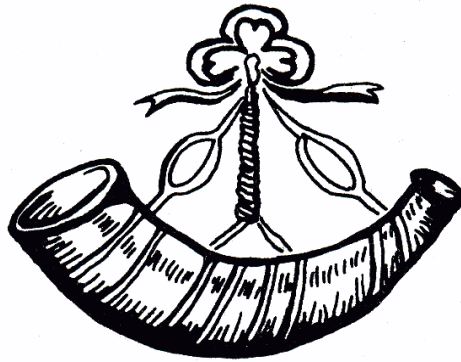


RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION

Wirral Group



LEADERS' HANDBOOK

Leaders' Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for leading walks for the Club. Without members willing to lead we would not have a Rambles Programme.

There are two types of member who may find this booklet useful. First, experienced leaders who may wish to refresh the procedures they follow. Second, those members who have never led a walk.

Many members are understandably apprehensive about leading a walk for the first time. There are similarities with other skills such as learning to swim. Some people are naturals, while others have to work at it. However, the sense of achievement and satisfaction that members have when they have successfully led their first walk, makes it all worthwhile. How many times at the end of a walk have we heard members say,

“Thanks for the walk, it was really good. I don’t think I would ever have completed it, if you hadn’t been leading it!”

We hope the guidelines in the booklet will help all leaders from veterans to those leading their first walk. We strongly suggest that you use this booklet in conjunction with the Ramblers’ Association checklist for Walk Leaders. Other reading material is available on request.

A. BEFORE THE WALK

Choose the route

- If you are leading a walk for the first time you may prefer to choose an area that you know well
- Leaders can plan their own routes or obtain copies of previous rambles from either the Route Descriptions Officer or the Clubhouse. New leaders might want to share their proposed ramble with a Buddy Leader
- Use OS 1:25,000 maps, available at the Clubhouse, as these maps contain the best footpath detail and field boundaries etc.
- Plan a varied, interesting walk within the constraints of the grade of walk.
- Allow plenty of time to plan your walk
- Before you plan your walk, consult the B+ leader so as to minimise duplication of routes and provide the best choice for members on the day. If you are unable to contact the B+ leader contact the Rambles Secretary or Route Descriptions Officer.
- Be comfortable with the amount of map reading and compass work that will be necessary for the walk that you are planning. The party want an enjoyable day out; not one that tests your navigational skills.
- Walks do NOT have to be at or near the upper limit of their range, particularly during the winter months.
- Ensure your proposed route is well within your capabilities in any weather conditions.
- All walks should have contingency plans to allow you to shorten the walk, if conditions become unfavourable.
- A and B+ walks should always cover the designated walk area. B- and C should do so whenever practicable. It is recommended that 'B-' walks do not climb above 2000 feet during winter months.
- Wherever possible use only public rights of way and permissive paths. Do not trespass. Remember there could be up to 30 ramblers in your party.
- Avoid road walking as far as possible.
- Measure the mileage, TOTAL ascent (i.e. ALL the climbs) and assess the type of terrain to provide an accurate assessment of your walk. Ensure the ramble grade falls within the required range. (See Appendix 2).
- Make sure you know the precise location of where you will meet the coach at the end of the walk.

Recce the route

- Know your ramble and don't leave it too late to do your recce. It is not uncommon for experienced leaders to recce the walk twice, if they have encountered unfavourable conditions such as bad weather or blocked paths. Avoid doing recces alone.
- On the other hand, don't recce the walk too soon, as memories can fade and paths become overgrown. Three or four weeks ahead is a good compromise.
- Note suitable landmarks or reference points at approximately 30 minute intervals during the course of the walk.
- A number of leaders find it helpful to take photos, particularly at key points, to help them visualise the walk.
- You might wish to check and note the areas where it is possible to get a mobile phone signal in case of an emergency on the actual walk.
- Make a route card (See Appendix 1) with times, landmarks, compass bearings especially in potentially difficult spots, escape routes etc. Apart from being a memory jogger, the route card would be invaluable to an experienced leader who might need to stand in for you if you were unavailable on the day.
- Look for suitable stops for meals and toilets.
- Check contingency routes for shortening the walk.
- Check on condition of gates/stiles etc. and allow time for passage of up to 30 ramblers.
- Check exact route of rights of way through farms and cultivated land.
- Consider the likely conditions at the time of year you will actually be leading the walk – weather, terrain, size of streams, lambing time, grouse shooting

Publicising the walk

- Write up route description and send it to the Route Descriptions Officer as soon as possible, but not later than 10 days before the walk. If you have a mobile phone number, include it for use in emergencies.
- Ensure your route description, which is circulated on the coach, draws attention to any particular features such as scrambling or rough terrain.
- If your walk does not start at the final drop off point your route description should include the six figure map reference of your start point.
- Leaders using GPS systems may wish to share the mapping information

B. ON THE DAY

Directions

The “B+” party leader is responsible for the location of coach/toilet stop (in consultation with the Route Descriptions Officer) and for guiding the coach driver in the later stages of the journey to ensure that the coach passes any drop-off points (with assistance from other leaders in respect of their walks as required).

- A library indicating the coach routes and coffee stops undertaken on previous walks will be available to B+ leaders. Under normal circumstances, there will be no coach stop for journeys that are less than 90 minutes duration from leaving the Wirral.
- The B+ leader should obtain the driver’s mobile telephone number and pass this on to the other leaders
- Confirm, before leaving the coach, with the driver and other party leaders, the exact location where the coach will be parked at the end of the day
- The drop-off points must be in a safe position with regard to both the safety of the walkers, the safety of the coach and the flow of traffic.
- All groups should, where possible, start somewhere on the standard route to the final drop-off point. It is undesirable to have long detours to accommodate one group at the time/expense of the other groups.

Safety

- Leaders have a responsibility for the safety of all members of their party. **All participants in a walking group owe each other a ‘duty of care’**. The implication of this is that all participants should, to the best of their ability, act in such a way so as not to cause or allow through neglect foreseeable damage to befall others or their property. Walk leaders either through training, qualification or experience could be considered to have an ‘enhanced duty of care’ as they ‘should know better’ than an inexperienced participant but the inexperienced participant is still party to decisions and cannot be absolved from all ‘duty of care’ obligations.
- The **MINIMUM** number on **ANY** walk is 3 members.
- The walk leader should guide the party in a safe, competent manner over the planned route, be prepared for any problems and know what to do if they arise. (See section on Problems and Accidents)
- Be aware that adverse weather conditions including snow, ice, strong headwinds and heavy rain can all slow progress considerably. Extreme heat can lead to dehydration and heat exhaustion in party members. Be

prepared to amend routes according to conditions and the needs of the party.

- When walking on roads, the leader and whipper-in should use the High Visibility jackets.
- Try to ensure that all persons in your party are adequately equipped and physically capable of completing the walk under the prevailing conditions and also under possible adverse conditions. Be prepared to turn away people if circumstances demand
- You are the leader and do not be coerced against your better judgement. Any member flouting the authority of the leader may be prevented from booking on future rambles.
- We will encourage members to carry emergency contact information on the outside of their daysacks.

At the start of the walk

- Welcome any new members who are out on the first walk.
- Give a brief description of the walk, including lunch stops and raise awareness of any situations where walkers may need to take particular care.
- Count the number in the party and appoint a 'whipper-in' who should be a strong walker, and ideally have a whistle, map and compass and be conversant with the route. This is very important in poor weather. Periodically count the party to ensure everyone is present and always recount after any stops such as lunch, drinks or toilet stops.
- Remind the whipper-in to remain at the back of the party at all times and not to let any members of the party drop behind him. If a party member needs to stop for any reason call the party to a halt to wait for the member, at a discreet distance if appropriate. Do not allow such a person to stop behind and say they will catch the party up.
- Set the pace of the walk by walking at the front and prevent others from walking ahead. If walkers are in front of the leader, the leader cannot be responsible for their safety.
- Look back regularly to ensure that the party is keeping together.
- Keep in touch with the whipper-in (who should always be the back marker) throughout the ramble and keep the party compact especially in poor weather.
- When on the ramble consider the strengths and weaknesses of the party.

- Remember to find convenient places for meal and toilet stops. This is very important in winter as coldness can set in very quickly.
- If you have a problem on the walk, any other walker who leads will be more than happy to assist.
- There is a first aid kit, complete with survival bag, high visibility jacket and Accident/Incident Book for each party and all leaders must ensure that they take one of these kits.
- Ensure that the whipper-in knows whether or not to close a gate. Call 'gate' if the gate requires closing and check that this message is conveyed to the whipper-in.
- Ensure that the countryside is left at least as pleasant as we found it. Leave no litter, ensure that gates are left as found and ensure good behaviour, particularly around farms etc.
- All walks finish at the coach and no walk should arrive more than 90 minutes before the departure time.
- The coach will be parked in a safe, easy-to-find area (e.g. village, where telephone communication is available, if possible).
- Always get your party back to the coach at least 10 minutes before the published departure time even if this means shortening your walk.

Problems and accidents

Coach arrives late at the start

- It may be necessary to revise the grade height and/or distance of the walk to reflect the reduced time available. Groups should be notified of the proposed changes prior to the start of the walk.

Coach takes wrong route

- The 'B+' party leader should ensure that he liaises with the coach driver on the outward journey.

Party gets lost or is delayed

- If it becomes apparent that a walk is going to be late returning to the coach, STOP, THINK and DON'T PANIC. Keep the group together and try to get a phone message to the coach driver, or failing that to the leader of one of the other groups. If you are unable to get a mobile signal, try to get a local farmer to call the coach driver. If it is possible, shorten the walk by diverting the group to a convenient, safe alternative pick-up point.

Procedure to be followed if a person is lost

- Determine where the person was when last seen by any other party member.
- Main party to wait and four strong competent walkers to look for the lost person. Shout or blow your whistle. Listen for a response. Keep to main tracks and remember where the main party is located. After a pre-arranged time, not exceeding 30 minutes, the searchers should return to main party.
- In adverse weather, the main party to continue with walk. The other four walkers – who are fully equipped with map, compass etc and have discussed route to coach with leader – continue to search for the lost person.
- After 30 minutes, if lost person is not found, then either continue with the walk and hope that the person has set off for the coach or met up with the main party, or notify the Police.

Consider:

- The ability and competence of the lost person.
- Is he/she equipped with map and compass and, if so, does he/she know how to use them?
- The terrain
- The weather

REMEMBER!

This situation will not arise if –

- Nobody walks ahead of the leader;
- The party is kept compact (particularly in poor visibility) and;
- The whipper-in remains at the rear of the party and maintains visual contact with the leader and uses a whistle to alert the leader if visual contact is being lost.

Procedure in the event of an accident**

** Taken from 'Safety on Mountains' (BMC) and 'Mountain and Cave Rescue (Mountain Rescue Committee)' 2010

REMEMBER the International Alpine Distress Signal – 6 blasts on a whistle (or 6 shouts or flashes of a torch) followed by a pause of a minute then a repetition of the 6 blasts, shouts or flashes. Keep giving this signal system. If your signals are heard, you should hear an answering whistle – 3 blasts

followed by a pause of a minute repeated several times. If your torch is inoperative and the noise from the whistle or voice does not carry because of the wind then you can wave a white or coloured cloth or garment. Whistles should not be used indiscriminately.

In the event of an accident when on a walk the following procedure should be adopted:

- Enquire of the party who has first aid or medical experience.
- Attend to the immediate needs of the injured person but ensure the safety and warmth of the rest of the party. Elect a deputy leader as appropriate.
- Use the 'Treating Injuries' advice on the Walk Leader's checklist provided by the Ramblers Association

Injured person cannot move

- If unconscious, ensure the airway is clear. Put in 'recovery' position unless spinal damage is suspected in which case constant attention should be given in case the tongue falls back.
- Stop any bleeding by pressure with clean pad or first aid dressing.
- Make the injured person as comfortable as possible; keep them dry, insulate them from the ground, moving them the least you have to in the process (especially if there is risk of damage to the spine). Make them warm and reassure them.
- If conscious, warm sweet drinks should be given if the weather is mild. However, never give drinks to anyone with suspected chest, abdominal or head injuries or any injured patient who may be transported to hospital quickly and put under anaesthetic **NEVER** give alcoholic drinks.
- Try to contact the emergency services using a mobile phone. If a party member has a GPS ask for an accurate grid reference for your location.
- If no mobile signal can be obtained then two strong, competent walkers should stay with the injured person. Display ORANGE or RED markers to aid the rescue services. Two strong, competent walkers fully briefed with situation and location written down, go ahead to raise the alarm by telephoning the Police or the nearest Mountain Rescue Post. They should state the exact location of the injured person. 6-figure map reference, compass bearings of known points and detailed description of location. Also state the time of accident and nature of the injuries.

Injured person is mobile

- The course of action to be taken depends on the nature of the accident. Usually administer first aid and together with 4 strong competent walkers proceed to the coach. If condition deteriorates then two of the walkers can stay with the patient whilst the other two go for help.
- Rest of the party to continue the walk or return to the coach as appropriate.

At the end of the walk

- Enter full details of Accident/Incident (including date, time and exact location) together with name(s) and address(es) of people involved and witnesses (if any) in the Accident/Incident book. A copy of this information must be sent to the Rambles Secretary as soon as possible.
- Remember that you are entitled to claim your recce expenses. Fuel costs incurred up to the cost of a seat on the coach (currently £11), plus tunnel fees and any parking costs. On a linear walk, members can also claim for the cost of their bus fare or taxi fare (if a bus is not available) back to their car. When doing a recce we do have tips on the cheapest places to park and encourage members to share these with us.

APPENDIX 1

ROUTE CARD EXAMPLE

	TIME		MILES
Start (Layby Opp. Red Lion) (SY 541.536)	1130		0
Point A – Leave main path	1150		1
Point B – direction 085 ⁰	1200		1 ^{1/2}
Point C	1230		2
Lunch stop	1245		2 ^{1/2}
Start	1305		
Peak Top 1	1345		3
Col	1355	– escape bearing 210 ⁰ to road	3¼
Peak Top 2	1420		4
Col	1430		4 ^{1/2}
Direction 344 ⁰ from col		– escape bearing 160 ⁰ to stream then follow on LHS	
Arrive at wall – follow 160 ⁰	1505		6 ^{1/2}
Point D	1540		8
Pass farm left of barn	1615		10
Coach (town centre bus park) (SY 638.421)	1700	– (Departure time 1730)	12

Keep track of actual time with respect to planned time and vary pace of walk to suit.

APPENDIX 2

RAMBLE GRADING

The Club uses a lettered grading scheme to help leaders plan walks of suitable calibre and to give more information to members. There is overlap between walks to be used at the leader's discretion.

The grading is based on a points system that takes into account the mileage, ascent, terrain and (any) scrambling involved in the walk. The greater the number of points, the more strenuous is the walk.

POINTS

Mileage = 1 point per mile

Ascent = 1 point per 500 feet of climbing

Terrain = 0 point - easy walking, well defined paths, fair terrain

= 1 point - mixed, fairly rough or boggy terrain

= 2 points - sustained very rough terrain

Scrambling= 1 point for some moderate scrambling

= 2 points for difficult, exposed scrambling

Add together the total number of points for the anticipated route to ensure that it falls within the permitted range

A = points 18-23

B+ = points 14-18

B- = points 11-14

C = points 7-11

D = points 5-7

Members seeking to lead an A+ walk must first seek the approval of the committee.