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Fiction

- ▶ [Creative Writing](#)

Fictional Tale

- ▶ [Myth](#)

Fine Art

- ▶ [Art, Studio](#)

Finitude

- ▶ [Death](#)

Fire-Walking

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Related Terms

[Anatenaria](#); [Religious ritual](#); [Theemithi](#)

Fire-walking is the ▶ [ritual](#) practice of walking barefoot over fire, hot embers, ashes, or rocks. Accounts of fire-walking are found in early historical records, such as Stabo's descriptions of such rituals in Italy and Cappadocia (*Geography* 5.2.9; 12.2.7). Contemporary fire-walking ▶ [rituals](#) are performed in many parts of the world, including Greece, Bulgaria, Spain ([Fig. 1](#)), Fiji, South Africa, Paraguay, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Hawaii, India, Japan, Brazil, Haiti, and Papua New Guinea.

In some cultures, fire-walking is an act of deep religious devotion, such as in the ▶ [Anastenaria](#) of Greece and Bulgaria, who perform this ▶ [ritual](#) in honor of saints Helen and Constantine (Danforth 1989; Xygalatas 2012), or the Tamil Hindu festival of ▶ [Theemithi](#). Participants in such rituals often consider fire-walking as a miracle, claiming that they do not get burned due to divine protection (for a study of a secular fire-walking ritual, see Xygalates et al. 2011). In other cases, most prominently in the USA, fire-walking is part of various New Age movements or performed by professional instructors as a technique for team-building, self-empowerment, fear-control, etc.

However, although it might seem counter-intuitive, it is generally possible to fire-walk unharmed, without any special technique or preparation, physical, mental, or otherwise. The explanation lies in physics: Hardwood, embers, and volcanic rock are very poor conductors of heat. Thus, contact for a short period of time does not usually harm the skin. This is why you do not get burned if you quickly pick up a glowing ember and throw it back into the fireplace. Think of the following example: when baking bread in the oven at high temperatures, you can insert your hand and touch the bread for 1 or 2 s without getting a blister (although you will feel the heat). However, if you touch the metal racks for the same length of time, you will get a blister. The bread and the rack have the same temperature, and, for that matter, so does the air in the oven when you first open it. The reason for not getting burned is that the air and the bread have low thermal conductivity, while the metal rack is an excellent conductor of heat (Leikind an McCarthy 1985). Thus, walking at a normal pace on burning embers is not likely to cause any damage



Fire-Walking, Fig. 1 A fire-walker traversing a coal-bed measured at 677 degrees Celsius (1250 Fahrenheit) while carrying his father on his back, in the Spanish village of San Pedro Manrique

to the feet, although sometimes fire-walkers do get burned, most commonly when an ember gets stuck between their toes, they step on a sharp piece of burning wood, they walk too slowly, etc.

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Cross-References

- ▶ [Anastenaria](#)
- ▶ [Experience](#)
- ▶ [Pain \(Suffering\)](#)
- ▶ [Religious Experiences](#)
- ▶ [Religious Studies](#)
- ▶ [Ritual](#)

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Firewall

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A security tool that breaks the normal behavior of data transfers in a way that provides a defense from threats. Firewall examples include application firewalls (breaks data transfers to/from applications where the data is dangerous to the application or its users), network firewalls (firewalls that break high-risk and unauthorized network traffic), and