**A Guide to Walking with the Holly Hagg Alpacas**

**Holly Hagg, Long Lane, off Stephen Hill/Back Lane, Crosspool, Sheffield S10.**

Last updated 03/02/2022.

**HEALTH & SAFETY FIRST**

The following bullet points will help make your experience safe and reduce the risks of injury and infection

**Safety**

* Please wear sturdy footwear to avoid slips, trips etc. on uneven ground
* Respect the space our animals need around them, don’t run or shout close to them or try to touch alpacas until the staff have instructed you how to.
* Please listen carefully to all the handling instructions
* Alpacas can kick. Avoid standing right behind them or touching behind the shoulder.
* When hand feeding an alpaca their teeth may nip you. They don’t mean to bite you but skin grazes can happen. Ask for a feeding saucer if you don’t want to take the risk.

**Hygiene**

* Ensure that hands are washed thoroughly with soap and water after touching or feeding any of our animals, before eating and on leaving Holly Hagg. Hand washing stations are throughout the farm.
* Please ensure any cuts and grazes on hands are covered with a waterproof dressing.
* Do not feed human food to the animals – this may be harmful or against the law.
* Do not kiss our animals.
* Do not eat animal food.
* Do not put fingers in mouths & ensure dummies are cleaned thoroughly.
* Do not touch or tread in animal faeces, wash shoes and hands if you accidently come into contact with faeces
* Risks from e-coli and other diseases transmitted from animals are low and significantly mitigated by effective hand hygiene and the above guidance however in young children or the elderly and those with compromised health there is potential for significant ill health. If after visiting Holly Hagg you become ill with sickness or diarrhoea contact your doctor and tell them you have visited a farm setting.

**WHAT TO EXPECT ON YOUR ALPACA TREK**

**Don’t worry – we will go over all this when you come and the guides will be there to keep you and the alpacas safe and relaxed.**

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 when we are in a safe situation with nothing unusual happening. For extra safety a second lead can be attached to the alpaca so that you or a guide can take over if there is any difficulty. We also use a second lead for adults who prefer a little backup.

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 at least two guides leading your trek and protecting you from dangers in front and behind.

We are granted an annual licence by Sheffield City Council to walk the alpacas on designated bridleways. We are keen 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 some minor hiccup like crossing a road or a snapping twig can startle one alpaca which startles the others, so be on the lookout for them making sudden movements and just stay stable and calm and hold on if safe to do so. 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 snack at the two feeding stops along the trek. We will give you a bag of alpaca pellets before we set off.

**Please do not allow the alpacas to eat any vegetation while trekking**. Some plants are bad for them and we want to avoid anything contaminated by wild animals.

**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 or people with mobility difficulties. If young children are unable to walk 1.5 miles at a slow pace, you will need to carry them.

**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. If we see people approach with a dog, the front guide will ask them to put the dog on a lead and we will tell you whether to walk past or wait for the dog to pass us. The alpacas are well trained and will cope well.

**8. Pedestrians and Cyclists**

We will be polite and friendly to everyone we meet and try to keep out of their way. Sometimes they get out of our way, and in most cases people are delighted to see us. If pedestrians show an interest we will stop to talk and maybe even 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 on the field and at our food stops along the way.

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 refraining 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 to hold onto your alpaca’s lead until a guide takes the halter off. 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. Handwash and sanitising gel is available at the handwash stations on 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. Please help us stay at the top of TripAdvisor by leaving us a good review.

Thank you for walking with the alpacas.

***Holly Hagg Ltd T/A Holly Hagg Community Farm is a not for profit company, bringing people and nature together***

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