

HERITAGE HIKES

Getting back to the countryside

The timing couldn't have been worse. In February 2001, just as English Heritage was preparing to launch *Heritage Hikes*, our new rural walks guides, the grim news about the Foot and Mouth epidemic hit the headlines and the countryside closed down. Not only were barriers set up across footpaths and the movements of any brave (or foolhardy) walkers severely limited, but many English Heritage properties also closed their doors. Notices appeared reading, 'The Government has appealed to the nation to avoid walking in the countryside' – not perhaps the best moment to encourage people to leave town.

Thankfully, with England officially declared free of FMD in January 2002, walking enthusiasts are once more seeking out their thick socks, rucksacks and binoculars and heading out into the fresh air. Re-launching our hiking series seems like a good way of celebrating the end of the disease and showing support for the rural economy. Rural recovery will be slow but the sooner the traditional visitors, the ramblers and the hikers, return, the sooner it can gather pace.

Heritage Hikes offer a very easy and attractive way of exploring the countryside and combining exercise with culture. The two that have been published so far focus on Yorkshire and Wiltshire and consist of a neat folder containing six pocket-sized walk guides. The folders provide general information about walking in the countryside, as well as specific details of the English Heritage sites encountered en route and the type of terrain to be covered.

The guides themselves – printed on separate laminated cards and tough enough to survive the worst of English weather – include a clear map of the route and detailed, step-by-step instructions for navigation. Varying between six and eight miles in length, the walks have been planned so that the site of special interest, whether it is a castle, an Iron Age fort or a stately home, usually appears about halfway through, just when a diversion might be rather welcome. Refreshment breaks are also anticipated, with information provided on convenient pubs and teahouses, as well as public transport links and the best places to park.

The great advantage of *Heritage Hikes* is that they've been put together to appeal to seasoned walkers and countryside strollers alike. All walks are circular, none very demanding and they all take in magnificent views and a historic site. For those familiar with local monuments, they provide an opportunity for viewing them from a new angle. For tourists, they make it possible to leave the crowds behind. As the archaeologist Julian Richards says, 'You really need to get away from the car park and the souvenir shop and the 21st century to get a feel for the mystical landscape around Stonehenge.'

Our plan is to add to the series gradually over the months to come, covering the country region by region and establishing a high-quality, collectable set of publications to encourage everyone to get to know England's natural and man-made heritage. Highly portable, informative and very accessible, these are trails you can trust. □

Elizabeth Rowe
Publications



Heritage Hikes is published by English Heritage in association with Glenwood Publications. Each priced at £7.95, *South West Vol 1* (Product Code 50341; ISBN 1 85074 798 9) and *Yorkshire Vol 1* (Product Code 50342; ISBN 1 85074 799 7) may be ordered from English Heritage, c/o Gillards, Trident Works, Marsh Lane, Temple Cloud, Bristol BS39 5AZ; Tel 01761 452966; Fax 10761 453408; ehsales@gillards.com Cheques should be made payable to Gillards

The first two of a series of regional volumes of guided walks in the English countryside are available for visitors and ramblers