



Leaders' Handbook

(Currently Under Revision)

Note 1: The B- Leader now takes over coach responsibilities from the B+ Leader.

Note 2: We are awaiting the Leaders Accreditation Scheme, that is to be introduced in January 2024. This may replace the current Risk Assessment requirement.

Script in red is as written in the 5th Edition and under consideration of deletion.

Script in green is either proposed replacement of the above or new addition to the text in the 6th Edition.

Script in gold are changes since new guidance issued from Ramblers HO (May 2024), either proposed replacement of the above or new addition to the text in the 6th Edition.

5th Edition, March 2019

6th Edition, November 2023

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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 walk leaders are an essential and integral part of the walks.

This Handbook has therefore been prepared in order to assist walk leaders in the planning, development and leadership of their walks. It aims to appeal both to new and aspiring leaders, whilst also offering a reference text for more experienced leaders.

The Handbook is structured into a series of clearly defined sections, addressing the planning, reconnaissance, co-ordination and leadership of the walks, together with associated activities. Walk leadership itself is addressed via reference to the Walk Leader Toolkit guidelines and information, published by The Ramblers.

Two Mandatory Requirements introduced by Ramblers Association

Requirement 1 Registering as a leader

A one off task and very simple:

Every club member who takes on a lead for the first time needs to register with Ramblers' Association. Once registered you are covered for all further leads.

Contact volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com and say you wish to register as a walk leader. Letting them know your ramblers' number and local walking group (Wirral Ramblers) will help.

Once registered you should get a confirmation email. You can also check by logging into the Assemble site on Ramblers website. <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer-zone/assemble.aspx>

Once into your account, click on your initials – top right hand corner of the screen (on the black bar). Click on View Profile Details, then User Details, then Roles and Responsibilities.

However, if you encounter any difficulties, our Membership Secretary can register you as a walk leader. This is a much quicker way. Contact membership@wirralramblers.org.uk

Requirement 2 Risk Assessment

The second obligatory task is to fill in a Risk Assessment (RA). Of course, the recce is the subconscious risk assessment that leaders have been doing for years. The filling in of a RA is written confirmation that we have considered potential risks.

This is very straightforward, our on line forms have a series of twenty two statements regarding safety concerns which you can put a Y for confirmed or X for not applicable. As part of the Risk Assessment you include the Route Description (RD) including distance, height (expressed both as miles/km and feet/metres) and walk points. Once complete this should be sent to the Routes Description Officer (routes@wirralramblers.org.uk), preferably no later than the Monday before the following Sunday's walks (giving us a week to advertise the walks on the website).

NEW LEADERS – WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOUR FIRST LEAD

What training do I need to do to be a walk leader with the Ramblers?

All new walk leaders must do three things:

1. Read and sign up to the [Walk Leader Handbook](#)
2. Complete the Walk Leadership Foundations e-learning (approx. 60-90 minutes)
3. Complete the Preventing & Managing Incidents e-learning (approx. 60 minutes)

These are all available in our [online training](#) once you become a Ramblers volunteer. If you join our Ramblers Wellbeing Walks team, you will also shadow a walk leader and attend an in person session with your programme co-ordinator.

You can access any training courses that are relevant to your volunteering role, some of which will be mandatory, in our online training library.

You'll need to [set up a My Ramblers Account](#) to access training.

If you're a member or access our routes library, you'll already have an account. If not, set one up then make sure you check your email inbox to verify it. If you have any issues with setting up your account, refer to our [Setting up a My Ramblers Account guidance](#).

New to volunteering? You will need to be added to the Ramblers' systems as a volunteer so you are able to access our online training. This can be done by the lead volunteer who supports you, such as group chair, walks programme coordinator, or project coordinator. Once you receive an email confirming you are set up as a volunteer you may need to wait up to 48 hours before accessing the online training.

If you have any questions about **Ramblers group walks**, please get in touch:
volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com

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(continued) July 2024

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1. Introduction

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 Walk Leaders are, self-evidently, an essential and integral part of the walking programme; indeed, without leaders, there would be no walks. This Handbook has been prepared such as to set out and provide appropriate guidance in relation to walk leadership, within the context of the Sunday coach rambles programme.

Individual Sections within the Handbook describe the planning and development of the walks, essential pre-walk activities, through to the leadership of the walks.

The Handbook aims to appeal both to new and aspiring leaders, whilst also offering a reference text for more experienced leaders. Further information on the organisation and delivery of the Sunday coach rambles programme, as a whole, is available from the complementary Sunday Coach Rambles Handbook¹.

2. Walk Gratings System

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 1.

New and aspiring leaders may wish to consider planning, reconnoitring and leading their first one or two walks, in conjunction with a more experienced leader. As such, they are very welcome to approach any of the leaders, or any Committee member, in this regard.

3. Walk Planning and Reconnaissance

Section 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.

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 are available to members, on the web-site (see Appendix 5);

¹ Wirral Ramblers, Sunday Coach Rambles Manual, accessible via:
<http://www.wirralramblers.org.uk/images/pdf/Coach-Manual.pdf>

- 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 the planning of linear walks, the list of preferred coach routes, available on the Club web-site, should be used to identify potential drop-off points en-route to the coach destination. Should any deviations from the preferred coach routes be desired, then these should be kept to a minimum, such as to avoid undue disruption to other walks. Any such deviation(s) must be agreed with the B Minus leader, at the planning stage, and, preferably, at least 4 weeks prior to the walk(s) in question. The B Minus leader should then notify the other leaders and the Rambles Secretary of any such deviation(s) agreed.

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.

In addition to the planning, development and leadership of the B Minus walk, the B Minus leader is also responsible for various other activities, principally in relation to the co-ordination of the walks and acting as the principal interface with the coach driver. These aspects are covered, as appropriate, in the text and, for convenience, are also summarised, in Appendix 2.

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.~~ (Still to be updated, see Autumn Winter Programme.) They may also claim for tunnel tolls and for parking, as appropriate. For linear walks, bus/rail fares may

also be claimed², 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 recce, 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.

The B Minus 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. Route Descriptions and Risk Assessment (Coach)

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, 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 Route Description should be written in the appropriate box in the Risk Assessment (Coach). The latter can be downloaded from the “For Leaders” section on the Wirral Ramblers website. The completed Risk Assessment (Coach) 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 **Risk Assessment (Coach)** to the other leaders.

5. Ahead of the Walk/On the Day Activities

5.1 Leaders’ pre-Walk Activities

The leaders are advised to run through their proposed route, the Walk Leader’s 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

² or taxi fares, if local bus/rail services are unavailable

shorten the route and/or reduce the ascent and potential exposure to such adverse conditions should be considered. If any leader still has concerns in relation to the advisability of proceeding with his/her walk, in the light of the forecast conditions, then, in the first instance, they should discuss these with the B Minus party leader.

5.2 On the Day

The B Minus 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 Minus party leader, only being required to assist with directions in the latter stages of the journey). The B Minus 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 Minus 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 walkers and leaders should carry an appropriate, maintained and up to date First Aid Kit on their walks.

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

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 leaders 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 Minus 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.

Appendices

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Appendix 1: 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.

A1.1 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.

A1.2 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 Minus 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 2: The Especial Role of the Coach Coordinator ~~B Minus Leader~~

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

In addition to planning and leading their walk, the leader is also the Coach Coordinator to whom the other leaders confirm:-

- ~~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-route;
- ~~Identifying~~ suitable and appropriate parking for the coach, such for the various walks to return to, at the end of the day³;
- 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 destination⁴;and
- Engaging in consultation ahead of the walk, with the Chair and the Treasurer, in the event of anticipated severe adverse weather conditions.

(Note: Coach routes to, coach parking at and amenities at our destinations are quite comprehensively recorded in the AAA Coach Routes pages in the Sunday Routes Archive. In most cases, the B- party leader only has to confirm that this information is correct.)

In the absence of a B Minus leader, the duties above will be assumed by the B Plus party leader.
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³ Guided by the initial suggestions for coach parking, as provided in the preferred coach routes information.

⁴ Should the B Minus party leader disembark prior to the intended destination, then he/she shall brief and designate one of the other leaders, to perform this duty.

Appendix 3: Route Descriptions/**Risk Assessment** 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.~~
- **Route Descriptions/Risk Assessment** should clearly describe the route, via reference to a series of specific features, waypoints, viewpoints and highlight any risks, hazards on the walk eg livestock, rough terrain, passing vehicles etc. For guidance see the comprehensive, but not exhaustive, list of potential hazards/risks in the Risk Assessment Coach on Wirral Ramblers website.
- 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 130 words maximum** ~~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

Appendix 4 Example of a completed Risk Assessment

Appendix 5 Planning a route for your chosen a walk

You are welcome to come up with your own route provided it falls within the definition of each walk grade (see Leaders' Handbook).

However another {perhaps easier?} option is to check the Sunday Routes Archive.

To do this you need to do another one off and very simple task.

The archive on the Wirral Ramblers website is accessible only by username and password. To obtain a temporary password, contact our Wirral Ramblers webmaster at webmaster@wirralramblers.org.uk. Your username will most likely be the email address that you have given to Wirral Ramblers. You will be given a temporary password and, once logged in, you can change this to one of your choosing.

To reach the archive, go to Document Hub, Members Area, Walking Routes, Sunday Route Descriptions. You will find our walks are divided into seven walking areas. Each route description will be obviously known by the venue place name. The numerical suffix is the date of the walks i.e. YYMM. For example, the walks at Arnside on 4th December 2022 will be called Arnside2212.

Once you have chosen the walk you will need a map of the area. OS Explorer Paper maps 1: 25000 are available to borrow from the club. Contact wirralrambles@gmail.com if required.

Alternatively Birkenhead Central Library lends out the full range.

Other Wirral libraries may have some but are Reference Only (a photo of the relevant area from one such map may suffice?)

Appendix 6 Emergency SMS

A simple, one off task is registering your phone with Emergency Services SMS – see Risk Assessment Coach.