



Sunday Coach Rambles Manual

Issue 1.1, March 2019

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Summary

Wirral Ramblers have, for many years, offered a weekly programme of Sunday walks by coach, covering a variety of destinations and with, typically, four or five walks being offered from each destination. The organisation and delivery of such walks involves various Officers of the Club and, of course, the walks leaders.

This Manual has therefore been prepared in order to assist all those involved in the preparation and delivery of such walks. It provides appropriate guidance, covering all aspects of the Sunday walks, from inception through to delivery, on the day.

The Manual is structured into a series of clearly defined sections, addressing the various stages involved in the preparation and delivery of the walks, including the development of the initial walking programme, the coach routes to the walks destinations, walking route planning and reconnaissance, route descriptions and the essential pre-walk and on-the-day actions. Walk leadership itself is addressed via reference to the Walk Leader Toolkit guidelines and information, published by The Ramblers.

It is intended that the Manual should be of value and assistance to all those involved in walk planning, preparation and leadership. The Manual can either be read as a whole, or retained as a reference text, for consultation with specific sections, as appropriate.

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1. Introduction

The Wirral Group of The Ramblers (“Wirral Ramblers” or “the Club”) has offered a weekly Sunday walks programme by coach, dating back to the 1970s. Such walks continue to be popular to this day, with some 4 or 5 walks usually on offer each Sunday, ranging from the more demanding to the leisurely. The organisation, delivery and leadership of these walks involves various Officers of the Club and, of course, the walks leaders

This Manual has therefore been developed in order:-

- To provide, within a single document, the requisite information concerning the organisation and delivery of the Sunday coach rambles programme;
- To clarify the various roles, responsibilities, activities, inter-relationships and timescales associated with the above;
- To provide appropriate “Good Practice” for walk leadership; and
- To support the development of new and aspiring leaders, whilst also offering a reference text for existing leaders.

The various stages involved in the preparation, planning and delivery of the Sunday Walks programme are as shown in Figure 1, below.

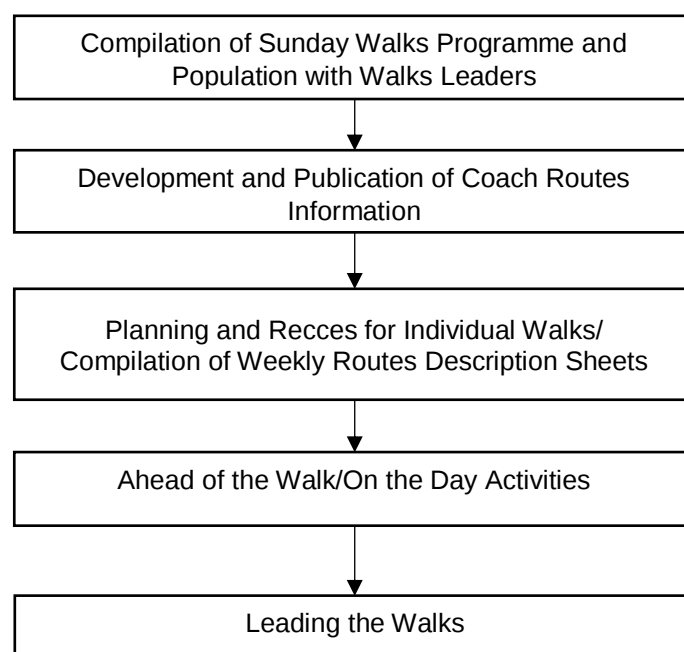


Figure 1:- The Preparation, Planning & Delivery of a Walk

The subsequent Sections of the Manual now describe these various aspects, in greater detail.

2. Development and Publication of the Twice Yearly Sunday Walks Programmes

The Sunday walks programmes are developed and published on a twice yearly basis, via individual programmes for the Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter seasons.

The development of these programmes is led and facilitated by the Rambles Secretary, working in conjunction with a small group of experienced leaders. The aim in developing the walks programmes is to provide a range of appealing walks, tailored to the seasons and daylight hours, via a mix of traditionally popular destinations, interspersed with a variety of less frequently visited and new destinations. The walks programme will also specify the coach pick-up arrangements on the Wirral, with a mix of two linear pick-ups (Southbound from Liscard and Northbound from Heswall) and also a number of departures from a central pick-up location.

Suggestions for new walks destinations are welcome from the membership, at any time of the year. Members should forward any such suggestions to the Rambles Secretary, who will include them in the considerations for future programmes.

The draft walks programme for the season in question is then submitted to the Committee for comment. Any modifications that may be requested are incorporated, prior to the programme then being passed back to the Committee, for approval. The approved programme is then made available to the membership, via circulation on the coach, specific e:mail distributions and posting on the web-site, for members to put themselves forward to lead one or more walks, of their choosing. Once the programme is sufficiently well populated with leaders, it is then finalised, such as to go to press, for the production of the seasonal programme card. This is made available and distributed to the membership, typically some 3 to 4 weeks ahead of the walks season in question. A tabulated PDF version of the walks programme is also posted on the Club web-site.

New leaders are always welcome and any members who may be considering leading a walk, for the first time, are welcome to discuss this with the Rambles Secretary. Every help and support will be given to such aspiring leaders.

As the season progresses, the Rambles Secretary circulates updates on any walks still requiring leaders, with a view to filling these, prior to the walks themselves.

3. Development and Publication of Coach Routes Information

The Rambles Secretary is also responsible for the compilation of the preferred coach routes information, for the walks programme in question (assisted, as appropriate, by one or more members). The preferred coach routes provide the basic information for the coach journey to each of the destinations, with this being supplemented via the identification of appropriate en-route comfort stops and coach parking information. En-route comfort stops are generally not included, for those destinations lying within 90 minutes duration of the final coach pick-up, consistent with the protocol in Appendix 1.

The complete list of preferred coach routes is posted on the Club web-site, in order to assist leaders in planning for their walks and, in particular, for linear walks, to alert them to opportunities for possible drop-offs en-route.

The Treasurer is responsible for forwarding copies of the Sunday walks programme, to the Coach Operator, at least one month ahead of the walking season in question. The information provided to the Coach Operator shows, for each trip, the date, the destination, the place and time of the first pick-up on the Wirral and the return time. This information is used by the Coach Operator, as the basis of their quotation, for the six monthly walking season in question.

4. Planning and Recces for Individual Walks/Compilation and Publication of the Weekly Routes Descriptions

4.1 Walk Gratings System and Coach Route to Destination

The Club uses a simple points based grading system, to categorise walks, ranging from the more demanding (A grades), through to the more leisurely (D grades). Each grade of walk is defined by a lower limit and upper limit points allocation. Further details on the walks grading system are provided in Appendix 2.

Unless otherwise agreed, the coach route to any particular destination will be as defined in the listing of the preferred coach routes, as described in Section 3. Should any variation in the final stages of such coach routes be desired, such as to facilitate drop-offs for linear walks, then these must be agreed with the B Plus leader, as described in Section 4.2, below.

4.2 The Especial Role of the B Plus Leader

In addition to planning and leading the B Plus walk, the B Plus party leader is also responsible for the following activities:-

- Deciding on the suitability of the en-route comfort stop (as appropriate);
- Deciding on/agreeing to any reasonable requests for variations in the latter stages of the coach route, such as to facilitate drop-offs en-route¹;
- Identifying suitable and appropriate parking for the coach, such for the various walks to return to, at the end of the day²;
- Communicating such coach parking information to the coach driver and other walks leaders, prior to disembarking from the coach;
- Briefing the coach driver on any intended drop-offs en-route and the party leader(s) responsible for these;
- Guiding the coach driver in the latter stages of the journey, to the intended destination³;and

¹ Any such deviations from the preferred coach routes should be kept to a minimum, such as to avoid undue disruption to the other walks.

² Guided by the initial suggestions for coach parking, as provided in the preferred coach routes information.

³ Should the B Plus party leader disembark prior to the intended destination, then he/she shall brief and designate one of the other leaders, to perform this duty.

- Engaging in consultation ahead of the walk, with the Bookings Officer, The Treasurer and the Chair, in the event of anticipated severe adverse weather conditions (as described in Section 5 and Appendix 4).

In order that all the walks leaders are able to plan their walks with confidence, any requests for variations on the preferred coach route should be submitted to the B Plus party leader at the planning stage and, preferably, at least 4 weeks ahead of the walk in question. Should any such variation(s) be agreed by the B Plus party leader (or initiated by him/her), then the B Plus party leader shall notify all other leaders and the Rambles Secretary.

In the absence of a B Plus leader, the duties above shall be assumed by the B Minus party leader.

4.3 Walk Planning and Reconnaissance

Section 4.3 aims to provide Good Practice Guidance for planning and reconnaissance. However, it is recognised that leaders are free to develop their own methodologies, as appropriate to the circumstances in hand.

4.3.1 Planning

Individual leaders are responsible for the planning of their own particular walks, consistent with their chosen walk grading. In planning the walks, leaders may wish to consider:-

- Previous walks around the destination in question, based upon the back catalogue of Route Descriptions available to members, on the web-site;
- Particular features in the area, eg peaks, viewpoints, buildings, monuments etc;
- History and heritage; and
- The time of the year and, in particular, the available daylight hours.

Each individual leader should aim to plan a varied and interesting walk, measuring the total linear distance and summing all the individual ascents, to calculate an initial estimate of the points rating. Should any adjustment be required, then the route can be modified, accordingly. The planning stage should also include an initial estimate of the timings for the walk, taking into account the anticipated terrain and the ascents/descents. Walks may be planned either as linear walks, taking advantage of a drop-off en-route, or as circular walks, starting and finishing at the designated coach destinations.

In planning the walks, leaders should, as far as practicable, aim to use designated Public Rights of Way and Permissive Paths, although alternative routes, across Access Land, may also be considered. Excessive road walking should be avoided. For walks in the winter months, with more limited daylight hours, consideration should be given towards planning walks nearer the lower limit of their grade's point range.

4.3.2 The Reconnaissance

Once a walk has been planned, the next stage is for the leader to undertake a reconnaissance of the route (“the recce”), ahead of walk date in question. It is recommended that such recces should be conducted some 2 to 4 weeks ahead of the walks themselves, both to provide time for any re-visiting of the route, should this be required, and to also avoid having to conduct such recces in bad weather.

Leaders may claim travel expenses for their recces, up to the cost of a seat on the coach. They may also claim for tunnel tolls and for parking, as appropriate. For linear walks, bus/rail fares may also be claimed⁴, from/to the start point for the walk. All leaders are also eligible for a complimentary seat on the coach, on the day of their walk.

In planning and executing the recces, leaders should start with their initial estimates of timings and waypoints, in the form of a draft route card, and note the timings achieved in practice. Some adjustment of the achieved timings may be appropriate, after the recce, both to take account for any delays encountered in determining the route in the recce, whilst also noting that extra time may be required to lead an extended party on the day, over multiple obstructions or stiles.

Individual leaders may also find it useful to make their own particular notes on the recce, eg recording details of particular features, landmarks etc., that may help facilitate the walk on the day.

Consistent with the especial role of the B Plus leader, as described in Section 4.2, the B Plus leader should also pay due attention to the suitability of the proposed comfort stop en-route (as appropriate), the latter stages of the coach route to the destination and, specifically, should identify an appropriate and safe parking spot for the coach, where it can be available to walkers, for at least 1½ hours prior to the designated departure time. In some cases, it may be possible to come to a local arrangement with a Pub or other facility, where the coach can use their car park, in anticipation of the patronage of the group, after the walk.

4.4 Route Descriptions

Once a recce has been satisfactorily completed, the next stage is to summarise the key features of the walk, in the form of a Route Description. Such Route Descriptions are produced for the benefit of the membership in general, both for promoting the walks and in facilitating the choice of individual walks on the day.

Further information of the preparation and submission of the Route Descriptions is provided in Appendix 3. The completed Route Descriptions should be submitted to the Route Descriptions Officer, as soon as practicable after completing the recce and certainly no later than 09-00 hours, on the Monday preceding the walk in question. Leaders may also, at their own discretion, wish to copy their Route Descriptions to the other leaders.

⁴ or taxi fares, if local bus/rail services are unavailable

The Route Descriptions Officer is responsible for the compilation of the consolidated set of Route Descriptions and associated information for the Sunday walks in question. The completed Route Descriptions sheet is posted in the Club Room, ahead of the walk, distributed via e:mail to those requesting it and also posted on the web-site (in a redacted form). Copies are also circulated on the coach, on the day of the walk.

Any member wishing to receive a weekly e:mailing of the Route Descriptions sheet should contact the Route Descriptions Officer.

5. Ahead of the Walk/On the Day Activities

5.1 Ahead of the Walk

The activities ahead of the walk, although relatively limited in nature, relate both to the dispatch of the coach and the individual walks, themselves

5.1.1 Coach Operation and Dispatch

The Club provides a full, year round, programme of walks, with cancellations of the coach, due to under-booking or adverse weather conditions, being very much the exception (typically no more than 3 or 4 times, in any given 5 year period). However, it is recognised that there may be occasions when the decision is made to re-route or cancel the coach, in accordance with the protocols set out and described in Appendix 4. Re-routing the coach, to an alternative destination with better weather, will always be considered in preference to cancellation.

In order to facilitate a smooth departure on each Sunday, the Bookings Officer will e:mail the Coach Operator on the Thursday or Friday prior to the Sunday in question, confirming the place and time of the first pick-up on the Wirral. He/she will also request the driver's name and mobile number (if not already known). This latter information will be appended to the Boarding List, to facilitate contact with the driver on the Sunday morning, should this be necessary. The Coach Operator is provided with the contact details for the Bookings Officer and the Treasurer.

5.1.2 Leaders' pre-Walk Activities

The leaders are advised to run through their proposed route, their pre-walk check list (see also Section 6) and to take note of the weather forecast for the day. In the event of severe adverse weather conditions being forecast, then options to shorten the route and/or reduce the ascent and potential exposure to such adverse conditions should be considered. If any leader has concerns in relation to the advisability of proceeding with his/her walk, under the forecast conditions, then they should discuss these with the B Plus party leader.

5.2 On the Day

The B Plus party leader should make himself/herself known to the coach driver and confirm the preferred route to the destination and any planned comfort stop, en-

route. (Note: The Coach driver is responsible for the navigation to intended destination, with the B Plus party leader, only being required to assist with directions in the latter stages of the journey). The B Plus party leader should advise the driver of any intended drop-offs en-route and of the arrangements for coach parking, at the destination. The B Plus leader should also ensure that all other leaders are advised of the coach parking arrangements.

All leaders should carry an appropriate, maintained and up to date First Aid Kit on their walks. Suitable First Aid Kits may be obtained from the First Aid Kit Holder, on the day, and returned at the end of the walks. Alternatively, Leaders may provide and carry their own First Aid Kits, of an equivalent standard.

All leaders should ensure that they have Coach Mobile Number available, prior to starting their walks (or entered into their mobiles' speed dial directories). This number is:- 07984-251579.

In the event of drop-offs en-route, then the appropriate leaders should re-iterate the requirement for their parties to bring their rucksacks on-board the coach and should move forward, on the coach, to advise the driver of the drop-off point(s).

6. Walk Leadership

Leaders are an essential and integral part of the Club's walking programme; indeed, without leaders, there would be no walks. Walk leadership represents a natural progression from walking with a group and provides the opportunity to develop and plan walks of the leader's own choosing, whilst also transferring the leader's enthusiasm for walking, to the group. The leader must ensure that the walks are conducted in a safe, enjoyable, sociable and responsible fashion and within the time constraints on the day.

All Wirral Ramblers walks are subject to a minimum of 3 persons on the walk, ie Leader plus 2.

Wirral Ramblers, as one of the constituent groups of The Ramblers, follows the guidance provided for leaders in The Ramblers Walk Leaders Toolkit, accessible via The Ramblers web-site (www.ramblers.org.uk; Home > volunteer zone > support and development > volunteer-toolkits-alphabetically-sorted > walk leader toolkit).

Specifically, the attention of Wirral Group's leaders is drawn to the following documentation and information:

- Walk Leader Role Description;
- Walk Leader's Checklist;
- Leading Walks in Remote Areas; and
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Current and prospective leaders are requested to note the guidance provided in this documentation and to apply it, as appropriate, to their own particular walks.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1: En-route Comfort Stop Protocol

If the coach is expected to arrive at its final destination more than 90 minutes after leaving the final pick-up point on the Wirral (eg Liscard, Heswall or the central departure point) then the coach will stop for a 15 minute comfort stop, en-route to the walking destination. Members are asked to co-operate by being back on the coach, within 15 minutes, so that it can leave promptly and not delay the start of walks.

If the coach is expected to arrive at its walking destination in less than 90 minutes after leaving the Wirral, there will be no comfort stop.

If there are no suitable comfort stops en-route and the coach would take longer to drive to a comfort stop than it would to reach its destination then there will be no comfort stop. This is very rarely the case.

The B Plus party leader, guided by the information provided in the preferred coach routes, should decide where the coach should stop. This should be either a "Services" centre or occasionally public toilets, which have the facilities to cater for large numbers. Sports centres are to be avoided.

Appendix 2: Walks Grading System

The Club uses a simple grading system to help leaders plan walks of suitable standard and to provide an indication to members of nature of the walks. 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 challenging and strenuous is the walk.

A2.1 Points Allocation

Mileage:	1 point per mile; and
Ascent:	1 point per 500 feet of climbing.

Additional points should be added for terrain and any scrambling, in accordance with the guidelines, below:

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.

A2.2 Walk Gradings

The individual points allocations are then summated to give the total number of points for the anticipated route, with the gradings of individual walks' categories falling within the following ranges.

A Walks:	18 to 23 points;
B Plus Walks:	14 to 18 points;
B Minus Walks:	11 to 14 points;
C Walks:	7 to 11 points; and
D Walks:	5 to 7 points.

It is recommended that B Minus walks do not climb above a height of 2,000' during the winter months.

Appendix 3: Route Descriptions Guidelines

- Route Descriptions should clearly describe the route, via reference to a series of specific features and waypoints, and should also draw attention to any other specific aspects of the walk (eg exposed sections, scrambling, rough terrain, viewpoints etc). The reason(s) for any extra points allocations should be stated;
- The Route Descriptions should also clearly state the starting point of the walk, either in terms of the Coach Destination (for circular walks), or a two letter/six figure Ordnance Survey Grid Reference and complementary details (for linear walks);
- For linear walks, state clearly the requirement for “Rucksacks on coach”, after any stop;
- Individual Route Descriptions should be limited to circa 3 to 4 lines of text (circa 75 words maximum), together with the appropriate figures for distance (miles and kilometres), ascent (feet and metres) and points;
- Route Descriptions should be written up and submitted as soon as practicable after completing the recce and, in any case, no later than 09:00 hours on the Monday preceding the Sunday’s walk in question;
- Early submissions are positively welcomed!
- Route Descriptions should be e:mailed to:- wirralroutes@gmail.com

A4: Coach Re-routing/Cancellation Protocols

The protocols to be adopted are as described, below.

A4.1 Cancellation by Coach Operator:

Upon receipt of any such cancellation from the Coach Operator, the Treasurer should immediately notify the Chair, the Bookings Officer and the Web-site manager. The Bookings Officer should then contact all those booked on the coach, via a mass e:mail from the bookings system, supplemented by individual texts or 'phone calls, for those without e:mail access or booked on manually, out with of the automated system. Likewise, the Web-site manager should post an appropriate message on the web-site.

Note: The cut-off days/times referred to in A4.2 and A4.3 have been agreed with the Coach Operator in place, as of September 2018. Should any new Coach Operator be appointed, then these may be subject to change.

A4.2 Adverse Weather/re-Routing or Cancellation by the Club:

Should severe adverse weather conditions be forecast for the intended walking area on the Sunday in question, or, should the Civil Authorities be requesting that visitors avoid the area, then the B Plus Party Leader shall liaise with the Bookings Officer, the Treasurer and the Chair to agree on the re-routing or cancellation of the Coach.

Re-routing, to an alternative walking destination will always be considered in preference to cancellation.

The B Plus party leader will be guided by the majority view of the all the walk leaders, for the Sunday in question, in relation to any consideration in relation to re-routing or cancellation.

If re-routing is deemed appropriate, then the Bookings Officer (or Treasurer, if the Bookings Officer is unavailable), will contact the Coach Operator by 16-00 hours on the Saturday ahead of the walk, and also the driver. In view of the short notice involved, the original pick-up arrangements on the Wirral will be maintained, irrespective of the choice of alternative destination.

Should the decision be made to cancel, then the Treasurer (or Bookings Officer, if the Treasurer is unavailable) should notify the Coach Operator of the decision. The Bookings Officer should contact all those booked on the coach, to advise them of the cancellation, following the procedure described in A4.1, above. Likewise, the Web-site manager should be contacted, to post an appropriate message on the web-site.

A4.3 Gross Underbooking:

Should there be an indication early in the week, of the likelihood of the Club wishing to cancel due to gross underbooking, then the Bookings Officer should advise the Treasurer and Chair of this and, if agreed, will then contact the Coach Operator to alert them to this possibility.

Should the coach be still be grossly under-booked on the Thursday morning prior to the Sunday walks in question, then the Bookings Officer should alert the Treasurer and the Chair to this, with a view to a decision being made to run the coach, or not. Should the decision be made to cancel, then the Treasurer (or Bookings Officer, if the Treasurer is unavailable), should advise the Coach Operator of any such cancellation, no later than 12:00 hours on the Thursday. Any such cancellation will only be done as a last resort and after consultation between the Bookings Officer, the Treasurer and the Chair.

Should the decision be made to cancel, then the Web-site manager should be notified by the Bookings Officer. The Bookings Officer should contact all those booked on the coach, to advise them of the cancellation. Likewise, the Web-site manager should post an appropriate message on the web-site.