

# Fifteen tips for long-distance walkers

## Accommodation

Before you book accommodation on a multi-day hike, ask where is the best place to leave your planned route. Also ask if there's an early breakfast option, especially if you may be short of daylight hours: the answer is often yes if the booking seems to depend on it.

## Blisters

Carry blister protection such as Compeed or Second skin: even if you don't need it, you may make a friend for life when you meet somebody who does.

## Distances and daylight

Plan distances cautiously, especially when daylight hours are a concern. If you assume you will average 2.5 mph/4 kph you will often get a pleasant surprise and seldom be caught out. Before going hiking at an unfamiliar latitude, find out the times of sunrise and sunset from [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com).

## Drinking water

Staying well hydrated is literally vital when hiking, even more so in hot weather, when carrying heavy loads and at altitude. Water weighs 1 kg per litre (1.25 pounds per pint) so it's also heavy. Avoid single-use plastic water bottles. In addition to water bottles or a bladder of suitable size, consider carrying a filter or tablets so you can purify water en route. This can save weight and works well as backup.

## Emergency

Carry both a whistle and headtorch/flashlight, keep it accessible and know the emergency signals: in the UK this is six blasts of whistle or six flashes of torch, then wait one minute, then repeat. A response of three blasts/flashes means your signal has been noticed, but keep signalling until you are certain that you've been located. See also Mountain Rescue.

## Environment

This isn't just about taking your litter home, leaving no trace and avoiding noise pollution. It's also about using public transport and active travel wherever possible.

## Feet and socks

Take care of your feet at all costs: carry a spare pair of socks, and if possible change them at lunchtime – a treat to look forward to! Also ensure your socks fit snugly and if the seams bother you, try wearing socks inside out. Ensure socks are made of a suitable material and weight for the conditions: merino wool is very flexible.

## First aid

Be realistic: there is no point in carrying a large first aid kit unless you have enough training to know how to use it. Completing a basic first aid course could also prove very valuable in other aspects of your life.

## Mountain Rescue

In the UK, report an accident or emergency by dialling 999 or 112, and ask for Police, then Mountain Rescue (or Coastguard if appropriate). Be ready to state the problem, the number of people and the location. If you have a smartphone, download OS Locate (free app that gives your exact location) so that rescue services don't waste time and effort.

## Navigation

GPS isn't an alternative to paper maps, but can be a great backup as long as you have a suitable app, look after your battery and understand its limitations. Paper maps can be difficult to manage in high wind: take the card cover off and refold! No amount of kit can compensate for a lack of navigation skills: going on a course may be a life-saver.

## Plans

Leave word of your plans and estimated return time and be sure to check in once back safe. This is important not only to ensure that you are found faster in an emergency, it is also vital to avoid wasting the time and resources of rescue services who might otherwise be looking in the wrong place or for somebody who no longer needs help.

## Smartphone/cellphone

Even if your smartphone is waterproof **and** you carry a spare powerbank, it is a backup, not your main safety device. It is possible to break or lose a phone, and in areas where there is no signal it is useless – other than as a GPS device. If you use your phone a lot, conserve battery and carry a powerbank and visit [bit.ly/RR-battery](https://bit.ly/RR-battery).

## Trekking pole

Two poles are much more efficient at transferring effort to the upper body, but even if like me you need to keep one hand free, carry at least one pole. It has many uses: it can help you to assess the depth of water in a stream and act as a "third leg" for balance when crossing; you can wave it to make yourself look larger if threatened by livestock; you can wrap duct tape (gaffer tape) around it to use for minor repairs; and mine has a top that unscrews to serve as a camera monopod.

## Weather

Check the forecast at the planning stage, and check again before setting out. Consider a Plan B or escape route if need be. If your route is tidal, this applies to tidal predictions. The dictum "There's no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothing" explains why it's surprisingly easy to get hypothermia in summer and sunburn in winter.

## Weight

Pack light: if you think you already do, ask yourself how many socks you need for a week-long hike? The answer, surprisingly, is three – two to wear and one to wash! Even if you don't take this literally, the 3-sock question is a useful mental device. Since water weighs 1 kg (2.2 pounds) per litre (nearly 2 pints) if the weather is warm you may decide to save weight by using a filter. But don't overdo it: visit [bit.ly/RR-Cam](https://bit.ly/RR-Cam).