

Derby and South Derbyshire Ramblers' Association

Leading group walks

These notes are intended as a guide to walks leaders. Even local walks demand careful planning and co-ordination, and it is wise to make sure that you have covered every eventuality. You should think about the following:

Planning the walk

- The availability of **paths** or **open country**. Stay off roads as much as possible: metalled surfaces are hard on feet, and the constant wariness of traffic will diminish your enjoyment
- **Start** and **finish points**. Are they convenient, suitable and easy to find? Are public toilets nearby?
- **Transport**. Wherever possible, walks should be accessible by public transport. If cars are the only alternative, there should be somewhere to park vehicles safely and without causing annoyance or obstruction to others.
- **Lunchtime halt**. Is shelter available in bad weather?
- **Length and timing**. The distance should never be so much as to tax unduly the capability and experience of your party. Always assume a slower speed than your own. In particular, allow more time for stiles: since most of these can only be surmounted by one person at a time, they will slow the pace of a group.
- **Terrain** and **weather conditions** will also affect walking speed: for walks in upland country, you should take the terrain into account. Muddy or windy conditions will also slow your speed.
- **Newcomers**. Although experienced walkers can walk much longer distances, a total of around 15km/10 miles a day in gently undulating countryside, or less over more hilly terrain, is easily far enough for many new walkers. For easy or introductory walks you should work on much less.
- **Alternative** and **escape routes**. Prepare less exposed alternatives for use if the weather is bad before you set out, and escape routes to shorten the walk if conditions deteriorate on the way.

After you have devised a route, **walk it yourself well in advance of the day**, unless you already know the area well. Any obstructions or other problems can then be reported to the highway authority so they will hopefully be put right by the time your party walks the route.

Insurance and safety

Walks organised by Ramblers Areas and Groups automatically receive **third-party insurance** cover, provided the leaders are Ramblers members, through the Association's national policy. This is designed to protect leaders against claims for damage to property and for injury or death, which might have been occasioned on the walk. Please note that the policy does not provide personal accident cover. The cover does however mean that we must take reasonable efforts to minimise risks.

Advertising the walk

Our walks programme is published twice a year and the Programme Secretary will ask you for the following details. These are published in our walks booklet, our web site and some local paper.

- **Name/description of the starting point**. Give a six-figure grid reference if you can, describe the terrain if it is over rough ground etc.
- **Distance** and estimated time, including lunch stop.
- **Date** and **departure time**
- **Lunch stop**. It is assumed that everyone needs to bring food and drinks.

- **Your contact details:** phone number.

Note that **you may receive telephone calls from non-members** wishing to join a walk for the first time. Please try and ensure that the walk is **suitable for the person** and advise them on the distance / terrain, footwear, food, drink and clothing requirements.

On the day

Before the walk

Introduce yourself as the leader of the walk, and, without appearing officious, make sure that:

- cars are parked responsibly
- dogs are on leads, or their owners have some means of restraining them.
- all party members are suitably equipped to cope with the terrain and the prevailing weather conditions. This will have to be a subjective assessment, but in extreme circumstances you would be justified in turning away someone if you thought that a lack of proper footwear or equipment could put them or others at risk.

Before setting off, give a brief oral description of the route, together with details of the lunchtime break, and other occasional stops, and estimated finishing time. If there are a number of new or non-members, remind them of the Country Code.

Give instructions on a code of conduct if there is any **road walking** involved: in general, walk in single file, and on the right side of the road to face the oncoming traffic, crossing over when you are about to approach the inside of a bend.

Also advise the party not to walk more than two abreast when **crossing fields** that are ploughed or in crop.

If sheep and cattle are likely to be encountered, dog-owners should be advised at this stage, and should be prepared to put their animals on a lead if this is appropriate.

Finally, appoint a **back-marker** (preferably, someone who knows the route as well as you) and make sure he or she is known to the party, and that everyone knows the back marker's function: to close gates and to ensure that no member of the party falls behind unseen. However, it is the **leader's responsibility** to ensure that contact is not lost with the rear of the party through a gap opening up in the middle. **If contact is lost** with a member of the group then they and the group should go back to the last place they were seen.

On the walk

The party will soon become spread out. In many respects this is preferable to having everyone bunched together, but try to avoid large gaps occurring by slowing down the pace, and making frequent stops to allow those at the rear to catch up. Don't move on just as the back-markers appear, since their need for a short rest will be, if anything, greater than those at the front. In addition, close up the party for complicated turnings, poor visibility or in woods.

In reasonable weather, lunch should not be rushed: for many, eating out of doors is one of the most enjoyable aspects of open-air recreation. Before leaving your lunch site, check for litter and that nothing has been left behind.

After the walk

Check that everyone is accounted for and has transport home. Finally thank everyone for joining the walk.