard. We describe a wide selection of walking routes, ranging from gentle half-day rambles on river-side paths to multiday treks across wild mountains, plus anything in between, with something suitable for everyone. You can base yourself in an interesting spot for a week and go out on day walks to explore the surrounding countryside, or you can travel from place to place on foot in true backpacking style. The options for walking in Britain are almost limitless, so providing a complete list is impossible, but what we have included is enough to keep you busy for a long time.

Walking is one of the most popular pastimes in Britain, so an infrastructure for walkers already exists and makes everything easy for visitors or first-timers. Most towns and villages in walking areas have shops selling maps and local guidebooks, while Britain's excellent chain of tourist offices can provide walking leaflets and other information. National parks offer guided walks. All this means you can arrive in a place for the first time, pick up a leaflet or guidebook, put on your boots and within an hour you'll be walking through some of Britain's finest landscapes. No fees. No permits. No worries. It really is almost effortless.

Where you go first may depend on your own experience. Generally speaking, the lower and more cultivated the landscape, the easier the walking, with clear paths and signposts – ideal for beginners. On popular routes in mountain and moorland areas, there will be a path (although sometimes it's faint) but not many signposts. If the route is rarely trodden, there may be no visible path at all and absolutely no signposts, so you'll need a detailed map and compass for navigation.

As well as the wonderful scenery, two aspects make walking in Britain unlike hiking, tramping or trekking in many other parts of the world. The first is the principle of 'right of way', allowing walkers to cross private land on paths or tracks open to the public. At the last count, the right-of-way network totalled about 140,000 miles (225,000km) – more than enough to keep any walker busy – and many of the paths have existed for hundreds or thousands of years. Even though nearly all land in Britain is privately owned, from tiny cultivated areas to vast tracts of wilderness, the right of way cannot be overruled by the actual owner. If there is a right of way, you can walk through fields, woods and even farmhouse yards as long as you keep to the correct route and do no damage.

The second aspect is the principle of 'freedom to roam'. Landmark laws introduced in 2003 and 2004 allow walkers to move *beyond* the right of way in mountain and moorland areas, and effectively go anywhere – opening up vast tracts of wild and remote landscape that were previously off limits. Of course, with freedom comes responsibility (for more details see the boxed texts on p32 and p448) but for many walkers in Britain these new opportunities are like opening the doors of a sweet shop.

In this book, we've described our favourite walking areas, and picked a selection of day walks as the best samples of each area. Most day walks are circular, so you start and finish in the same place. Some of the day walks can be extended into two days – ideal for a weekend, or if the weather's fine and you simply want to keep going. We also outline shorter alternatives; good if you only want to walk for a morning or afternoon.

The Ramblers' Association's annual publication *Walk Britain* is an invaluable planning tool, outlining many routes and walking areas, with handy lists of walker-friendly B&Bs all over Britain.

We've also selected our favourite long-distance paths (LDPs), ranging from about four days to 20 days. Freedom is key here too: the LDPs don't have to be followed in their entirety – you can do just a couple of days if you prefer. In this book, we've selected some day walks and LDPs that deliberately overlap, giving you even more scope for several walks in the same area.

When it comes to a place to stay, all walking areas and LDPs are well served by a mix of hotels, B&Bs and hostels, plus camp sites and bunkhouses. On the long routes you may want to camp but you certainly don't have to. You don't even have to carry all your gear, thanks to a marvellous system of baggage-carrying services.

In this book, we have concentrated on the national parks and other rural or remote areas, simply because these are where the walking is best. Some of the routes are long-time classics; others are personal favourites based on our own local knowledge. We have also described a few out-of-the-way routes and provided brief outlines of many more places that you can enjoy exploring on your own. Have fun!

As Australians in Britain we like our routes to go through villages, and we stop overnight in old inns when possible. We are keen bushwalkers at home, but in Britain do not wish to duplicate our Australian walks. A pint in a pub at the end of a day's walking through English fields and meadows is most enjoyable.

Phillip Crampton

WHEN TO WALK

The best seasons for walking in Britain are spring, summer and autumn (March to October) – the conditions are likely to be better and there's more daylight. July and August are school holidays and the busiest months, especially around the coast and in national parks. In winter (November to February) some accommodation closes, restaurants have shorter hours and public transport options are reduced.

In summer in northern England it's light from around 5am to 9pm, while in winter it's light between 8am and 5pm. In southern England the differences are less pronounced, but in Scotland during summer it gets dark for only a few hours around midnight and your days are luxuriously long. Conversely, during winter in southern Scotland or northern England you only have about seven or eight hours of daylight to play with – down to just five or six in northern Scotland.

Generally speaking, the farther north you go, the longer the winter and the shorter the walking season. This especially applies to Scotland; while lower and coastal areas may enjoy seasons similar to those in England and Wales, in the high mountains of Scotland the best time for walking is from May to September. (During the Scottish winter, most walking routes

DID YOU KNOW?

On many long-distance paths in Britain, baggage services will arrange to transport your kit between overnight stops, while you travel light all day. See p437.

See Climate (p439) for more information on Britain's climate.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Your passport and visa, if you're from overseas (p452)
- Good boots and gaiters, if you're heading for the moors and mountains (p467)
- At least some basic map-reading skills (p468)
- Midge repellent, if you're heading for Scotland in summer (p462)
- A taste for real ale (p443)

require an ice axe, crampons and specialist knowledge; technical winter walks of this nature are beyond the scope of this book.)

Away from the high mountains, you can walk the rest of Britain at any time of the year. Even in winter the weather is never bad enough to make conditions technical. In fact, a beautiful, crisp midwinter day is always preferable to one of the damp and misty days that can easily occur in high summer.

See p439 for more details on regional climates.

COSTS & MONEY

More than anything, your choice of accommodation will determine how much you'll spend while walking in Britain. Camp sites cost around £3 to £8 per person, or £5 to £15 per 'pitch' (usually two people and a tent), but may be more if the site has many facilities. Bunkhouses are around £7 to £10 per person per night, and hostels around £10 to £20. At a simple B&B you'll pay £20 per person, and up to £30 in smarter places. A night in a midrange hotel can be anything from £20 to £50 per person, although £35 to £50 is more likely. These prices assume you're sharing a double or twin room. Single rooms are usually around 75% of the double-room rate. Wherever you stay, prices are usually higher at busy times – in Britain this means from around Easter to early September. The rates we quote throughout this book are high-season prices, but you may discover an extra peak at the busiest time – late July and August. For more details about accommodation, see p432.

For food, in towns and cities you can get by on £5 per day by purchasing basic supplies from supermarkets. When walking, camping or hostelling you may be self-catering anyway, so £10 per day will see you through. If you have meals at hostels, cafés or cheap restaurants, £15 to £20 per day will be your baseline. A bar meal in a pub will be about £7, while a restaurant main course will set you back around £8 to £10. Beer may not be classed as an essential by some but – just for the record – a pint will cost £2.50 to £3 in London and the Southeast, and £1.50 to £2.50 around the country.

Transport will be your other big expense, but its cost is harder to quantify as it depends not on how long you stay, but on how far you go and how many different areas you visit. More details are given in the Transport chapter (p453).

For more money details, see p447.

BACKGROUND READING

To get you in the mood for walking in Britain here's a selection of our favourite travelogues. Details on specific area guidebooks are given in the individual route descriptions.

- *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* by Laurie Lee. A young man leaves the time-warped 1930s Cotswolds, then carves out a life in London before heading off to Spain.
- *Journey Through Britain* by John Hillaby. An intrepid adventurer explores his own backyard on foot in the mid 1960s and captures the spirit of that age.
- *On Borrow's Trail* by Hugh Oliff. Retracing the journeys through Wales made by 19th-century writer George Borrow, combining a rich synopsis of the original observations with modern photos and colour illustrations.
- *Two Degrees West* by Nicholas Crane. Walking a perfectly straight line across Britain, the author wades across rivers, cuts through towns, sleeps in fields and meets an astounding selection of people.

HOW MUCH?

Camp site (for 2 people)
£10
YHA hostel (dorm bed)
£10-20
B&B (double or twin)
£40-60
Map £5-8
Mars Bar 60p

GUIDED WALKS & ORGANISED WALKING TOURS

In national parks and other countryside areas (and in some cities), guided walks ranging from an hour to all day – many with a theme such as wildlife or history – are organised by rangers or local experts. More details are given in the chapters throughout this book, and you can find out more from national park websites or tourist offices.

For something longer, a great option is an organised walking tour with a commercial operator. These are ideal if you're new to walking or simply enjoy the company of others. Some operators offering walking tours in Britain are listed below. Even if you don't book a tour, the itineraries outlined in their websites and their brochures can be handy for planning and a great source of information.

- **Adventure Plus** (☎ 01678-521109; www.advplus.co.uk) Friendly team offering guided or self-guided walking in North Wales.
- **Bath & West Country Walks** (☎ 01761-233807; www.bathwestwalks.com) Guided and self-guided trips in the Southwest.
- **Brigantes Walking Holidays** (☎ 01729-830463; www.brigantesenglishwalks.com) Self-guided tours in northern England (Coast to Coast, Cleveland Way, Cumbria Way, Dales Way etc).
- **Contours Walking Holidays** (☎ 01768-480451; www.contours.co.uk) Long-standing outfit with a very wide range of self-guided tours throughout Britain.
- **Cotswold Walking Holidays** (☎ 01242-254353; www.cotswoldwalks.com) Does exactly what it says on the tin, and comes in three varieties: guided, self-guided and luxury.
- **Country Adventures** (☎ 01254-690691; www.country-adventures.co.uk) Offers walking and activity holidays around Britain, especially the Lake District, North York Moors and Wales.
- **Countrywide Holidays** (☎ 01707-386800; www.countrywidewalking.com) Part of well-respected and long-standing **Ramblers Holidays** (www.ramblersholidays.co.uk), with a very wide selection of tours throughout Britain.
- **Footpath Holidays** (☎ 01985-840049; www.footpath-holidays.com) Guided and self-guided hotel-based walking trips throughout Britain.
- **Greenways Holidays** (☎ 01834-862109; www.greenwaysholidays.com) Self-guided walking holidays in Pembrokeshire, Wales.
- **Make Tracks** (☎ 0131-229 6844; www.maketracks.net) Self-guided walks along many of Scotland's long-distance routes.
- **River Deep Mountain High** (☎ 01539-531116; www.rdmh.co.uk) Outdoor activities, including walking, in the Lake District.
- **Sherpa Expeditions** (☎ 020-8577 2717; www.sherpa-walking-holidays.co.uk/britain) International trekking company that offers a very good range of self-guided walking tours in Britain.
- **SYHA Holidays** (☎ 0870 155 3255; www.hostelholidays.org.uk) Walking tours in Scotland based in youth hostels.
- **Walking Women** (☎ 01926-313321; www.walkingwomen.com) Female-only walking tours in the Lake District, around Britain and beyond.
- **Wandering Aengus** (☎ 01697-478443; www.wanderingaengustreks.com) Specialising in guided tours for small groups, including a 'Three Peaks' trip to Snowdon, Scafell and Ben Nevis.

Many more companies can be found under 'tours' links in several of the walking websites listed under Internet Resources (opposite). One of the most comprehensive lists is at www.ramblers.org.uk/info/Contacts/hols.html. For more ideas, type words such as 'walking tours', 'walking holidays' and 'hiking vacations' into internet search engines.

WALKING FESTIVALS

During summer, many towns and country areas organise walking festivals featuring a few days of guided walks, often coinciding with an annual carnival or other event. The aim is to encourage more people to get into walking, or for established walkers to meet like-minded people. For more details contact local tourist offices, do an internet search for 'walking festivals' or see www.ramblers.co.uk.

- *Slow Coast Home* by Josie Dew. A cross between journal of miscellany and chatty letter to a friend. Yes, it's about a cycling tour of England and Wales, but walkers will identify with the pace and offbeat observations.
- *The First Fifty* by Muriel Gray. The perfect antidote to male-dominated tales of peak bagging and other hardy walking ploys.
- *Hamish's Mountain Walk* by Hamish Brown. The extraordinarily long (and first) continuous round of the Munros, by an extremely well-known Scottish mountain writer.
- *Plowright Follows Wainright* by Alan Plowright. Follows the footsteps of legendary 'AW' (see the boxed text, p188) along the Pennine Way and Coast to Coast, with evocative landscapes and eccentric fellow walkers encountered along the way.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The internet is a wonderful planning tool for walkers and travellers, and there are millions of sites about Britain. Before plunging into the cyber-maze, try these for starters:

Backpax (www.backpaxmag.com) Cheerful info on cheap travel in Britain, plus details about visas, activities and work.

BBC (www.bbc.co.uk) For an overview of British news and culture, see this immense and invaluable site from the world's best broadcaster.

i-UK (www.i-uk.com) The official government site for all British business, study and travel information.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Loads of travel news, a bit of merchandise and the legendary Thorn Tree bulletin board, complete with a Walking, Trekking & Mountaineering forum.

Long Distance Walkers Association (www.ldwa.org.uk) The name says it all, and the site includes details of long day or multiday walks in rural or mountainous areas. The club also promotes challenge walking (covering set distances within a set time).

Mountaineering Council of Scotland (www.mountaineering-scotland.org.uk) The MCofS represents climbers and hillwalkers in Scotland, and provides mountains of information, particularly on issues of access and freedom to roam.

Ramblers' Association (www.ramblers.org.uk) Britain's largest and most active national walking organisation; the website has details of routes, events, places to stay, campaigns, walking festivals and guided walks, plus general advice for walkers and a list of publications for sale online.

Sherpa Van (www.sherpavan.com) One of Britain's leading tour operators and baggage-carrying services, the website is also packed with useful route information, walker-friendly accommodation listings and a lively walkers' forum – especially good for first-timers.

Visit Britain (www.visitbritain.com) The country's official tourism website: accommodation, attractions, events and much more.

Walking Britain (www.walkingbritain.co.uk) A comprehensive list of walking routes, recommended books and maps, organised walking tours and a lively walkers' forum.

Walking Pages (www.walkingpages.co.uk) A great source of information on all aspects of walking Britain – destinations, festivals, rights, equipment and more – also with an online shop for buying local guidebooks.

Walkingworld (www.walkingworld.com) The largest of many commercial walking information sites, with more than 3000 route descriptions in all parts of Britain – and growing daily.

TOP THREES

Major positives of walking in Britain include variety of the landscape, the compact nature of the country, and the sheer range of options from short strolls to multiday epics. These 'top threes' will help you find what you're looking for.

Coast Walks

- **The South West Coast Path** (p133) The cliff-top paths of the Southwest Peninsula are hard to beat; the ups and downs can sometimes be hard work, but this is the place for jolly seaside resorts, great views, sand and surf.
- **The Pembrokeshire Coast Path** (p291) Another top choice for roller-coaster seaside walking, with birds, seals, wildflowers and a great mix of busy beaches and secluded traditional fishing villages.
- **Scotland's west coast and islands** (p398) For coastal walks with wilder edge, there's simply nothing better.

High Walks

- **Ben Nevis and Glen Coe** (p359) When it comes to high walks, in Scotland you're spoilt for choice, but the peaks in this iconic area are a great starting point.
- **Snowdonia** (p308) The highest mountains in Wales, with wonderful high-level walking and a great mix of terrain.
- **The Lake District** (p185) The heart and soul of walking in England; inspiration for poets, and summits and ridges for walkers.

River Walks

- **The Thames Path** (p64 and p88) A long-distance river-side classic, meandering through countryside to the capital.
- **The Dales Way** (p174) A gem of northern England, following the beautiful River Wharfe through Yorkshire.
- **The Speyside Way** (p427) A lowland Scottish path beside the famous 'silvery Spey' from the sea to the Cairngorm foothills.

History Walks

- **Dartmoor** (p97) An ancient landscape dotted with standing stones, burial mounds and Bronze Age settlements.
- **The Ridgeway** (p83) Walk from Avebury's time-worn stone circle past Neolithic grave mounds and mysterious figures carved in chalk hillsides.
- **Hadrian's Wall Path** (p213) A route that has it all: Roman remains, medieval castles, battlefields, even rich industrial heritage.

Wilderness Walks

- **Northwest Scotland** (p384) Most serious and most rewarding and, without doubt, Britain's finest wilderness area, with its rugged and far-flung mountains.
- **Cheviot Hills** (p277) One of the wildest parts of England, crossed by the Pennine Way.
- **The Glyndŵr's Way** (p324) A long-distance route through the remote heart of Mid Wales.

Environment

The island of Britain consists of three nations: England in the south and centre, Scotland to the north and Wales to the west. Further west lies the island of Ireland. Looking southeast, France is just 20 miles away.

THE LAND

Geologically at least, Britain is part of Europe. It's on the edge of the Eurasian landmass, separated from the mother continent by the narrow English Channel (the French are not so proprietorial, and call this strip of water La Manche – the Sleeve). About 10,000 years ago Britain was *physically* part of Europe, but then sea levels rose and created the island we know today. Only in more recent times has there been a reconnection, in the form of the Channel Tunnel.

When it comes to topology, Britain is not a place of extremes. There are no Himalayas or Lake Baikals here. But the geography of Britain is undeniably varied, with plenty to keep you enthralled, and even a short journey can take you through a surprising mix of landscapes. Here we outline the main features by focusing on each country.

RESPONSIBLE WALKING

Walkers as a group tend to care about the environment, and some of the following points you'll have heard before, so hopefully they will just be handy reminders.

When walking in rural areas:

- Guard against all risk of fire – is the great outdoors the place for a cigarette anyway?
- Fasten all gates, or leave them as you found them if they're obviously supposed to be open (to let stock reach water, for example).
- Avoid damaging buildings, fences, hedges, walls, wild plants and trees – or anything else for that matter.
- Leave no litter – take it home. All of it. Don't bury it. For extra points, pick up some of the stuff others have dropped.
- Keep dogs under control – that usually means on a lead or near to you, as a dog chasing a bird or sheep rarely comes when called (whatever their owner thinks)
- Safeguard water supplies – don't pollute streams, rivers or lakes.
- Respect the privacy of people who live and work in the countryside.

Some of the general advice above also applies when you're camping 'wild'. Remember that all land in Britain is privately owned, and wild camping is generally not permitted. Where it is tolerated (in some areas of open mountain and moorland), please ensure that you heed the following:

- Don't wild camp somewhere for more than one night.
- Camp out of sight of roads, houses or popular recreational areas.
- Don't camp in fields enclosed by walls without permission.
- Avoid lighting fires – and handle stoves carefully.
- Keep groups small and avoid pitching where other tents have recently been.
- Leave wild camp sites exactly as you found them – or better.

England

Covering just over 50,000 sq miles, England can be divided into five main geographical areas: northern, central, southwestern, eastern and southeastern.

Northern England is dominated by the Pennines, a chain of mountains, hills and valleys – often dubbed the ‘backbone of England’ – stretching for 250 miles in a central ridge from Derbyshire to the border with Scotland. The Pennine Way (p261) winds through this range. To the west are the Lake District’s scenic Cumbrian Mountains, especially popular with walkers, containing England’s highest point, Scafell Pike (978m). Not surprisingly, the bulk of England’s best walking areas are in the north of the country.

The central part of England is known as the Midlands, which is mainly flat, heavily populated and an industrial heartland since the 19th century. In the southern part of this region lie the Cotswold Hills, an area of farmland, quaint villages and small market towns, also blending into the northern part of southwest England.

Southwestern England’s most notable geographic feature is the Southwest Peninsula, also known as the West Country, with a rugged coastline, good beaches and a mild climate, making it a favourite holiday destination. The South West Coast Path (p133), Britain’s longest national trail, and the wild, grass-covered moors of Dartmoor and Exmoor are popular areas with walkers.

Eastern England, or East Anglia is it’s usually called, is the flattest part of the country, and a major agricultural area.

The rest of the country is usually lumped together as the Southeast, a region of rolling farmland and several densely populated towns and cities, including London, the capital of both England and Britain. In the southern part of this region are hills of chalk known as ‘downs’, including the North Downs and South Downs, both crossed by national trails and stretching to the coast where the chalk is exposed as England’s iconic white cliffs.

Fascinating interviews with farmers, anglers, walkers, surfers, park rangers and everyday people from around Britain, compiled onto CD as ‘audio books’, are available from www.rovinggear.co.uk. It’s like meeting an interesting local in the pub...

WALKING IN WHERE?

It won’t have escaped your notice that this title of this book is *Walking in Britain*. The state of Great Britain (shortened to ‘Britain’) is made up of three countries – England, Wales and Scotland – and those are the areas we describe in this book.

The United Kingdom (UK) consists of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The island of Ireland consists of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The latter, also called Eire, is a completely separate country. We don’t cover Irish walks in this book – although there are plenty of options there, as detailed in Lonely Planet’s *Walking in Ireland*.

The British Isles is a geographical term for the whole group of islands that make up the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and also includes autonomous or semiautonomous islands such as the Isle of Man and the Channel Isles.

It is quite usual to hear ‘England’ and ‘Britain’ used interchangeably but you should, if possible, avoid this – especially in Wales or Scotland. Calling a Scot ‘English’ is like calling a Canadian ‘American’ or a New Zealander ‘Australian’. Visitors can plead ignorance and get away with an occasional mix-up, but some of the worst offenders are the English themselves, many of whom seem to think that Wales and Scotland are parts of England. This naturally angers the Scots and Welsh, fuelling nationalist sentiments, and is completely misunderstood by the English, who simply think their neighbours carry ancient and unreasonable grudges.

NEVER MIND THE BEALACHS

In different parts of Britain geographical features have various names, according to local dialect. For example, a stream is a ‘beck’ in the Lake District and a ‘burn’ in Scotland; a valley can be a ‘cwm’ in Wales, a ‘glen’ or ‘strath’ in Scotland and a ‘coombe’ in southern England. A low point between hills is a ‘bwlch’ in Wales, a ‘haus’ in the Lake District and a ‘bealach’ in Scotland. For more local words, see the Glossary (p472).

Wales

Covering just over 8000 sq miles, Wales is surrounded by sea on three sides. Its border to the east with England still runs roughly along Offa’s Dyke, a giant earthwork constructed in the 8th century, today followed by a national trail (see p333). Wales has two major mountain national parks: Snowdonia (with Mt Snowdon, at 1085m, the highest peak in Wales) in the north and the Brecon Beacons in the south. In between is the wild and empty landscape of the Cambrian Mountains. The population is concentrated in Wales’ southeast, along the coast between the cities of Cardiff (the capital) and Swansea, and in the Valleys (a former mining centre) that run north from here.

Scotland

Scotland covers about 30,000 sq miles, two-thirds of which is mountain and moorland and therefore very popular with walkers. The Central Lowlands run from Edinburgh (the capital and financial centre) in the east to Glasgow (the industrial centre) in the west, and include the industrial belt and the majority of the population. A coastal plain runs most of the way up the east coast. Between the Central Lowlands and the border with England are the Southern Uplands, an area of rolling hills and deep valleys. To the north of the Central Lowlands are the Highlands, a vast, sparsely populated area where most of the major mountain ranges are found. Ben Nevis, at 1344m the highest mountain in Scotland and Britain, is near the town of Fort William. The most spectacular (and most remote) mountains are those in the northwest.

Scotland has 790 islands, 130 of them inhabited. The Western Isles comprise the Inner Hebrides and the Outer Hebrides. Two other island groups are Orkney and Shetland, the northernmost part of the British Isles.

WILDLIFE

Britain may be a small country but it boasts a surprisingly diverse range of natural habitats, thanks partly to the country’s wide range of climatic influences – from cold Arctic winds howling down the glens of northern Scotland, to the warm waters of the Gulf Stream lapping the beaches in southern Cornwall.

Some native plant and animal species are hidden away but it’s easy to spot undoubted gems, from woods carpeted in shimmering bluebells to a stately herd of red deer in the mountains. This wildlife is part of the fabric of Britain, and having a closer look as you walk will enhance your trip enormously.

Animals

When you’re walking through farmland and woodland areas, you’ll easily spot small birds such as the robin, with its red breast and cheerful whistle, and the yellowhammer, with its ‘little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese’ song. You might also hear the warbling cry of a skylark as it

For in-depth information on the nation’s flora and fauna, www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk is a comprehensive, accessible, interactive, award-winning site.

LINE OF DUTY

A particularly important aspect of responsible walking in Britain concerns rights of way, meaning you can cross private land, as long as you keep to the path (for more details see p448). It's the duty of walkers not to deviate from the right of way and to do no damage. If a right of way is obstructed, you can remove enough of the impediment to pass. Sometimes, though, a right of way may go straight across a field sown with crops. In such cases you can go legally (but carefully) through the crops, but discretion is advised and it is usually more responsible to walk round the edge of the field.

Considering the size of Britain, in practice there are surprisingly few rules and regulations. Mostly it comes down to common sense. If there's no stile and you have to climb over a wall to cross a field, chances are you shouldn't be there.

Away from cultivated areas, up on mountains and moorlands, paths can get very boggy and walkers often seek the drier ground on the edge of the path, gradually making it wider and exposing soil or peat and damaging sensitive vegetation. The advice here is to stick to the path rather than widen it, even if it means getting your boots dirty. In some other areas, however, walkers are encouraged *not* to keep to a single line, to spread the load and avoid creating lines of bare earth through the grass. In the area around Hadrian's Wall, for example, notice boards specifically ask people to walk side by side since keeping a solid cover of vegetation means archaeological remains are better protected.

flutters high over the fields – a classic, but now threatened, sound of the British countryside.

Between the fields, hedges provide cover for flocks of finches, but these seed-eaters must watch out for the sparrowhawk – a bird of prey that comes from nowhere at tremendous speed. Other aerial predators include the barn owl, a wonderful sight as it flies silently along hedgerows listening for the faint rustle of a mouse, or other mouse-like creatures such as a vole or shrew. In rural Wales or Scotland you may see a buzzard, Britain's most common large raptor.

Also in fields, look out for the increasingly rare brown hare; it's related to the rabbit but is much larger, with longer legs and ears. Males who battle for territory in early spring are, of course, as 'mad as a March hare'.

A classic British mammal is the red fox. As you walk though the countryside – especially towards dusk – you may see one, but these wily beasts adapt well to any situation, so you're just as likely to see them scavenging in towns and even in city suburbs. A controversial law banning the hunting of foxes with dogs was introduced in 2005, but it's too early to see what impact this has had on population numbers.

Another well-known British mammal is the black-and-white-striped badger. This animal is nocturnal so you'll probably only see its large burrows when you're walking in lowland areas, but if you're driving at night you might catch sight of 'old Brock' in your headlights. Some farmers believe badgers spread tuberculosis to cattle, although the evidence is inconclusive, and the debate rumbles on between the agricultural and environmental lobbies.

In woodland areas, mammals include the small, white-spotted fallow deer and the even smaller roe deer. They're timid, so you're only likely to see them if you're walking along very quietly. Also in woodland, if you hear rustling among the fallen leaves it might be a hedgehog – a cute, spiny-backed insect-eater – though it's an increasingly rare sound these days. Conservationists predict that hedgehogs will be extinct in Britain by 2025,

(Continued on page 45)

(Continued from page 32)

possibly thanks to increased building in rural areas, the use of insecticides in farming and the changing nature of both the countryside and the city parks and gardens that once made up the hedgehog's traditional habitat.

In the trees, you're much more likely to see a grey squirrel. This species was introduced from North America and has proved so adaptable that the native British red squirrel is severely endangered (see the boxed text, below). Much larger than squirrels is the pine marten, which is seen in some forested regions, especially in Scotland. With a beautiful brown coat, it was once hunted for its fur but is now fully protected.

Out of the trees and up in the moors, birds you might see include the red grouse, a popular 'game bird', and the curlew, with its elegant curved bill. Also in the moorland, as well as some lower farmed areas, the golden plover is beautifully camouflaged so you have to look hard. But you can't miss its cousin, the lapwing, often showing off with its spectacular aerial displays, although unfortunately it's one of Britain's fastest-declining species – conservationists are making efforts to maintain the well-watered upland farm habitat it needs to survive.

The most visible moorland mammal is the red deer. Herds survive on Exmoor and Dartmoor, in the Lake District and in larger numbers in Scotland. The males are most spectacular after June, when their antlers have grown ready for the rutting season. The stags keep their antlers through the winter and then shed them again in February. (For information on hunting deer with guns, as opposed to with dogs, in Scotland, and how this impacts walkers, see the boxed text, p388.)

Birds you may see when walking in mountain areas include the red kite (in Wales there has been a successful project to reintroduce this spectacular fork-tailed raptor), while on the high peaks of Scotland you may see the grouse's northern cousin, the ptarmigan, dappled brown in the summer but white in the winter. Also in the Scottish mountains, keep an eye peeled for the golden eagle, Britain's largest bird of prey.

If you're walking near rivers, look along the banks for signs of the water vole, an endearing rodent also called a 'water rat' (and the inspiration for Ratty in *Wind in the Willows*). It was once common but has been all but wiped out by wild mink (introduced from America to stock fur farms).

SEEING RED

The red squirrel was once a common species in many parts of woodland Britain, but it's now one of the country's most endangered mammals. Where they once numbered in the millions, populations have declined significantly over the last 60 years to about 150,000 – confined mainly to Scotland, with isolated groups in the Lake District, Norfolk and the Isle of Wight – and the simple reason for this is the arrival of larger grey squirrels from North America.

The problem isn't grey squirrels attacking their red cousins; the problem is food. Greys can eat hazelnuts and acorns when they're still tough, whereas reds can only eat these nuts when they're soft and ripe. So the greys get in first, and there's little left over for the reds. So thorough are the greys that once they arrive in an area the reds are usually gone within about 15 years.

One place where reds can do well is pine plantations, as they're more adept than greys at getting the seeds out of pine cones, but even this advantage is threatened as, in recent years, the indomitable and adaptable greys have started learning the technique.

The red squirrel fills an important ecological niche in Britain and is a legally protected species, with various national and local schemes in place to hopefully ensure its survival. Websites with more information include www.squirrelweb.co.uk and www.red-squirrels.org.uk.

Handy wildlife guides (*Trees, Birds, Wild Flowers, Insects* etc) are produced by the Wildlife Trusts (www.wildlifetrusts.org). The website is a great source of information, and proceeds from book sales support environmental campaigns.

Complete British Birds by Paul Sterry is full of excellent photographs and handy notes, ideal for identifying anything feathered you may see on your walk.

In contrast to water voles, the formerly rare otter is beginning to make a comeback after suffering from polluted water, habitat destruction and persecution by anglers. In southern Britain it inhabits the banks of rivers and lakes, and in Scotland it frequently lives on the coast. Although its numbers are growing, it's mainly nocturnal and hard to see, but keep alert and you might be lucky. Also near water, you have a chance of spotting an osprey, a magnificent fish-eating bird of prey; the Cairngorms are among best places in Britain for a sighting.

On the coasts of Britain, particularly in Cornwall, Pembrokeshire and northwest Scotland, the dramatic cliffs are a marvellous sight in early summer (around May), when they are home to hundreds of thousands of breeding sea birds. Guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes, among others, fight for space on impossibly crowded rock ledges. The sheer numbers of birds makes this one of Britain's finest wildlife spectacles, as the cliffs become white with droppings and the air is filled with their shrill calls.

Another bird to look out for in coastal areas is the comical puffin (especially common in Orkney and Shetland), with its distinctive rainbow beak and underground nests burrowed in sandy soil. In total contrast, the perfectly designed gannet is one of Britain's largest sea birds, most spectacular when it makes dramatic dives for fish, often from a great height.

And, finally, the sea mammals. Two species of seal frequent British coasts, with the larger grey seal more often seen than the (misnamed) common seal. Walking along the cliff-top paths in Cornwall, Pembrokeshire and particularly Scotland, you may see dolphins and porpoises, and even minke whales. With luck you may also spot basking sharks, especially from May to September when viewing conditions are best. For more reliable sightings it might be best to combine your walking with a wildlife-watching boat trip – we mention where this is possible in the walk descriptions throughout this book.

Plants

In any part of Britain, the best places to see wildflowers are in areas that have evaded large-scale farming. For example, in April and May some grazing fields erupt with great profusions of cowslips and primroses in the chalky hill country of the South Downs and Wiltshire Downs in southern England – crossed by the South Downs Way (p123) and the Ridgeway (p83) – and in limestone areas such as the Peak District (p151) and Yorkshire Dales (p165) in northern England.

Some flowers prefer woodland, and the best time to visit these areas is also April and May. This is because the leaf canopy of the woods hasn't at that time fully developed, allowing sunlight to break through to encourage plants such as bluebell – a beautiful and internationally rare species.

Another classic British plant is gorse – you can't miss the swathes of this spiky bush in sandy heathland areas, most notably in the New Forest in southern England. Legend says that it's the season for kissing when gorse blooms; luckily, its vivid yellow flowers show year-round.

In contrast, the blooming season is quite short – though spectacular – for heather, a low, woody bush found mainly on moors. On the Scottish mountains, the Pennines of northern England and Dartmoor in the south, the hill tops are covered in a riot of purple in August and September.

Britain's natural deciduous trees include oak, ash, hazel and rowan, with seeds and leaves supporting a vast range of insects and birds. The New Forest in southern England and the Forest of Dean on the Wales–England border are good examples of this type of habitat. In some parts of Scotland, stands of indigenous Caledonian pine can still be seen. As you

Complete Guide to British Wildlife by Norman Arlott, Richard Fitter and Alastair Fitter is a highly recommended single volume ideal for walkers, covering mammals, birds, fish, plants, snakes, insects and even fungi.

travel through Britain you're also likely to see non-native pines, standing in dark plantations devoid of wildlife. Thankfully for Britain's wildlife (and for walkers who like to see birds, plants and animals), large-scale conifer planting is on the decline, and an increasing number of deciduous trees are being planted instead.

NATIONAL PARKS

Way back in 1810, famous poet and walker William Wordsworth suggested that the Lake District should be 'a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy'. But it took more than a century for the Lake District to become a national park and it was very different from the 'sort of national property' Wordsworth envisaged.

Other national parks in Britain are the Brecon Beacons, Cairngorms, Dartmoor, Exmoor, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, New Forest, Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, Northumberland, North York Moors, Peak District, Pembrokeshire Coast, Snowdonia and Yorkshire Dales. A new park, the South Downs in southern England, was in the process of being created at the time of research. In this book we describe a range of walks – long and short – in most of these areas.

Combined, Britain's national parks now cover more than 10% of the country. It's an impressive total, but the term 'national park' can cause confusion. First, these areas are not state-owned: nearly all land is private, belonging to farmers, companies, estates and conservation organisations. (Just to increase the confusion, large sections of several national parks are owned by the National Trust but, despite the similar name, this private charity has no direct link with the national park administrative authorities.) Second, Britain's national parks are not total wilderness areas, as in many other countries. In Britain's national parks you'll see roads, railways, villages and even towns. Development is strictly controlled, but about 250,000 people live and work inside national park boundaries. Some of them work in industries such as quarrying, which ironically does great damage to these supposedly protected landscapes. On the flip side, these industries provide vital jobs (although sometimes for people outside the park), and several wildlife reserves have been established on former quarry sites.

But don't despair! Despite these apparent anomalies, national parks still contain vast tracts of wild mountains and moorland, rolling downs and river valleys and other areas of quiet countryside, all ideal for long walks, easy rambles, or just lounging around. They are still among the most scenic areas of Britain, but being aware of their actual status will lessen the surprise for some visitors, especially if you're used to places like Yellowstone or Kakadu. To help you get the best from Britain's national parks, there are information centres, and all provide various recreational facilities (trails, car parks, camp sites etc) for visitors.

The current number of visits to British national parks is more than 100 million every year. That's a lot of footsteps – though many visitors don't get far beyond the car park. Some conservationists believe national parks are counterproductive, claiming that giving an area a precise name and boundaries creates an increase in visitors, putting unsustainable pressure on the land and local resources. It seems there's never an easy solution.

It's also worth noting that there are many beautiful parts of Britain that are *not* national parks (such as the Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales, the North Pennines in England and many parts of Scotland). These can be just as good for exploring on foot, and – as the anti-park conservationists point out – are often less crowded than the national parks.

The Woodland Trust (www.woodland-trust.org.uk) buys and conserves woods and forests all over Britain – and allows walkers free access to many of them.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (www.rspb.org.uk) runs more than 100 bird reserves across the UK.

Other Protected Areas

As you enjoy your walking in Britain, you'll undoubtedly pass through protected areas other than national parks – most are identified by a bewildering array of acronyms. First up are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), the second tier of protection for landscapes in England and Wales, all of which have excellent walking opportunities. There are about 40 such areas – including famous regions such as the Cotswold Hills (crossed by the Cotswold Way, p109) and less-known parts of the country such as the Solway Firth, a tranquil part of north Cumbria crossed by Hadrian's Wall Path (p213).

In Scotland, National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are usually sizeable areas, more or less wild, or at least uninhabited. These reserves are owned or leased by Scottish Natural Heritage, or by conservation organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and National Trust for Scotland. For walkers, some of the finest NNRs are Beinn Eighe (p393) and Creag Meagaidh (p396). Others include Hermaness (Shetland), Ben Lawers (Central Highlands), Glen Affric in the Highlands and Loch Lomond. There's also a vast NNR within Cairngorms National Park. Most NNRs are readily accessible, and the most popular reserves offer ranger-led guided walks.

Another protected area popular with walkers is a Heritage Coast. Once again, the clue's in the name – these are particularly scenic or environmentally important areas of coastline. You'll also encounter Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), protecting the most important areas of wildlife habitat and geological formation in Britain; Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs); and Countryside Stewardship Schemes (CSSS), which are intended to help farmers protect or manage their land in a more environmentally positive manner.

Conspiracy theorists claim that the sheer number of protected areas and governmental organisations charged with environmental protection is a deliberate move to prevent any one body becoming too powerful. Whether this is true or not, there are two important points to remember:

BRITAIN'S WORLD HERITAGE

Some areas in Britain have been declared World Heritage Sites – places of great environmental or cultural significance. There are around 700 sites globally, of which about 20 are in Britain. Those on or near walking routes described in this book include:

- The Georgian city of **Bath** – at the start of the Cotswold Way (p109)
- The mills of the **Derwent Valley** – near the start of the Limestone Way (p158)
- **Hadrian's Wall** – followed in its entirety by Hadrian's Wall Path (p213)
The stone circles of **Stonehenge** and **Avebury** – the latter near the start of the Ridgeway (p83)
- The castles of **Caernarfon**, **Conwy**, **Beaumaris** and **Harlech** – near the mountains of Snowdonia (p308)
- **Cornwall's** coastal mining heritage and the **Dorset and East Devon coast** – both followed by the South West Coast Path (p133)
The maritime sites of **Greenwich**, the **Royal Botanic Gardens** in Kew, the **Tower of London**, and **Westminster Palace** and **Westminster Abbey** – all passed on the Thames Path (p64)

For more details see www.culture.gov.uk, following the Tourism and Leisure link to 'historic environment'.

Wildlife Walks, edited by Malcolm Tait (with a foreword by the nation's favourite ecologist, David Bellamy), suggests days out in more than 500 wildlife reserves across the country.

THE ANSWER IS BLOWING IN THE WIND

As we go through the early years of the 21st century, renewable energy – most notably in the form of wind turbines – is a major environmental issue in Britain. Of course, these giant towers (and accompanying lines of transmission pylons) ideally need to be sited in high areas away from habitation – just the kind of areas that walkers and conservationists would like to see untouched. Plans to establish vast banks (or 'farms') of wind turbines in areas of outstanding scenery, such as Mid Wales and much of Scotland, have generally been opposed, but the debate is far from over, and demand for energy shows no sign of ebbing. Meantime, walkers still blithely jump into cars and drive considerable distances in pursuit of their hobby. Since public transport services have improved in recent times, perhaps we should all slow down, use less energy at an individual level and think about the future.

like national parks, most protected areas consist of privately owned land; and these special designations do not normally affect rights of way – where they exist, you can use them without worry.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

With Britain's long history of human occupation, it's not surprising that the landscape's appearance is almost totally the result of people's interactions with the environment. Ever since Neolithic farmers learnt how to make axes, trees have been cleared so that crops could be planted – a trend that has continued into our own time. In Scotland particularly, the Clearances of the 18th century meant that poor tenant farmers were moved off the land by powerful estate owners to make room for sheep, and these animals nibbled to death any saplings brave enough to try growing on the mountainsides. Today, the Highlands is undoubtedly a wilderness, devoid of human habitation in many areas, and a place of rugged beauty, but don't be under any impression that it's 'natural' or 'unspoilt'.

The most dramatic environmental changes hit rural areas of Britain after WWII, especially in England, when a drive to be self-reliant in food meant new farming methods. This changed the landscape from a patchwork of small fields to a scene of vast prairies as walls were demolished, trees felled, ponds filled, wetlands drained and, most notably, hedgerows ripped out.

For many centuries, these hedgerows had formed a network of dense bushes, shrubs and trees that stretched across the countryside protecting fields from erosion, supporting a varied range of flowers and providing shelter for numerous insects, birds and small mammals. But in the post-war rush to improve farm yields, thousands of miles of hedgerow were destroyed. The destruction continued into our own time; from 1984 to 2002 another 25% disappeared. Some remain though, and as you walk through areas such as the Cotswolds or the dales of Derbyshire you'll still see examples of great British hedgerows. A 2006 report from the Countryside Agency indicates that hedgerow destruction has virtually ended, partly because farmers are now encouraged to set aside hedges and other uncultivated areas as havens for wildlife.

Of course, environmental issues are not exclusive to rural areas. In Britain's towns and cities, topics such as air pollution, light pollution, levels of car use, road building, airport construction, public transport provision and household-waste recycling are never far from the political agenda, although some might say they're not near enough to the top of the list. Ironically, Britain's new 'hedgerows' are motorway verges.

The National Trust (www.nationaltrust.org.uk) is one of Britain's major conservation charities and a major landowner, with estates, wilderness areas, parks and woods all over England and Wales, plus about 600 miles of coastline.

Totalling almost 30,000 hectares, these long strips of grass and bushes support many rare plant species, insects and small mammals – that's why kestrels are often seen hovering nearby.

Meanwhile, back in rural Britain, hot environmental issues include farming methods such as irrigation, monocropping and pesticide use. Environmentalists say the results of these unsustainable methods are rivers running dry, fish poisoned by run off, and fields with one type of grass and not another plant to be seen. These 'green deserts' support no insects, which in turn means populations of some wild bird species dropped by an incredible 70% from 1970 to 1990. This is not a case of old, wizened peasants recalling the idyllic days of their forebears; you only have to be over 30 in Britain to remember a countryside where birds such as skylarks or lapwings were visibly much more numerous.

But all is not lost. In the face of apparently overwhelming odds, Britain still boasts great biodiversity, and some of the best wildlife habitats are protected to a greater or lesser extent, thanks to the creation of national parks and similar conservation zones – often within areas privately owned by conservation campaign groups such as the Woodland Trust, National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Many of these areas are open to the public, and are ideal spots for walking, bird-watching or simply enjoying the peace and beauty of the countryside.

Also on the plus side, and especially important for an island such as Britain, sea protection is better than it's ever been – a definite plus for walkers as so many excellent routes, such as the Pembrokeshire Coast Path and the South West Coast Path, follow the shoreline, sometimes along beaches, and at other times striding across dramatic cliffs. Major efforts have been made to stem the flow of sewage into the sea, and while oil spills still occur, the clean-up process is quick and efficient. While some coastal areas may still be dirty and polluted, there are many other areas (around southwestern England and much of Wales and Scotland, for example) where the water is clear and many popular holiday beaches are proud holders of 'blue flag' awards. These awards show they meet international standards of cleanliness – on the sand and in the waves. The wild birds, dolphins and whales like clean water, the tourists are happy, the locals make some money and the scenery is stunning for walkers and everyone else to enjoy. It's a win-win-win situation!

The National Trust for Scotland (www.nts.org.uk) has similar objectives to its namesake south of the border, concentrating on buildings and large estates such as Glencoe and Torridon.

The John Muir Trust (www.jmt.org) owns several large estates, including Ben Nevis and three on Skye, and is committed to protecting and conserving wild places in Scotland.

DO WALKERS SHIT IN THE WOODS?

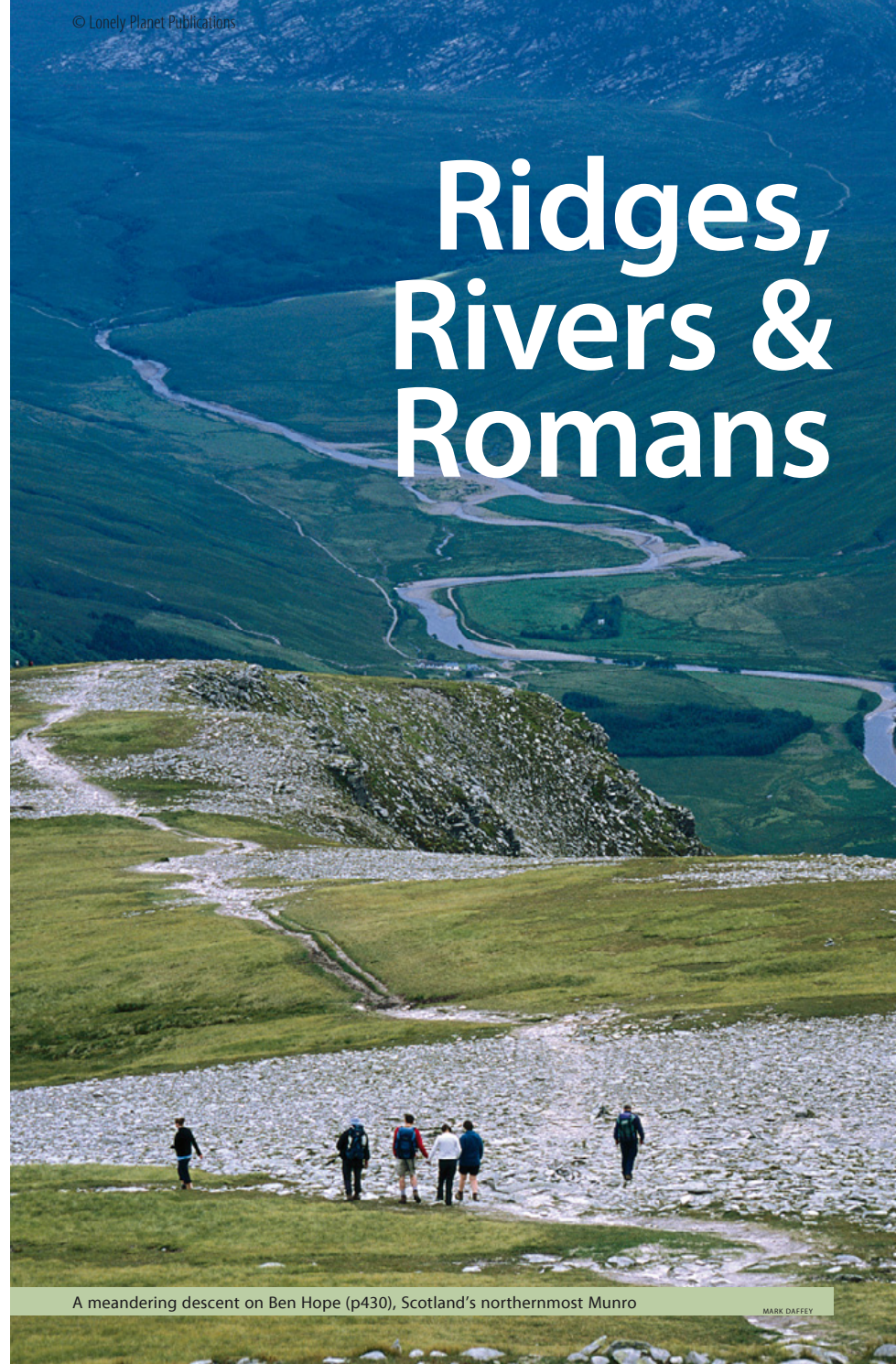
Yes – quite often. So it is something that has to be discussed and not coyly skirted around.

Ideally, when out walking you should use public toilets where provided, but sometimes that's just not possible, so if you have to 'go' in the great outdoors, please do it responsibly. Defecate at least 100m away from water, paths and camp sites; dig a hole and bury your excrement if possible – it will break down in the soil. The hole should be deep enough (around 15cm) to prevent animals from being attracted by the smell and digging it up – which can spread disease. Do *not* simply cover excrement with a stone. If you really can't bury it, it is better out in the sun, where it breaks down more quickly.

Bury toilet paper (biodegradable paper is good for this) or, ideally, carry it out in a bag and dispose of it properly. Tampons and sanitary pads should always be carried out. A sealable plastic bag (nappy sacks are ideal) inside a supermarket carrier bag keeps things safe and out of sight.

After all this malarkey, don't forget to wash your hands! But, please, *not* in a river or stream. Collect some water in a cup and wash your hands away from the waterway. Packs of moist tissues are useful – but carry these out too.

Ridges, Rivers & Romans



A meandering descent on Ben Hope (p430), Scotland's northernmost Munro



BRITAIN BOASTS MANY THOUSANDS OF MILES OF FOOTPATHS

The fertile Long Man of Wilmington (p132), seen along the South Downs Way

DAVID TOMLINSON



Stonehenge

DAVID RYAN



Housesteads Fort (p225), Hadrian's Wall

VERONICA GARBUTT

On a map of the world Britain appears small, but this island boasts a spectacular and varied landscape. From the rolling whaleback hills of Dartmoor to the airy mountain peaks of Snowdonia, this is a country tailor-made for walkers. In the space of a few days, or even a few hours, you can walk along cliff tops overlooking the sea, trot across moors with only the sound of the breeze for company, and scramble up to rocky summits with views in all directions.

Britain boasts many thousands of miles of footpaths, a network that can take you rambling through picturesque Cumbrian villages or striding along remote Scottish glens. In addition, there are vast areas of mountain and moorland where you can leave the paths and explore the wilderness as much and as far as you like.

The only possible downside to this wonderful variety is deciding where to go. We hope this chapter will help. Instead of dividing walking routes into geographical areas, we've divided them into themes: Walking through History, Flora & Fauna, City Escapes, Mountain Challenges and Rugged but Reachable. Of course, there are some overlaps – the Thames Path, for example, is rich in history *and* a great place to spot watery wildlife – but we hope this gives you a few pointers when you're planning your trip.

As well as the walks and areas covered in detail by this book, we also suggest a few places off the beaten track that you can go and discover for yourself. With a map, a backpack and a sense of adventure (and sense of direction!), the rest is up to you.

WALKING THROUGH HISTORY

Britain may be a small island on the edge of Europe, but it was never on the sidelines of history. For thousands of years, invaders and incomers have arrived, settled and made their mark. The result is Britain's fascinating mix of landscapes, cultures and historic sites – and walking through Britain is one of the best ways of seeing them.

Perhaps Britain's best-known historic sites are Stonehenge, a circle of menhirs on windswept Salisbury Plain, and the nearby, larger, stone circle at Avebury. In the surrounding area are many more relics from past eras: 5000-year-old Bronze Age burial mounds, Iron Age forts and mysterious figures carved in the chalk – even a place where horses will be magically re-shod overnight. And you can see them all on the Ridgeway (p83), where hikers follow the footsteps of the ancient people who walked this route many millennia ago.

Jump forward a few centuries and you reach another famous historic site: Hadrian's Wall, a battlement stretching 75 miles across the country, built by the Romans in the 2nd century AD to mark the edge of their great empire – and to keep out rowdy Scots. Despite the passing of almost 2000 years, much of Hadrian's Wall has survived the ages remarkably well and, with various forts, turrets and castles, it's protected as a World Heritage Site. It's also followed by the Hadrian's Wall Path (p213), a week-long national trail that's fast becoming one of the most popular in Britain.

For another border walk, you could follow Offa's Dyke Path (p333), a national trail based on a defensive ditch or 'earthwork' constructed in the 8th century by King Offa, ruler of



Barn owl (p32)

DAVID TIPLING

Puffin (p46)

DAVID TIPLING

Mercia, to mark the boundary between his kingdom and Celtic stronghold of Wales, and – you guessed it – to keep out the rowdy Welsh. Even today, though only 80 miles of the dyke remains, the modern Wales–England border roughly follows its line. The Offa’s Dyke Path crosses and recrosses that border around 30 times, passing castles and battlefields, and heading through Welsh and English villages that are notably different in character, even though they may be just a few miles apart.

Other walks with a historic theme include the Thames Path (p64 and p88), the definitive walk through the annals of England, from Roman remains near the source in the Cotswolds, to Windsor Castle and the giant wheel of the London Eye, a monument to the second millennium. Then there’s the Pembrokeshire Coast Path (p291), especially around St David’s; the Clarendon Way (p74) between the cathedrals of Winchester and Salisbury; the valley of Glen Coe (p369); the Pilgrim’s Way to Canterbury (see North Downs Way on p70); and just about anywhere on the southern edge of Dartmoor (p97), where you can hardly walk without tripping over a medieval marker stone, a Bronze Age village or granite blocks originally destined for London Bridge.

FLORA & FAUNA

Britain’s varied landscape means a surprisingly diverse range of plants and animals, although you won’t find vast deserts or wild beasts such as bears here, as you might when hiking elsewhere in the world – but, then, that’s a major plus for walkers...

Some of Britain’s most spectacular walks follow the coastline – a dramatic melee of high cliffs, sandy beaches, wave-cut rocky platforms, tidal flats, marshes and estuaries – and this

is also one of the finest places to spot wildlife, especially during spring and early summer (March to June) when they are home to thousands of breeding sea birds. Guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes fight for space on impossibly crowded rock ledges, while comical puffins with their distinctive rainbow beaks burrow into sandy banks to make their nests. Up above, gannets are one of Britain’s largest sea birds, making dramatic dives for fish. These avian delights can all be seen on Britain’s two finest long-distance seaside routes, the Pembrokeshire Coast Path (p291) and the South West Coast Path (p133), and on many of the coastal walks in Scotland’s Western Highlands (p384) and around islands such as Skye (p398), Arran (p353) and the salt-splashed northern outliers of Orkney and Shetland (p430). In the water itself you’ll see seals bobbing around, and with a keen eye you’ll spot dolphins and even sharks.

Inland, many of Britain’s best walking routes take you through meadows and farmland, where fields that escape artificial fertilizers and pesticides come alive with wildflowers – especially in spring and summer. In places such as the Cotswolds (p107), look out for the fairy-tale-named cowslips, primroses and buttercups. These flowers also grow in areas such as the Yorkshire Dales (p165) and the limestone valleys of the Peak District (p151), alongside several species of orchid.

Britain may not have rainforest or jungle, but it does have some beautiful swathes of woodland. The Centenary Walk (p59) winds through Epping Forest, a surprisingly sylvan outing so close to London’s outskirts, while there are lovely patches of tree-shaded walking along the Cleveland Way (p252), Wye Valley Walk (p341) and North Downs Way (p70).

Heather (p253) in bloom

GREG GAWLOWSKI

Bluebells in beech woodland

DAVID TIPLING





Tryfan's north ridge (p315)

DAVID ELSE

Other areas great for wildlife walking include Norfolk (p71), where the coast has some of Britain's best bird reserves, while the meadows around the inland waterways of the Broads are rich in flowers and butterflies.

CITY ESCAPES

When you're walking through the wilds of Scotland, or the mountains of Mid Wales, you wouldn't think for a moment that Britain is a heavily urbanised nation. Even following the Pennine Way, as it snakes along the high moors separating Manchester and Leeds, you can be less than an hour from city streets while enjoying clean air, wide views and good paths though fabulous open countryside.

So turn this to your advantage. Whether you're a visitor from overseas or just looking for a weekend break from work, there are many great walking options within easy striking distance of the major cities.

Let's start with London. The Thames Path (p64 and p88) is on the doorstep, of course, so why not catch a train upstream then spend a day or two (or longer) walking back home? Or

TOP FIVES

Still can't decide where to go? Here's a no-prisoners list of our favourite walking destinations in Britain. You may disagree, and that's fine – as long as you've been to all the other places first.

Mountains

- Beinn Alligin (p390)
- Buachaille Etive Mór (p370)
- Pen-y-Ghent (p172)
- Scafell Pike (p197)
- Tryfan (p315)

Flora & Fauna

- The Cotswolds (p107)
- Isle of Skye (p398)
- Norfolk (p71)
- The Pembrokeshire Coast Path (p291)
- The Yorkshire Dales (p165)

City Escapes

- Cardiff to the Brecon Beacons (p281)
- Glasgow to Ben Lomond (p347)
- Liverpool to Snowdonia (p308)
- London to Corrou and the Road to the Isles (p365)
- Manchester to the Pennines (p261)

sample the great chalky hills of the South Downs, offering one-day strolls or longer walks along the South Downs Way (p123), a roller-coaster hike from Winchester to the sea. The nearby Clarendon Way (p74) is also perfect for a weekend getaway. In the other direction sit Norfolk and Suffolk (p71), with plenty of relaxing rambles.

Good train services mean you can strike out further. A long weekend in the Brecon Beacons (p281) is eminently possible for Londoners, although these great rolling hills and deep corries are more easily reached from Cardiff, the Welsh capital. For a real sense of changing places, from London you can get an overnight train to Scotland, wake up to the sight of scenic glens, and get off at remote Corrou, heading into the wilds on the Road to the Isles (p365) straight from the station platform.

From the northwestern cities of Liverpool or Manchester you can easily reach the Pennines, the 'backbone of England'. Or get a bit organised, make an early start, and by mid-morning you can be striding up Snowdon (p311) or another fine peak in North Wales.

From the West Country gateways of Bath and Bristol you can easily reach the Cotswolds (p107), or simply follow the Kennet & Avon Canal Path (p80). Further north, the cities of Carlisle and Newcastle-upon-Tyne are good jumping-off points for walks along Hadrian's Wall (p213), through the stark and beautiful hills of the North Pennines (p261) or across the empty, big-sky landscape of the Cheviot Hills (p234).

Then, of course, there are the northern centres of Edinburgh and Glasgow, from where the walkers' paradise of Scotland lies within reach. It's a mere hop to the glens and peaks around famous Loch Lomond (p346), or to Arran (p353), the island billed as 'Scotland in miniature', with several great and varied choices for walkers. With a skip and a jump you could be in the Southern Uplands (p408), or stepping off the train in Fort William and heading up Ben Nevis (p360), or alighting in the fine port town of Oban and catching the ferry across to Mull (p431).

Standing stones below Goatfell (p354) on the Isle of Arran

GRAEME CORNWALLIS



YOU WOULDN'T THINK FOR A
MOMENT THAT BRITAIN IS A
HEAVILY URBANISED NATION



Dawn mist wrapped around Glen Coe's mighty Buachaille Etive Mór (p370).

GARETH MCCORMACK

MOUNTAIN CHALLENGES

Britain has plenty of options for strollers, and those who like to tie in walks with a relaxed pub lunch, but if you like to get high on the big hills and work up a sweat with a serious outing, there's a massive choice as well.

Post box and mountains, Great Langdale (p205), Lake District

DAVID TOMLINSON



A great place to start is the Lake District, the heart and soul of walking in England. To reach the summit of Scafell, England's highest peak, we describe a classic route (p197), plus a longer alternative taking in neighbouring peaks; it's a walk that'll take your breath away – in more ways than one. On Helvellyn (p192), another major Lakeland mountain, the walk up and down is stiff enough, especially if you enjoy the scramble along the narrow ridge of Striding Edge, but for a really good long day out you can extend the loop, taking the alternative route over the summits of neighbouring Dollywaggon Pike and Fairfield. Or head north, over Helvellyn and along a broad ridge to Great Dodd and Stybarrow Dodd (p210) – a stunning route known as the 'Backbone of the Eastern Fells'. And if all that still sounds like a stroll in the park, you

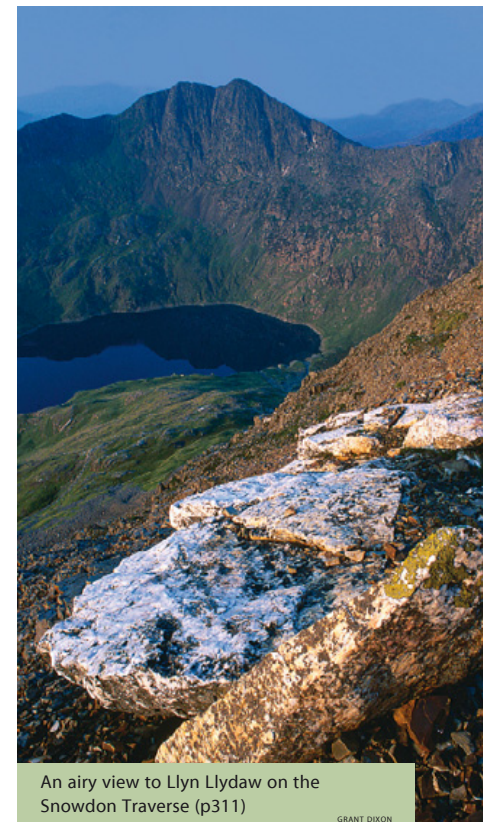
can start bagging the 214 separate summits known as 'Wainwrights' (see the boxed text, p188); some people take years to do it, others do the lot in a week. For an even more serious challenge, the Bob Graham Round (see www.bobgrahamround.co.uk) takes in 42 Lake District peaks, covering around 75 miles with a total ascent of more than 8700m, all within 24 hours. Some superhuman fell-runners do it in just over half that time.

For mere mortals, other mountain challenges include the famous Three Peaks of Yorkshire (p170), a 25-mile circular hike over the summits of Wharfedale, Ingleborough and Pen-y-ghent, that keen walkers try to do within 12 hours. In Wales, the Brecon Beacon Ridge Walk (p283) is a long enough walk, over the famous summits of Pen y Fan and Fan y Big ('fan' simply means 'peak' in Welsh), but can always be turned into a longer route by tying in peaks to the west, including Fan Frynich – a route known as the Fan Dance by soldiers who train in this area.

Also in Wales, the Snowdonia mountains offer more challenges. Many walkers aim for a traverse of Snowdon (p311), the country's highest peak, but a tougher challenge is the classic Snowdon Horseshoe, taking in the knife-edge ridge of Crib Goch, where a wrong step can send you plummeting down sheer cliffs. The neighbouring mountains of Tryfan ('three peaks'), Glyder Fawr and Glyder Fach are another great mountain challenge when done in one hit (see p315). For more fun and games, tie Snowdon, Tryfan and the Glyders together, or go for the best-known mountain challenge in the region, the Welsh Three-Thousanders (p321), summiting 15 peaks over 3000ft (914m) in less than 24 hours.

And then there's Scotland, where the mountain vistas go on for ever and the challenges are virtually endless as well. Classic summits include Ben Nevis (p360), the highest peak in the whole of Britain, and nearby sit the iconic mountains of Buachaille Etive Mór (p370) and Buachaille Etive Baeg – the 'great shepherd' and 'small shepherd' of Etive – overlooking Glen Coe. For yet more walks from base-town Fort William, head for the wilder ranges: the Mamores (p372) and Grey Corries (p373).

Further north, even greater challenges lie in the Cairngorms (p376), one of the country's most serious mountain ranges, equally renowned for its stunning beauty, remote atmosphere and fearsome weather. Come here for a taste of the tundra, especially in winter – although snow in high summer isn't unknown.



An airy view to Llyn Llydaw on the Snowdon Traverse (p311)

GRANT DIXON



Skye's Black Cuillin (p400) is a favourite with walkers and nimble scramblers

GARETH MCCORMACK

To the west is Skye (p398), dominated by the long, serrated ridge of the Black Cuillin. A classic route to the crest follows Bruach na Frìthe (p404), but for one of Britain's best-known mountain challenges you can go *along* the ridge, a very serious undertaking for only the most experienced high-level walkers with legs of steel and a head for heights, not to mention a rope and some rock-climbing knowledge.

In the Western Highlands the landscape is covered by peaks, many providing mountain challenges to satisfy even the most demanding walker. For starters, sample the Five Sisters of Kintail (p386), a classic line of summits overlooking Glen Shiel. In the Torridon area, Beinn Alligin (p390) is another classic, as are neighbouring Beinn Eighe (p393), Beinn Dearg and Liathach, a famously massive wall of a mountain festooned with pinnacles and buttresses.

Still hungry for more? Try an ascent of double-tiered Slioch (p393), rising majestically from the shores of Loch Maree; attack An Teallach (p397), another Scottish classic; or explore wild and rarely visited Glen Affric (p396). And still you're just skimming the surface. Perhaps it's time to get serious and start ticking off Munros (p349) – all the mountains in Scotland over 3000ft. There are 284 in total and, as with the Wainwrights and other groups of peaks with collective names, some people take a lifetime bagging them all, while others seem to saunter over them in a season. The record for a single 'round' of the Munros is less than seven weeks, but then we're back in the realm of superhumans again.

Perhaps it's time to get serious and start ticking off Munros... there are 284 in total

THE LONG WALKS

Where Nepal has the Annapurna Circuit and America has the Appalachian Trail, Britain has the Pennine Way and the Coast to Coast Walk – plus many other long-distance routes. They may not match their overseas cousins in length or altitude but the long walks of Britain certainly lack nothing in terms of scenery, variety, quality and – the big plus – feasibility. Most of the best-known routes are easily reached and can be done virtually on a whim, often in just two or three weeks, although others such as the South West Coast Path and Monarch's Way (both around 600 miles) may take up to eight.

The long routes are not necessarily hard – you can potter along at 10 miles per day, if you're not strapped for time. And most are not wilderness walks – they pass through villages with walker-friendly B&Bs and welcoming pubs. But as you settle into a long walk there's a very special enjoyment of travelling from place to place through the landscape.

Below is a short list of our favourite classic long walks. For an idea of other options, see the website of the **Long Distance Walkers Association** (www.ldwa.org.uk).

Walk	Distance	Duration	Page
The Coast to Coast Walk	191 miles (307.5km)	12 days	237
The Cotswold Way	102 miles (164km)	7 days	109
The Dales Way	84 miles (135km)	6 days	174
The Offa's Dyke Path	177.5 miles (285km)	12 days	333
The Pennine Way	255 miles (411km)	16 days	261
The South Downs Way	107 miles (172km)	8 days	123
The South West Coast Path	630 miles (1014km)	50-60 days	134
The Thames Path	173 miles (278km)	12 days	64 & 88
The West Highland Way	95 miles (153km)	7 days	418

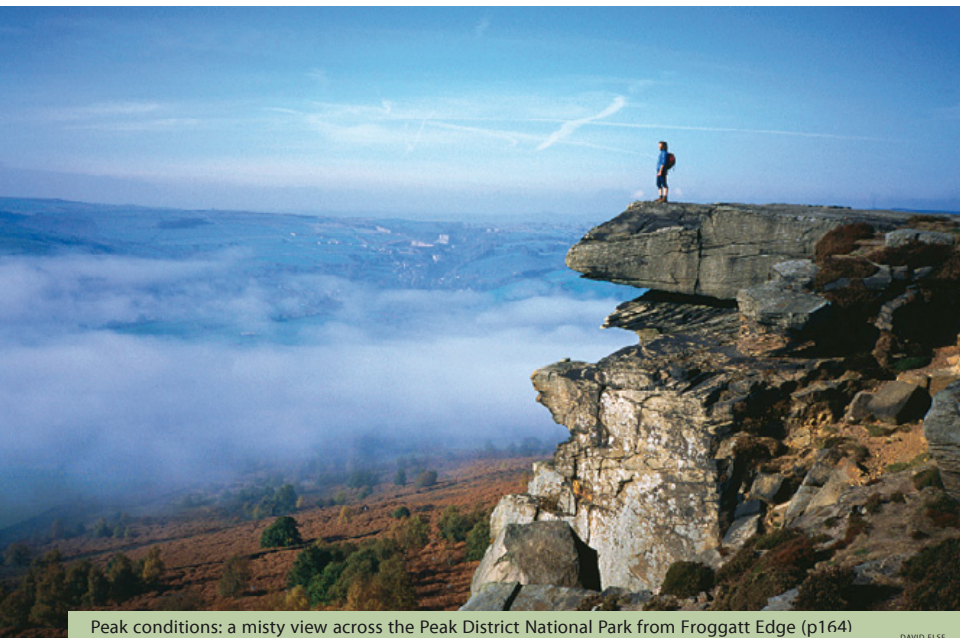


South West Coast Path (p133), Dorset

DAVID TOMLINSON

Peak District (p151) stile

DAVID ELSE



Peak conditions: a misty view across the Peak District National Park from Froggatt Edge (p164)

DAVID ELSE

RUGGED BUT REACHABLE

So if you're *not* looking for a mountain challenge but still want a flavour of Britain's more rugged landscapes, as well as cosy strolls through bucolic countryside, where can you go? Dartmoor (p97) is a great place to start; this vast expanse of wild grassland is ringed by towns and villages, offering relatively straightforward access to the high hills, Bronze Age remains and characteristic spiky rock tors.

In the Peak District, the Edale Skyline (p154) is no idle jaunt, but it gives a great taste of the wild Pennine moors, and you can still have a pint in the pub at lunchtime. For a mix of wild beaches and good pit stops, the Northumberland coast (p229) is ideal.

In Wales, head for the Preseli Hills (p304), an area rich in history and mystery, where paths are clear and the views across farmland, heath and seascape, simply divine. Or follow the Glyndŵr's Way (p324), a national trail through the heart of seldom-visited Mid Wales, walking over rolling, grassy mountains by day, and staying in friendly village inns by night.

Though Scotland is best known for its challenging walks, even non-hardcore walkers can experience its rugged landscape. A good starter is the ascent of Ben Lomond (p347), or coast walks on the easily reached islands of Arran (p353), Jura (p358) and Skye (p398). Further north, there's the steep-sided but surprisingly accessible Stac Pollaidh (p430). And, finally, out across the sea, you can delight in relatively easy options on the islands of Rum, Harris, Barra (p430), Orkney and Shetland (p430), forever tempting the walker as they bask in the glow of a rich Scottish sunset.

The Authors



DAVID ELSE

A full-time professional writer, David has authored more than 20 walking and travel guidebooks, including Lonely Planet's *England* and *Trekking in East Africa*. His knowledge of Britain comes from a lifetime of travel around the country – often on foot – a passion dating from university years, when heading for the hills was always more attractive than visiting the library. Originally from London, David slowly trekked northwards via Wiltshire, Bristol and Derbyshire (with periods of exile in Wales and Africa) to his present base in Yorkshire, close to the Peak District National Park – and once again he's often tempted from his desk by the view of the nearby hills.

My Favourite Walks

While researching this book, I revisited many of my favourite places in Britain. I remember the misty day I walked up the valley from Seathwaite in the Lake District, suddenly popping out above the cloud near Styhead Pass (p199), looking across to Scafell and other high peaks glowing in the light of the low autumn sun. Then there was that beautiful summer stroll along the Pembrokeshire Coast Path (p291) near St David's Head, where gorse-topped cliffs plunged down to shining sand and crystal-clear water. In sharp contrast, I enjoyed a wintry outing on Beinn Alligin (p390), cracking on to keep warm in the chill wind, but loving the endless views and solitude, and really earning that pie and pint back down in the pub.



LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.



SANDRA BARDWELL

When Sandra discovered a Scottish great-grandmother, she knew it must be in the genes. The first time she set eyes on the Highlands' hills, she felt she'd come home. When she settled beside Loch Ness, she flung herself into the hills, walked the glens, loch shores and coast with huge enthusiasm. This happened well into a lifetime of walking in wild, remote and not-so-remote places, mainly in Australia, and writing the odd bushwalking article and book there. With Lonely Planet she's explored some other wonderful European countries, but Scotland – and especially the Highlands, in their infinite variety and ever-changing beauty – are closest to her heart.



BELINDA DIXON

Living near Dartmoor and having developed a late – and to her friends baffling – interest in archaeology, Belinda can often be seen setting out, map in hand, to investigate stone rows and hut circles. That love of hiking and old bones also came in handy for Cotswold hillforts and Neolithic mortuary practices. Almost 20 years of living in southwestern England have given her an understanding and love of its ridges and moors, while years of guidebook writing have left her, despite all the efforts, thanking her lucky stars that you can actually get paid to do this.



PETER DRAGICEVICH

Peter's first taste of long-distance walking was a four-day *hiko* (a Maori protest/pilgrimage) in his native New Zealand/Aotearoa. Since then the walking's been mainly for pleasure, and the protests much shorter. During his dozen years in publishing he's written numerous travel features for newspapers and magazines, on subjects as varied as Welsh castles and gay life in Brighton. This is the fourth book he's co-authored for Lonely Planet.



DES HANNIGAN

Des has been exploring the Cornish coast, both onshore and offshore, by footpath and rock climb, for over 30 years. He lives in the tiny parish of Morvah (Cornish for 'by the sea') on the beautiful north coast of the Land's End Peninsula, where the South West Coast Path passes through one of its most scenic sections. Des has written several walking guides to various parts of Britain, as well as numerous general travel guides to such diverse places as the down-to-earth Netherlands and the high-in-the sky mountains of North Pakistan. He has worked on Lonely Planet's *Greece*, *Ireland*, *Spain* and *Denmark* guides.



BECKY OHLSEN

Becky has been walking since she was a small child, but had no idea until a few years ago that it could be used as a means of getting from one pub to another. Most of her hiking time has been spent in the largely pub-free forests of Colorado and Oregon. She has also completed some hilly treks in Switzerland and northern Sweden. After covering three of Britain's long-distance national trails, she is permanently hooked on the white acorn.



SIMON RICHMOND

Travel writer, photographer and hiking enthusiast Simon Richmond has slung on his backpack and laced up his boots for walks on five continents. Among many projects for Lonely Planet he's covered walks in Australia's Blue Mountains, traipsed up an active volcano in Kamchatka, sweated it out in Malaysia's jungles and puffed his way across Table Mountain in Cape Town. Despite the inevitable rain, covering both the Coast to Coast and Pennine Way routes was an ideal way to spend an August.