



Hiking during Ramadan

By Kirsty Pallas, Mountain Safety Adviser

Ramadan is one of the most important months in the Islamic calendar, but what does it have to do with hillwalking? As there is a wonderful increase of people in the hills from underrepresented communities, including Black, Asian, and other minority ethnicities, it's important to consider outside influences on hillwalking, and how that might affect people. But first, let's learn a bit more about Ramadan.

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar - a calendar that is based on lunar cycles - which means that the dates change each year. For 2023, Ramadan is 22nd March to 20th April, about ten days earlier than 2022. During this period, most Muslim adults will fast between dawn and dusk each day, with some exceptions for the elderly, pregnant or menstruating people, and those who are ill, or travelling. As the dates for Ramadan change each year, the fast period can sometimes be up to 18-20 hours here in the UK over midsummer. This fast doesn't just include food, but also water and other drinks. A meal, Suhoor, is eaten before dawn, followed by fasting until the evening meal - Iftaar - after dusk.





Fasting is just one aspect of Ramadan though, and equally important is the charitable side. This includes giving monetary donations to charities, spending time with those who are in need, as well as being more mindful about yourself and those around you. It's a time to focus on yourself, your thoughts, your connection to God, and spirituality, with these reflections and intentions continuing throughout the year. Ramadan finishes with the big celebration of Eid, an important gathering of family and friends, with food and charitable donations as well.

Even if we don't observe Ramadan, we can support Muslims through the month in several ways:

- It is time to be charitable, and if you are able, consider donating. Many mosques will run a fundraising drive, but also consider Muslim Aid and Islamic Appeal.
- If you have friends who observe Ramadan, offer to provide an Iftaar meal and break the fast with them.
- If you do head out with someone who is fasting, understand that they may not want to push themselves, and be aware of signs of dehydration if it's a hot day.
- Don't ask why someone isn't fasting - it is a choice and there are many personal reasons why someone may choose not to fast.

Some of our Muslim members, including Nav Bakhsh from Boots and Beards, Halima Hussein from Sole Sisters Scotland and Zahrah Mahmood (also known as the Hillwakling Hijabi) have offered some advice on how to look after yourself through Ramadan and keep safe while active if you choose.

Zahrah Mahmood @the_hillwakling_hijabi

Zahrah, known as The Hillwalking Hijabi on social media, set herself the challenge of getting out every day during Ramadan 2020 - to walk, jog or cycle 100km to raise money for a charity that plants olive trees in Palestine. She first went hillwalking with friends to forget about the pressures of upcoming exams, and while the that initial trip was tough, Zahrah found herself returning the hills.

When speaking about her 2020 challenge, Zahrah said that a big part of the inspiration was that the cause is very close to her heart. Her other reason for doing it was to push herself and see how strong she was. She didn't want to go into Ramadan unprepared, so she tested herself by doing a few voluntary fasts in the prior months to see how her body responded and what she was able to do. Again, timing for Zahrah was important, and she preferred to exercise an hour before breaking the fast, so she knew that she would have food and water soon. While hillwalking and being active is a big part of her life, during Ramadan the spiritual aspects like praying, reading the Qur'an, and spending time with family, take priority.

If you want to get out during Ramadan, Zahrah recommends finding a time that works for you. She said: "Some people might prefer to exercise after the morning meal but bear in mind that this may be at 3am, and there is a full day of fasting ahead. Also do not feel like you have to continue hillwalking, keeping exercise gentle and building up allows you to get to know your body."

If you want to support others through Ramadan, one thing Zahrah suggests is just treating people like normal. Don't comment on how people are forced to fast - it's a choice and an important time for Muslims, which connects them to their religion and family. It's a time that many people look forward to throughout the year, so comments like 'you must be relieved it's over' or apologising about eating and drinking in front of them can be unwelcome and jarring.

After recently becoming a mum, Zahrah didn't fast for the full month of Ramadan in 2022 due to breastfeeding. While this is one of the dispensations, it was still hard to not feel like she was missing out on some of the spiritual acts of worship. But through speaking with friends and understanding her role, she realised that care-giving and being responsible for a little person is also extremely rewarding and another path to God.





Nav Bakhsh @bootsandbeards

Nav is the co-founder of Boots and Beards - a community organisation based in Glasgow which aims to increase the health and wellbeing of the community using physical activity and the outdoors. Bonnie Boots is the sister organisation, which encourages women to get out, get active, and take up leadership roles too. Nav says: "The first Boots and Beards group walk after Ramadan is always a busy one - people miss them - but in recent years the days have been too long to plan walks through Ramadan. As the calendar moves towards shorter days, we'll review their decision around planning walks so that people can still get out if they want to."

Nav's top tips for staying active through Ramadan are to start local and don't feel like you must push yourself. As your body gets used to fasting, you may be able to go further, but try to conserve your energy throughout the day. If you are keen to get out, think about the timing during the day. Going just before dusk means you will be breaking your fast soon, but you don't want to push yourself too hard and have to break your fast early. Finally, when you do sit down for Iftaar - although heavy or fried food might be tempting - start with fruit and water, then slowly add other foods. Your eyes are bigger than your belly, and your stomach shrinks during Ramadan, so make sure you get the essential nutrients in first.

If you want to support someone through Ramadan, then Nav suggests educating yourself on what Ramadan is and why it is important. You could also try fasting for a day and see what the benefits are for you.



Halima Hussein @solesisters_scotland

Halima founded Sole Sisters after realising that, as a keen hillwalker herself, she didn't see many other Muslim women and girls out enjoying the hills. She wanted to provide a space for more representation and opportunities to access the Scottish outdoors.

Halima says: "Ramadhan is a holy month for Muslims where we do not eat food or drink during daylight hours. This can be tough to get used to for the first couple of days of the month, so I do not put pressure on myself doing physical activity especially if the fasts are long. Usually, by day four, my body starts adjusting and I get back into going to the gym but doing light weights and short cardio circuits. Doing light physical activity daily helps boost your energy. In terms of the outdoors, I stick to less challenging walks, such as short lowland routes.

"Walking is a great way to keep fit and you can stick to a pace that feels good for you. When going outdoors you need to be aware of signs of dehydration and listen to your body. Take extra precautions when fasting, for example, send your location or try to go with someone else.

"It is good to still train and work out whilst fasting as our bodies are more capable than we think."

