

Manor Walking Club

Tips for walk leaders

These tips are for guidance only because the conditions and circumstances of walks vary widely. They should be read in conjunction with our Safety Code which explains how we seek to take reasonable care of our club members on walks.

The most important advice is to use common sense and if in doubt ask for assistance.

Introduction

The walk leader should guide the group in a safe, competent manner over the planned route, be prepared for problems and know what to do if they arise.

This may sound daunting at first but new leaders are requested that they start by working in a pair with a more experienced club member in order to gain confidence. Leading a group is not a 'test' and club members are always supportive of the volunteer leaders.

1. Know your walk before the day. It must be recce'd first, preferably shortly before the day of the walk. Be fully conversant with the use of a map and compass to a degree commensurate with the grade of walk. GPS systems are useful but should not be relied upon in case there are problems with the technology.

From the recce, note the mileage, the height gain and the terrain and from these determine the grade of walk according to the Club's system. If in doubt, consult the programme secretary.

2. Prepare a route card, particularly for the B & A grade walks. This will be helpful for your memory and might be used if there has to be a replacement leader.

3. Ensure that your route is well within your own capabilities in any of the likely weather conditions.

4. Be prepared to alter the route if conditions are unfavourable. Do not be coerced against your better judgement - you are the leader. Walks should ideally have contingency plans to enable you to shorten the walk if necessary.

5. Before the day, inform the programme secretary of any unusual hazards that are expected, for example streams or scree to cross, scrambles, possibility of ice, exposure to steep drops and so on. This is our Risk Assessment procedure. All members know that country walking is hazardous but we flag up any additional hazards. The programme secretary will e-mail this advice to members in advance of the day.

6. Also in advance of the day and if possible on the morning of the walk obtain a weather report. If necessary, alter the plans for the walk and advise the programme secretary. As leader, you are entitled to change your plans. State what your plan is when you meet the group so that members can decide whether or not to join you.

Leaders of the A walks should normally take one of the club's survival tents with them. All group members are asked to take their own basic first aid materials.

7. At the assembly point meet and greet any visitors or guests. You will normally have been

notified to expect a visitor, perhaps someone trying out our club. As explained in our Safety Code, you should outline the walk to the visitor, ask if they have done similar walks previously and in this informal manner, check that they are adequately prepared for the day. We expect that all participants on our walks take personal responsibility to ensure they are adequately prepared. In the unlikely event that you believe that a guest or visitor is inadequately prepared for the walk you have planned, you may refuse to include them in the group. The other Club members will support you in this.

8. At start of the walk take a head count and appoint a 'back marker.' You should maintain visual contact with the back marker throughout the walk to enable you to keep the group together and prevent any from straying onto the wrong path.

9. Lead the walk from the front, setting a pace which enables all the group members to keep with you. Keep the group compact in poor weather especially. Ensure that all gates are left as found by passing a message to the back marker.

10. On your recce you will have noted convenient places for refreshment stops. A good guide is to stop briefly for at least a breather and a drink after each hour of walking.

11. Generally, you should discourage any individuals or 'sub groups' from varying your route. On a rare occasion if, for example, alternative pathways through difficult terrain are being sought, then you should establish who is setting off in a different direction and where you will all reassemble.

12. Ensure that the countryside is left at least as pleasant as found. Leave no litter, ensure gates are left as found and ensure responsible behaviour, particularly around farms and on rights of way through crops.

Tips for the recce

1. Don't leave it too late. You may need to repeat the recce in order to resolve problems. 3 or 4 weeks ahead is a good target to aim for.

2. Make a route card with times, landmarks, bearings or grid references.

3. Keep to rights of way and open access land. Do not trespass.

4. Look for suitable stopping points for refreshment breaks and be considerate with regards toilets at the start of a walk and opportunities for 'comfort breaks'.

5. Devise contingency routes for shortening the walks.

6. Consider where best to park cars safely.

7. Prepare copies of some driving instructions to ensure that the group can find the start point of the walk.

8. Bear in mind how conditions can vary according to time of year, affecting terrain, route finding, stream crossings, likelihood of ice and so on.

Potential problems

This is not an exhaustive list nor is it a list of instructions. All situations are unique and

require assessment of the actions that are required.

1. Group members fail to meet at the walk start point.

Use mobile phones to try to contact group members known to be travelling in the 'missing' vehicle(s). If it is necessary to wait a long time for the missing group, consider shortening the walk in order to complete it safely.

2. Group is significantly slowed down on a walk due to injury or illness of a participant.

If the unwell group member can continue, then a 'fit' group may proceed to the finish and possibly return with a car. The party must not divide into more than two groups and there must be sufficient numbers to be able to support the slower group member.

3. In the event of an accident.

a) Enquire of the party who has first aid or medical experience

b) Attend to the immediate needs of the injured person but ensure the safety and warmth of the rest of the party. Appoint a deputy leader as appropriate. Do not let the group disperse.

c) Appoint a group member who will coordinate the means of communication, for example determining who has got a phone signal.

d) Arrange for First Aid to commence, utilising whatever expertise is available within the group at that time. All those attempting any First Aid should remember :-

A - Airway

B - Breathing

C - Circulation

e) If an injured or unwell person is unable to move or continue, then arrange for assistance, either by phoning 999 (Police and then request Mountain Rescue) or, in the absence of a phone signal, arranging for two or three strong competent walkers to go ahead and raise the alarm. They will need to be fully briefed on the situation with the location written down. They may be able to find a location for a phone signal or they may have to find an occupied dwelling.

f) If it is necessary to get the rest of the group back to the cars, because of failing light or dangerous weather conditions, then they may do so provided there is at least one competent leader and a map, and that a small group with a minimum of four walkers stays with the injured party.

g) Remember the International Alpine Distress Signal - 6 blasts on a whistle (or shouts or torch flashes) followed by a pause of one minute followed by a repetition and so on.

h) Full details of the incident must be reported by the Leader as soon as possible using the Incident/Accident report form on the Club website.

4. If a person is lost

a) Determine where the person was last seen by any other party member.

b) The main party should wait and four strong competent walkers should look for the lost person. They should shout and/or blow whistles, keeping to the main tracks and remembering where

the main party is located. After a pre-arranged time, not exceeding 30 minutes, the searchers should return to the main party or, if it is possible to communicate with the leader by phone, agree the route back to the cars and then, fully equipped with map, compass, GPS system etc, continue to search for the lost person.

c) If after a further 30 minutes, the searching party has still not found the lost person then they should continue back to the cars (or catch up with the group on the walk). If necessary call the police (Mountain Rescue). Consider:

- i) The ability and competence of the lost person
- ii) How well equipped the lost person is in terms of protective clothing, map, compass, GPS.
- iii) The terrain and the weather

d) This problem may be avoided by advising walkers not to walk ahead of the leader and by the nomination of a back marker who should remain in visual contact.
