

Kit list for hill-walkers and climbers

The following items are normally regarded as essential for high-level three season hill walking in the UK, i.e. spring, summer and autumn but excluding winter conditions. Winter conditions in the mountains require additional equipment, normally including ice-axe and crampons, plus the appropriate skills and experience to use them properly:-

- Waterproof / windproof outer layer (including protection for the legs)**
- Warm inner (base) & mid-layer(s)**
- Suitable footwear (see notes below)**
- Map, compass and watch**
- Torch / head torch and whistle**
- First aid kit – lightweight and simple**
- Adequate food and drink – drinks bottle – flask of hot drink in cold weather**
- Rucksack to carry it in**

Unless summer weather conditions are warm, dry and settled it is advisable to add:-

- Hat / balaclava and gloves**
- Spare warm clothes (extra layers for very cold conditions or emergencies)**
- Survival bag or lightweight bivvy shelter for group use**
- High energy emergency food - only intended for use in an emergency**
- Resalable plastic bags to keep equipment dry**

Depending on the season and the activity, the following may also be required:-

- Helmet - advisable for some scrambling routes**
- Gaiters**
- Insect repellent (anti midge)**
- Good sunglasses**
- Sun block / sunhat**

Other useful items include:-

- Mobile / cellular phone (recommended)**
- walking poles**
- GPS receiver and spare batteries**

Fluid intake – In warm summer conditions dehydration can be a real problem, the body will use much more water climbing than walking on the level. Take plenty to drink, as you become more experienced you will become better able to judge the amount of fluid your body requires under different conditions. Special water bottles (hydration packs) can be fitted to some rucksacks that allow you to drink via a tube on the move.

Choice of what to drink "on the hill" is mostly down to personal preference, but it is necessary to replace the sugars, salts and minerals lost through exercise and perspiration, hence "isotonic" sports drink with a good balance of carbohydrates and salts may be beneficial and should also reduce the occurrence of muscle cramps.

Weight – avoid over packing your rucksack – choose the items to be taken carefully, don't take more than required, and reduce the weight carried as much as possible without compromising your safety. Too much weight will slow you down, spoil your enjoyment of the day and make it more likely that you will become benighted! Getting the right compromise is something that comes with experience.

Equipment Notes

Clothing – Several layers of clothing to cope with different conditions are better than one thick heavy layer. Conditions at altitude are almost always much colder and windier than in the valley. Warm and windproof clothing may not be required when climbing the mountain but they are likely to be required during rest stops, on the tops and during the descent later in the day. The layering principle of outdoor clothing is designed to cope with widely differing conditions by adding or removing layers as required. Pay particular attention to the base layer because this must wick moisture away from the body without causing too much heat loss. Thermal fabrics are much better than cotton in this respect and can be used as a T. shirt in hot weather. Fleece in its many guises is the most popular choice for the mid-layer. A windproof and waterproof outer layer is essential in all but the most stable summer conditions.

Modern breathable fabrics are more versatile and comfortable than conventional non-breathable shell garments.

Jeans are far from ideal because they are heavy, cold and uncomfortable when wet. They should be avoided except for low level walks in fine weather. If using shorts it is advisable to carry alternative warmer leg wear. Remember that legs are very vulnerable to cuts and bruises during rock scrambling.

Footwear – The choice of footwear depends on the seriousness of the route, but good quality, good fitting comfortable boots, are probably the most important part of your kit. Trainers do not support and protect the feet and ankles adequately, modern light-weight mountain walking boots do – don't buy heavier boots than required for your intended level of activity, take advice from a good specialist retailer (look at the suppliers list on this site) and try on as many types as possible. Ask to have your feet measured and take your favourite walking socks with you to the shop. Alternatively ask the retailer to recommend suitable socks before trying the boots on.

Map and compass (plus a watch) – essential whatever the weather. A good map scale for mountain walkers is 1:25,000, such as the OS Explorer series The map used for mountain navigation needs to be capable of being used in high winds and rain and normally it will require some form of map case to protect it. Don't rely on being able to follow clearly marked paths in the British hills, even in good weather.

A good walker's compass (e.g. SILVA, Suunto, Recta) with a protractor base and a Romer scale for measuring distances on the map is essential for checking direction, and setting and walking on accurate bearings. Make a habit of keeping track of your position on the map even when the weather is good – it's good practice, it adds to the enjoyment of the environment and helps a lot if the visibility suddenly deteriorates.

Torch and whistle – both are useful for attracting attention in an emergency. The internationally recognised distress signal is 6 long blasts / flashes repeated at one minute intervals. The reply is 3 blasts / flashes.

A head torch or small hand torch can prove a very useful aid to a safe return from the hill in failing light. Some head torches can be fitted with a halogen bulb which gives a bright white light which is good for map reading (but shorter battery life).

First Aid Kit – make up a small kit in a waterproof pouch to suit personal requirements or buy one designed for walkers. Suitable contents could include a crepe bandage (very versatile), medium wound dressing, safety pins, safety razor blade, plasters, blister kit, Parasetamol, lip salve, etc. Groups will need a more comprehensive kit.

Make your first aid kit a more versatile emergency kit by adding other useful small items such as waterproof note paper, pencil, water sterilisation tablets, miniature tin opener / penknife, miniature survival compass (in case your main compass is lost or damaged), waterproof matches and striker, a little cash etc.

Rucksack – a good quality rucksack is a good investment. It is almost as important for your rucksack to fit comfortably as it is your boots. Make sure it is big enough to carry the maximum load you need to carry (depending on your level of activity) but don't buy a bigger rucksack than you require – again take advice and try on as many as possible before making your choice, with comfort and stability being the prime requirements. A rucksack for scrambling needs to be stable, neat and uncluttered. No rucksack is completely waterproof, so protect important kit with resalable plastic bags and/or use rainproof sack liners / sack covers.

Mobile (cellular) phone – mobile phones are well worth carrying in most areas and can be a very useful safety aid, but can not be relied on completely in the mountains as the terrain will often block the signal. Normally better reception is found on the tops, but sometimes the phone can be fooled by receiving too many signals from distant base stations. If a phone is carried check that the battery is fully charged before you set out, and know your own phone number.

In an emergency dial 999 from any phone (free) and ask for the police who will contact the local (volunteer) mountain rescue organisation. Be ready to give as many details as possible about your exact location (give grid ref if possible), your phone number, the number in the party, nature of injuries etc. Make sure that the emergency operator knows that you require mountain rescue assistance and what mountain area you are in, so that you can be put through to the correct control centre.

Weather Forecast – check the weather forecast before you set out and be prepared to change or abandon plans if the weather is unsuitable.

Route Card – if going on a mountain walk, especially if you are on your own, or leading a group, always leave behind details of your intended route and when you expect to be back so that the emergency services can be alerted if you fail to return.