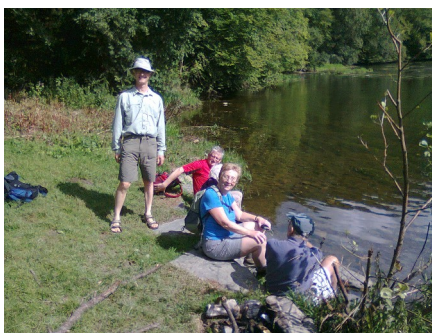


On The Right Track

Guidelines for Walk Leaders and Walkers



Caterpillar Walking Club

Foreword

The aim of this document is to provide both leaders and walkers with a simple check list of steps to consider when planning walks and during walking events. Even for most experienced leaders it may be useful as an aide- memoire.

Walking is one of the safest forms of recreational exercise. However when walkers walk in larger groups different dynamics come into play which can lead to problems if not understood. For example the group can get split up which wastes time and could become serious if the weather deteriorates or daylight is running out. Perhaps the single most dangerous aspect of group walking is when the group comes into contact with roads. This issue is dealt with in the guidelines.

The check list has been developed from material published by other organisations and from experience of what has gone wrong in the past.

If you choose to lead a walk from a guidebook, do bear in mind that if you go off course from the route described in the guide text, you will have no reference to find your way back on course. Therefore unless you are familiar with the route, i.e. having done a recce beforehand, you should always carry an OS map of the area.

If the guidelines are followed most problems will be prevented from occurring in the first place and everybody should have a good time.

Enjoy

Mike Sweaney

Walk Leader - Planning and Preparation

Suitable meeting point

Plan to meet in official car parks, or be certain that the designated spot is suitable for the anticipated number of cars, preferably with access to public transport.

Whenever possible the walking route should avoid roads especially where there is fast traffic.

Tips on Planning the Route

To avoid making mistakes in measuring route length or severity, if in doubt:

- Have your route checked by an experienced leader
- Recce the route when possible
- Estimate the duration according to Naismith's Rule*
- Bear in mind season and location, affecting sunset time
- If event requires public transport, check times
- Always use OS map and compass as primary navigation, even if the route is from a guide book.
- Use GPS as a secondary navigation tool (they can fail).
- Ask other, experienced, participants for help at an early stage

○ Advertising the event

It is important to communicate nature of the event to members well in advance via an advert in the newsletter

Advert must include a description of the:

- Length
- Terrain
- Grade description e.g.: hilly; no stiles; suitable for all members; moderate pace; muddy, etc.
- Details of how to get to the start point and approximate journey time.
- Whether packed lunch is required or a pub lunch is available.
- Give your contact details so people can let you know they are coming and mobile number for use on the day.

Managing the group during the walk

Pilots checklist: prior and throughout the walk

- Make sure you find everybody you are expecting, some stations have multiple entrances and car parks, etc.
- Once everyone is booted up and not before the advertised start time, count the group immediately before you start the walk and then at regular intervals throughout the day.
- Stop and regroup if the group is becoming too spread out and after obstacles such as stiles, road crossings, etc.
- Appoint a backmarker if the group is large. Each person should never lose sight of the person in front of them, if they do the risk of taking a wrong turn and losing the party.
- Carry mobile phones and know the leaders number, as advertised with the event.
- Always follow the Countryside Code when off-road
- Always follow the Highway Code when on public roads
- Always observe any local temporary unforeseen path diversions or closures.
- Allow a safety margin in planning finishing time.
- Have contingency plans e.g. always know the point of no return and what time you expect to reach it. You can then judge whether to return or commit to the whole route.
- Carry a torch if the expected completion time is close to dusk
- Assess whether participants are fit enough for the event. If in doubt, discuss your concerns with them and decide whether they should do for example half a day rather than the whole route.
- Have contingency plan: e.g. some members are happy to give car support and collect walkers at key points of the walk
- Leader to monitor participants in order to identify anyone who appears to be in difficulty.
- Any participant who experiences a problem on the walk must advise the leader immediately so that appropriate steps can be taken.
- Dog owners are legally responsible for their dogs and not the Club. Any participant within the group should advise the dog owner when they see livestock ahead, so that they can ensure the lead is on before entering the field with livestock.
- Always study the local weather forecast prior to each walk, take account of recent weather conditions i.e. prolonged rain, snow or ice.
- Participants are informed well in advance of: the time of year; location of the event and grade of the walk, they

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must bring suitable clothing footwear and equipment. If the leader has any doubts as to whether a participant is adequately equipped for the conditions on the day of the walk, they should first discuss their concerns with the member. Ultimately the leader is empowered by the planning committee to refuse to take anyone they judge would be a risk to themselves or others.

- If the walk is in a remote area, before starting the walk advise/remind participants what food and water they require.

Crossing and walking on Roads

Always use bridges or pedestrian crossings where available when crossing busy roads. Where these are not available actively manage the crossing process i.e. ensure everybody focuses on the task and they do not just follow others whilst engrossed in conversation (it's easily done!). Large groups should cross in stages of small groups. If visibility is restricted, perhaps on a sharp bend, one person should cross first to obtain a longer site line, then advise others when it is safe to cross. Be aware and make allowances for any participants with a disability. Observe the Highway Code, face oncoming traffic unless, you are on a blind bend, in which case leader should indicate to the group to cross road, so that both they and any oncoming vehicle have a clear line of sight.

Crossing Railways

Only cross using bridges and approved level-crossings. Many footpaths cross mainline railways with fast trains operating. These level crossings are in remote spots with no barriers or warnings of trains coming, apart from the driver's whistle. Actively manage the crossing process and observe local instructions. If necessary cross in small groups taking account of any disabilities.

Crossing rivers and streams

Use crossings (bridge/ford) where available. Should the bridge crossing a stream be missing or broken, first assess banks which may be slippery or insecure before attempting to cross. Consider an alternative crossing point if necessary. If anyone gets wet and cold, manage the situation by assessing, monitoring; making contingency plans if anybody is in difficulty.

Leaders and Walkers

Adverse weather conditions

Don't start the walk if the local weather forecast cast is too adverse. Never be afraid of aborting the walk or consider curtailing the event.

If the walk is underway and the weather conditions deteriorate, stop and reassess the situation. Share decision making process with whole group, this will produce a better outcome, lift morale and achieve buy-in from the group. Shelter from weather where possible if it is likely to pass. If the weather looks as if it may deteriorate further, head for a pub or tea shop if possible, though avoid alcohol until you have reached safety. If you later decide to finish the walk, do not make unnecessary stops to look at views, for example, just get to safety as quickly as possible. Have contingency plans for getting down off the hills if the walk is in a remote location. It a good idea to carry a bothy bag or space blanket, during winter conditions. Let someone know where you are going and your ETA.

Hot weather

To avoid dehydration and sunstroke: Drink plenty of water, wear a hat, and wear sunscreen.

Avoiding potential trips and falls

Advise participants of obstacles ahead or difficult terrain where they may not have appreciated the risk. Anyone who is unstable should buddy-up with someone more sure-footed and link arms whilst on the difficult terrain.

When relevant, advise participants before traversing vulnerable areas or where there are sudden sheer drops, where they may not have appreciated the risk and need to focus on the immediate terrain. If necessary talk to the group and reassess before tackling any severe and unfamiliar manoeuvres especially with less experienced walkers.

Be aware some people may have allergic reactions to stings or bites. Individual members should be aware of their allergies and they are responsible for carrying appropriate medication for their own safety and wellbeing.

If a serious reaction does occur, summon medical assistance immediately using any means available. If you need to summons the emergency services and you are in a remote area such as moorland, you will need to know your OS grid reference. Alternatively if you can locate a place or village nearby, state which direction you are in relation to the place of reference, for example 1 mile south of Tan Hill Inn!

Individuals are advised to carry hikers first aid kits.

***Naismith's rule** was developed by a William Naismith in 1892 as a basic rule of thumb that can be used to calculate the time it will take to walk from point a to b. The formula has been adapted a little since then and considers the distance to walk, the altitude changes and the speed that you will walk.

This rule assumes a reasonable level of fitness, but Tranter's corrections can but used to change the time to suit a particular level of fitness.

The URL below will give you a calculator to work out the duration of your walk taking account of hills and distance.

<http://www.wildwalks.com/bushcraft/technical-stuff/naismith-s-rule-estimate-walking-time.html>

Appendix

Overseeing risk management at the planning committee

To manage the risks associated with group-walking the following steps should be taken by the planning committee
Designate an experienced person to manage risks associated with group walking activity.
Benchmark policies and procedures against similar reputable walking organisations.
Carry out formal risk assessment of group walking.
Review and update risk assessments regularly.
Ensure risk is a standing agenda item on group committee meetings.
Offer training and support to any less experienced member intending to lead walks.
Issue guidelines to members. The planning committee must ensure that leaders undertake events within their competencies or are given the necessary support from more experienced leaders.
Ensure Guidelines are available to leaders.
Make tuition available on request from experienced leaders
Ensure any adverse incidents that occur during walking events are reviewed by the planning committee, with the aim of preventing a reoccurrence in the future.