

A Guide to Walking with the Holly Hagg Alpacas

1. Safety First

We will take every precaution to ensure the safety of the party and of other road and bridleway users. However, alpaca trekking outside the field does carry some risks and you need to be aware of these and agree that these risks are acceptable. You will be leading a large animal on rough terrain with likely encounters with cars, horses and dogs.

You are responsible for your own safety and that of any children in your care. Please also watch out for the safety and wellbeing of everyone around you.

When the walk guides give instructions it is important that you act on them promptly to ensure no people or animals get hurt. The guides have the right to change the route, cut it short or take back control of your alpaca in the interests of safety.

Trekkers of all ages will need to stay quiet and calm around the alpacas and not make sudden movements.

If you agree, your children may be allowed to take the lead at the guide's discretion when we are in a safe situation with nothing unusual happening. You must stay near the child if they are leading and be ready to take over if they get into difficulty. Most adults can restrain a haltered alpaca but younger children cannot.

Alpacas may kick if they sense something close behind them. We don't want that to be you or the alpaca behind. Please be aware of their hind legs and keep humans and animals away. It is especially important to remember this if we engage with people we meet on the walk who haven't been briefed, especially children.

Walk guides will be wearing hi-vis vests for maximum visibility and to alert other road and bridleway users of our presence. There will be one guide to every two alpacas and they will generally walk one at the front and one behind the party.

We are granted an annual licence by Sheffield City Council to walk the alpacas on designated bridleways. We need to ensure that our trek does not cause inconvenience to other bridleway users who might raise a complaint to the council but on the whole you will find the public are delighted to see a group of alpacas trekking through their neighbourhood!

Trekking is fun! Expect a peaceful, trouble free saunter through beautiful countryside with lovely gentle animals, glorious views and enjoyable encounters with other people.

2. Understanding alpacas

Alpacas are largely confident and curious while out walking and will enjoy looking around and meeting people. They take most things in their stride but they don't like confined spaces and may need some time and encouragement to deal with strange obstructions like skips, bulk bags or parked cars. Sometimes if one of us slips or breaks a twig it can startle one alpaca which startles the others, so be on the lookout for them making sudden movements and just stay stable and calm. They will soon settle down.

When free in the field alpacas will back off if you try to touch them as they are making sure they won't get caught. Once they are haltered and on a lead they give up their need to avoid you and will walk happily beside you. You may be able to lightly touch the neck but this is infringing their space so it isn't polite to try it too often. Likewise an alpaca should respect your space and not nudge or nibble you. Never touch the rump, although our experienced handlers may do so to encourage an alpaca to move out of danger.

Alpacas are herd animals – they believe in sticking close together for safety. If one gets left behind he may start to run to catch up. For the safety of the people at the back, the front party needs to **stop and wait if a gap opens up between the alpacas**.

If you drop the lead your alpaca will stay in the group and not run off unless very alarmed. We can then pick up the lead and carry on.

On a walk you are part of their herd. They trust us to be good, calm, confident leaders.

This is for them as well, so make sure they have fun and get to stop and admire the view when they want to, or need a toilet break!

2. Leading Techniques

Your lead has a knot at the end. This makes sure it doesn't pull out of your hand.

Do not wrap the lead around your hand – you need to be able to drop it quickly if you are in danger.

Alpacas don't like a tight lead or being dragged. You can encourage them forward using short ratchet movements: pull – release – pull – release. Give them time to work out new situations.

Most of the time you should keep the lead loose and you may hold it with just one hand at the end.

When you need more control, place your second hand on the lead, about 30cm from the alpaca's head.

If you are in danger of falling or being dragged, drop the lead. However if you are dealing with a passing car or other danger you need to make a judgement between your safety and that of other people and the alpacas.

Watch out for the lead rope getting wrapped round your alpaca's neck. If this happens, hold the end of the rope and manoeuvre yourself around the alpaca so you are back on the right side.

4. A Note on Snacking

Alpacas enjoy a handful of pellets on the trek. We use this as encouragement and to allow people we meet to engage with the alpacas. You will need a roomy pocket which we will fill with alpaca pellets before we set off.

Please do not allow the alpacas to eat any vegetation while trekking. You won't have time to work out whether it's poisonous or not and they don't always know what's bad for them because they come from Peru.

4. Terrain

The Rivelin Valley bridleways can be steep in places with rough paths, loose stones and some mud. There will be nettles and brambles along the way and you need to protect yourself from sun, rain, cold and insects. Please wear sturdy shoes and be prepared to walk for about an hour unless otherwise arranged. This is a walk in the country, not the park! We can tailor the walk to suit the party's abilities and there are some places where we can walk along a quiet road. It is not suitable for buggies, very young children (unless carried) or people with mobility difficulties but we can arrange short treks within Holly Hagg which is safe but still on a slope.

5. Cars

Some parts of the route involve walking on roads without a pavement. We all need to be on the lookout for cars and if one approaches we shorten the leads and draw the alpacas into the side of the road, preferably onto the verge, to let the vehicle pass. Make sure their bottoms are well in! In some cases the walk guides will stop the traffic and ask you to lead the alpacas quickly off the road.

6. Horses

Horses get spooked by strange things like alpacas. In the worst case they may bolt or rear causing harm to the rider. Our policy is to move the alpacas well off the path into the woodland, disappear up a side path or if that's not possible we turn round and walk back until we find somewhere to get out of the way. The riders really appreciate this.

7. Dogs

Think dogs and sheep, except that alpacas are bigger and will defend themselves. Everyone is asked to keep a look out for dogs and alert the group. If we see people approach we may call out to see if they have a dog and ask them to put the dog on a lead. We then take avoiding action – pulling the alpacas well into the side of the path or getting further away if the dog is loose. Most dogs act cautious but can turn aggressive through fear or the scent of prey. Alpacas are both alert and curious around dogs. They may attempt to touch noses if they feel the dog is safe. Do not allow this. It may provoke the dog to defend itself.

8. Pedestrians and Cyclists

No dangers here, but we need to be respectful. For cyclists we get off the path to allow them to pass easily. For pedestrians we look for signs that they are wary of the alpacas and again keep out of the way. If pedestrians show an interest we will stop to talk and offer to let them feed the alpacas. This is a nice way to brighten up someone's day and spread good will.

9. Mobile Devices

You need to be alert and in charge of your alpaca at all times. However, taking photos is an important part of the experience so feel free to snap away when you are in a safe place with no obstacles, cars, horses, dogs etc.

We will take photos for use on our Facebook page and website to promote our activities. Please let us know if you don't want your photo to be used. Similarly, please respect the privacy of other people when posting your own photos.

Please refrain from using your phone during the walk as this may be annoying to other people out for a quiet walk with the alpacas! Also, you need to be able to pay attention at all times to your alpaca and the conditions around you.

10. Back in the field

Once we are all back in the field and the gates are closed you will be instructed how to remove your alpaca's halter and lead. Please don't detach the lead and find you've now got a loose alpaca still wearing a halter!

Please wash your hands after your walk. Sanitising gel is available at Holly Hagg.

Please tell your friends about your experience, share your photos and our facebook posts and tell us if there was anything we could have done better.

Thank you for walking with the alpacas.

Claire Gregory Mob 0777 9067718