

High Weald National Landscape Dark Skies Walk Guidance 2023

This guide will support you holding your own Dark Skies Walk. This walk can be use for local residents or youth groups to help them understand:

- The importance of reducing light pollution
- Seeing the wonder of the stars and landscape at night
- How they can reduce light pollution and make a difference
- How light pollution impacts on wildlife.



High Weald Dark Skies Walk Guidance

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1. Why do we need to reduce light pollution?

Light pollution, or artificial light at night, is the excessive or poor use of artificial outdoor light, and it disrupts the natural patterns of wildlife, contributes to the increase in carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere, disrupts human sleep, and obscures the stars in the night sky.

2. What can you do to reduce light pollution



Why not close your curtains at night or put up blinds and maybe choose red lights for outside or warm white for your Christmas decorations!

Download our leaflet for more guidance: [‘Taking action on light pollution’ \(pdf\) >>](#).

3. How to prepare for a Dark Skies walk

For a first nocturnal venture or if you are guiding a community walk:

- Pick a route you already know well, so navigation isn't a problem.
- Do a test walk in the daylight and in the dark
- It's good to plot your route on a map before a walk, just to be aware of the kind of things you'd rather avoid - or at least be prepared for - whether it's electric fences ditches and stiles or rough ground
- Start at dusk so your night vision and other senses sharpen as darkness falls slowly
- Remember you'll walk slower, need more time for way-finding and stop more often
- The walk will usually take a couple of hours with potential stops.

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- Chose a route that may show light pollution impact and an area of darkness so that everyone can enjoy the stars
- don't be too ambitious when it comes to distance. Instead choose habitat and terrain to provide the most interest.
- Be wary of broken ground, walking the banks of rivers, coastal paths with cliffs or steep drops or anywhere missed footing, navigation errors or not seeing an obstacle could lead to serious consequences.
- Have places to stop (dependent on the weather) to talk about the stars you can see, or why not do a dark skies story. [Find more ideas in our Dark Skies Family Activity Sheet](#) (pdf).

Risk Assessment

It is essential that you complete a Risk Assessment for your Dark Skies Walk. You can use your own preferred format, or [contact Sam for a template.](#)

Equipment for dark skies walk

- Equipment list:
- Red Torches
- Hi Vis jackets
- Portable chairs or ground sheet
- Map/compass
- Dark skies app
- Laminated materials



It is important that if taking a group for a night walk that you have appropriate clothing and footwear as well as:

- Torches for leaders and the group. One small to be kept in your pocket where it's easy to find if needed as a backup, and one main torch (either a handheld or a head-torch). Use a red light, or a green light option as it will make your eyes easier to adjust and is better for wildlife.

Try not to use your torch except when really needed. You'll be surprised how much your night vision can pick up, especially if you train yourself to use your peripheral vision, which is more sensitive in low light, to 'look' at things.

- Hi-Vs jackets for leaders to ensure that you are easily identified by group
- Chairs you can carry or a ground sheet so that the residents can sit if you are going to stop and look at the night sky
- Laminated sheets if you want to talk about wildlife and how light pollution impact them
- Stargazing guide

4. Best time to do the walks:

Natural moonlight washes out the light from most stars leaving only the brightest visible and is most noticeable around the time of the full Moon. When the Moon is at its brightest fewer stars can be seen. Therefore, the time during full Moon is the

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worst time to stargaze — at this time, even dark sky sites free from artificial light pollution are no darker than a city centre!

The best time to go stargazing is the days before, during and soon after each new Moon, when there is no Moon in the sky. During these times, there is no bright Moon to wash out the light from fainter stars. As a result, you will be able to see thousands of stars with just your naked eye, this compared to just a few hundred at other times

[Sunrise Sunset Calendar - England Home Page](https://gostargazing.co.uk/dark-sky-calendar/)
<https://gostargazing.co.uk/dark-sky-calendar/>

Volunteers to support the walk:

To ensure everyone has a safe and enjoyable night walk it is best to have a:

- Group leader – health and safety talk and introduction to why you are holding this walk
- Backstop and extra hand.
- Guest speakers to talk at specific stops

5. What stars can you see in the winter night sky

Bob Mizon, a local expert who recently passed away, spoke of the winter night sky:



‘Orion dominates the southern sky, Use the three belt stars of the Mighty Hunter to find other winter constellations. They point down towards Sirius, the brightest star of the night sky, whose light dances in many colours in Canis Major the Great Dog.

To their right is Taurus the Bull, with its red ‘eye’ Aldebaran, resembling an arrowhead flying past Orion’s shield. The triangle of seven glittering stars is the Pleiades.’

‘The saucer-shaped Plough, part of the Great Bear (Ursa Major), is low in the north. Its two ‘Polar Pointer’ stars, Merak and Dubhe, indicate the position of Polaris the Pole Star, around which all other northern-hemisphere stars seem slowly to turn in anti-clockwise circles.’

Later in the evening, the sickle-shaped figure of Leo adorns the north-eastern horizon. Its brightest star Regulus, the ‘Little King’, is a quadruple star system 79 light years away.”

Alternatively why not talk to your local astronomical society or wildlife society who may wish to join you on this walk as a guest speaker.

Contacts:

- [East Sussex Astronomical Society](#)
- [Wadhurst Astronomical Society](#)
- [Crawley Astronomical Society](#)
- [Horsham Astronomy Group](#)
- [Home - Bat Conservation Trust \(bats.org.uk\)](#)
- [Butterfly Conservation for moths](#)