

# Country walking

## Child carriers review

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# CHILD CARRIERS

Parenting might be a life-changing experience, but it needn't spoil your enjoyment of the great British countryside...

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When my wife Helen and I became proud parents of our daughter Georgie, we vowed she'd get to enjoy as much of the UK's scenery as possible. A good child carrier gives you access to areas that would be impossible to appreciate without one when they're too young to walk for long distances (or at all). We certainly wouldn't have been able to take a pushchair, even an all-terrain one, up Ben A'an in Scotland.

Most carriers are suitable for children from about six months old, up to a weight of 20-22kg, and I'd certainly recommend that you get one as early as possible, as realistically the window of opportunity for using a carrier isn't much more than two years.

Generally, all the carriers on test offered similar levels of comfort for the parent, but I did find one that didn't suit me at all. I'm 5ft 11in, so of average height, but I'd definitely suggest you try your pack on before purchase, and ideally have it fitted at the store. While Georgie is fairly small for her age, at two years old and around 11kg, there was quite a difference in the mobility these packs afforded her. Freedom for their arms is important, and the joy of having your child stroking your head as you walk, and pointing out rabbits, hot-air balloons and tractors, far outweighs the misery when they rip off your glasses and throw them in a cow-pat.

My wife is 5ft 3in, and very short in the back. It's worth noting that, had she written this test, the Vaude would have won, due to its compact design, with the LittleLife a close second, holding Georgie a touch too high for her. It really is vital to try before you buy...

## Bush Baby Elite £220

Weight: 3.4kg [www.bush-baby.com](http://www.bush-baby.com)



Despite well-written and clear instructions, I simply couldn't get comfortable with this pack. While the shaped metal frame fits the back well, I found the top of it pushed my head slightly forward. It's very important to try this pack at a store, as fitting is always a very personal opinion. The Bush Baby is well-equipped, with two hip pockets (zipped from front to rear for easy access), toy loops, and absolutely acres of storage capacity. It's compatible with a hydration pack, though it's a shame that no guide loops are included on the shoulder straps for the pipe. A mirror is attached by a lanyard to the right-hand pocket, which also contains a key clip. Unfortunately the mirror is of very poor quality, with the mirrored backing starting to flake off within a day's use.

The detachable sun hood offers excellent protection, though the mesh side panels are tightly woven, meaning your child's view is a little restricted. The separate rain cover is well-designed, completely enclosing your child. Stirrups help keep your little one comfortable, but it's a shame to find that the adjustment for your child's shoulder straps are buried inside the upper compartment. To access the two buckles, you need to unclip the small attached daypack (which has hidden, unpadded shoulder straps), unzip both sides of the compartment, then remove the sun-hood if it's not fitted, or any luggage you may have inside. If the weather changes, and your child puts on a coat, it's an annoying design. The second lightest pack on test, there's no fold-out stand, but unlike the LittleLife, the Bush Baby isn't very steady without using the fold-out stabilising flap (of course, your child should never be left alone in any carrier). Sadly, the flap is quite annoying to use, flicking back as you try to open it, and not inspiring the confidence of the LittleLife design.

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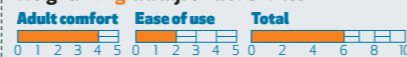
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## Jack Wolfskin Watchtower Supreme £180

Weight: 4.1kg [www.jack-wolfskin.com](http://www.jack-wolfskin.com)



This is a relatively large pack, so I was surprised to find I had it adjusted to the maximum back height. While the hip straps seemed to sit a little high, it was still comfortable in use, although the straps that secure the child's sun hood kept brushing against my head.

Once set up, getting your child in is simple, and the large stirrups keep their legs well supported. However, adjusting the child's shoulder straps is far too much of a faff, requiring the back to be opened up, and two awkward buckles manipulated. This makes accommodating different clothing on your child an annoying task. Georgie's arms were held in an uncomfortable-looking position by the high side protection, and the lack of any toy straps or pockets is also a let-down.

The Watchtower has a very clever sun hood that pulls up and out of the back of the pack. Unfortunately it also offers the least protection for the child, and the hard pocket it slips into eats a huge amount of space from the bottom compartment, robbing the pack of what could be a very useful storage space. The upper pouch is relatively large, but it's still a disappointment to see such a waste of space.

This is the heaviest pack on test, but the extra weight isn't really noticed. The foldaway stand is a very helpful addition, and the hip straps are very solid, but the lack of hip pockets is a let-down.

Credit should go to Jack Wolfskin for the excellent stirrups, but a few design tweaks would certainly help make the Watchtower a stronger contender.



## Deuter Kid Comfort III £200

Weight: 3.6kg [www.deutergb.co.uk](http://www.deutergb.co.uk)



With its fold-out stand, the Deuter is a very stable pack when loading, and the back system offers plenty of adjustment for the parent and a comfortable walk. The stand locks into place, but does mean that you must close it before putting the pack on, as you can't reach the mechanism once it's on.

The frame system allows the pack to fold flat when not in use, but the extra height adds greatly to the bulk. The high headrest contains a clever sun hood, which quickly pops out and fastens to the front - a great design. Unfortunately, a rain cover isn't included, and will add £25 to the cost of the pack, but it does fully enclose the passenger.

It's nice to find that the child's shoulder straps are quick and easy to adjust, meaning that changes of clothing aren't a problem, but it's a shame that the seat height buckles are a tad clumsy. The main fastening clip can be rather awkward to access, which makes loading your child a little harder than with some other packs, and added to the fact that it's easy to get the shoulder straps twisted, it's not the most simple design.

The Deuter offers a reasonable amount of storage space, with the hip strap benefitting from a single zipped (opening from the rear to the front) pocket, and a pouch for the included (annoyingly bendy) mirror. Space for a hydration pack is built into the back system, with a single guide loop for the pipe on the right-hand shoulder strap.

While the toy pockets are useful, it's a shame not to find any loops for attaching them, and the large side-flaps tended to restrict Georgie's arm movements, making walks that little bit less pleasurable for her. The Deuter has some clever features, but not quite enough for it to compete with the winners in this test.



## Vaude Jolly Comfort I £155

Weight: 3.3kg [www.vaude.com](http://www.vaude.com)



The Jolly Comfort is a compact carrier, and as the lightest pack on test, it's a pleasant surprise to find an extremely useful fold-out stand built in. Setting up the Vaude is a little tricky as the instructions are rather vague. While the adjustment for the child's shoulder straps is behind a zipped cover, it's very quick and easy to access, and along with the ratchet seat height system, makes getting your child in relatively quick and painless.

With the child's shoulder straps using a single-point fixing, your little one can easily move around in the pack, whilst remaining safe. This freedom clearly appealed to Georgie, who also appreciated the fluffy ears to hang on to. My only criticism of the Jolly Comfort is the lack of stirrups, although the design of the pack allows children to tuck their legs safely inside the frame, which should relieve some of the weight. The sun hood is very effective, though rather fiddly to hook up at the front, and the included rain hood is handy, but doesn't cover the legs.

I had the back system adjusted to its maximum length, and it did feel that the hip straps would have benefitted from being a little lower, but my wife definitely preferred the slightly more compact design. Storage space isn't the most generous, but the bottom compartment is extremely roomy. It includes toy straps and pockets, and the two hip pockets are useful (even if the zips do open from the rear to the front).

The included mirror is tough, but would have benefitted from a lanyard. Overall, though, a great value pack for fun days out, and the Jolly Comfort would be a great option for shorter walkers.



## LittleLife All Terrain £200

Weight: 3.7kg [www.littlelife.co.uk](http://www.littlelife.co.uk)



From the clear instructions and simple fitting, it's obvious that this pack has been designed and refined by people with a real understanding of the needs of walking parents. At a pound over the weight of the excellent Vaude, it's surprising that the LittleLife doesn't feature a fold-out stand, but the clever design of the Vibram-covered base makes the pack extremely stable, and with the ingenious foot support hole, loading the child is simple. Rubber gripped straps at either side make this the easiest pack to pick up and put on too.

The seat is very easy to adjust, and the design of the shoulder straps means that they're always pulled to the perfect tightness every time your child is loaded. The only reason the All Terrain didn't score 5/5 for ease of use is that with three straps coming from the central clasp, you have to take a little more care to ensure you don't get them tangled or muddled.

The included sun hood offers plenty of protection, and while it can't be used without the mesh sides, it's a fairly open weave, so doesn't restrict your child's vision too much. The separate rain cover is excellent, completely enclosing the child and creating a snug, dry environment.

The stirrups are easy to attach and adjust, and along with the toy loops make for a comfortable and happy child. In use the pack feels very comfortable, belying its size and weight. It's a shame there's only one hip pocket, but it's good to see that the zip opens from the front to the back, making it easier to use, and comes with a tough and useful metal mirror on a lanyard. The LittleLife has a huge amount of storage space, with a massive base compartment and a large upper pack which can be unzipped and used as its own daysack, with hidden, padded shoulder straps. Large pockets at the sides add to the storage options, and space for a hydration pack, with plenty of elasticated pipe guide loops, completes an excellent package. Shorter walkers would still be well-advised to try the Vaude, but for me this is the one that has it all.

