

Leading Group Walks

This guide is intended for those seeking to organise and lead Ramblers groups on walks. All walks demand careful planning and co-ordination, and it is wise to make sure that you have covered every eventuality. New Walk Leaders should liaise with their Group's Programme Coordinator and see if 'mentoring' or 'buddying' can be offered, whereby you will learn from an experienced Walk Leader. Our Walk Leader's checklist, available from central office, summarises this guide.

Planning the walk

Basic guidelines

In selecting a route, you should think carefully about the following:

- 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? Is there somewhere safe to congregate?
- **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. Is there opportunity to car share to the starting point?
- **Lunch**. Is shelter available in bad weather? If a pub is convenient, will it accommodate your party, and can it provide food? Where can walkers sit and eat their own lunch: in the pub grounds or is there a suitable picnic spot nearby? Check in advance: many pubs no longer allow this, especially if they sell their own food.
- **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 climbed by one person at a time, they will slow the pace of a group. Leaders of remote or challenging walks may choose not to disclose the exact starting location until they have vetted walkers by phone in advance.
- **Terrain and weather conditions** will also affect walking speed: for walks in upland country, you should shorten the route by 1.5-3km/1-2 miles for every 300m/1,000 feet of ascent. Muddy or windy conditions will also slow your speed.
- **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. 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. For more on footpath problems, see the [Rights of Way](#) page. If in doubt, your Group's Footpath Officer will be able to assist you. It's also best to re-walk your route a week or so before the event, to refresh your memory and note more recent changes.

Insurance and safety

Make sure you are familiar with the principles of safety, and of choosing the appropriate clothing and equipment for walks. Consider taking training in first aid, and encourage walkers to carry a small first-aid kit. Ensuring that you are familiar with the route and conducting a recce will help you lead the walk with greater confidence and increase your ability to warn walkers about likely hazards.

All walks organised by Ramblers Areas and Groups automatically receive civil liability insurance cover through the Association's national policy. The only requirement is that the designated Leader(s) is a Ramblers member. This is designed to protect leaders against claims for damage to property and for injury or death which might have happened on the walk. Please note that the policy does not provide personal accident cover. Further information about insurance for Walk Leaders is available on [here](#).

Affiliated groups can access similar insurance cover at advantageous rates by contacting our current insurers, Perkins Slade. Any affiliated group taking advantage of this offer is asked to recognise that the Ramblers Association is simply providing an introductory service. As such the Ramblers' Association is unable to enter any insurance negotiations on behalf of, or provide support to affiliated groups on this matter.

Advertising the walk

Regular walks

Your Group's Walks Programme Co-ordinator is likely to ask you to supply details several months in advance for inclusion in the programme. An important role that they play is ensuring that walks go up on our [Walks Finder](#) database. To make their job as easy as possible they should ask you for some standard information. If you or your Group does not have a standard template you can get one from our [resources page](#) to fill in and return to your Programme Coordinator. Information you will need to provide includes:

Date and start time

Brief description of the walk. This should be short and descriptive, including some local information, for example Hebden Bridge canal side walk. Walksfinder needs some local information in the name, otherwise the system can become quite frustrating for people searching for walks.

Distance and estimated time, including lunch stop

Details of the starting point. This may include a six-figure grid reference, but it is not essential.

Grade. The Ramblers' Association uses a national [grading system](#) which is needed to enter walks onto Walksfinder. In addition many Groups have developed their own bespoke systems. Whether you use one or both systems it is important to give walkers an idea of the difficulty of the walk they are embarking on.

Public transport details. State which service to catch and from where, departure times, route numbers and destinations, where to get off and directions to the starting point. Allow in your planning for late running services. If by car and your organisation has an arrangement to meet at a central point before setting out at the start of walks, allow time for this too, and give details of where to park safely and unobtrusively.

Walksfinder is an important resource, allowing the Ramblers to demonstrate the full extent of the Led Walks Programme and to allow potential new walkers to quickly and simply search for walks anywhere in the country. If your Group would like help using Walksfinder please email volunteer@ramblers.org.uk

Special walks

Throughout the year, The Ramblers puts on special themed days or weeks, such as the Festival of Winter Walks or Get Walking Day (30th May each year). Your Committee will be kept informed about these special events or look on our [news pages](#). As well as providing the information above, leaders on special walks should advise on footwear and clothing requirements

in advance. Details should be sent to the local press and radio preferably three weeks in advance, followed by a reminder two weeks later. Also notify other local information providers, such as libraries and Tourist Information Centres. On the walk draw attention to features of special interest.

On the day

Before the walk

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

x any cars are parked responsibly

x dog owners appreciate that they are responsible for their dogs

x 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 introduction to 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, briefly introduce them to some of the wider work of the Ramblers. Give instructions on a code of conduct if there is any road walking involved or difficult roads to cross. 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. The leader and back-marker are recommended to wear reflective arm bands on the left arm on any walk involving road walking. (Note the Highway Code suggests large groups on organised walks should walk on the left. The Ramblers does not consider regular Led Walks to constitute a large group in the sense intended by the Code). It should be noted that it is a legal requirement to inform the police and to take their advice if any walk planned is likely to take the form of a march.

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 when asked to do so. Identify to the party if there are any railway crossings on the route. Advise the group that when crossing they should obey any warning signs or lights; stop, look and listen. They are to cross one at a time, not as a group. They should not cross until the person in front of them has cleared the crossing area, meaning clear of any stiles or gates. This avoids people backing up across the railway and potentially being trapped as a train approaches. Also, advise dog-owners they will need to put their animals on a lead when crossing the railway.

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.

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. About 45 minutes for lunch is recommended. Use the lunch break to give out information, such as details of future walks and events or Ramblers membership. Before leaving your lunch site, clear up litter and check that nothing has been left behind.

After the walk

Check that everyone is accounted for and has transport home. Give out information about other Group activities and membership. Record any incidents on an [Incident form](#), and send to the Led Walks Team at central office. Make sure you thank everyone for coming.

Walking for everyone

As a charity which aims to promote walking, we encourage our Groups to lay on a wide range of walks to appeal to as many different people as possible. Please don't just think about meeting the needs of experienced members when you plan your programme: consider shorter, easier walks for beginners, walks that might be attractive to families with children, and walks that can be reached by public transport or start from the centre of town. This will also help us in broadening the membership of the organisation. If you are taking children or vulnerable adults on your walks, be familiar with our [Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy](#). Sometimes those with special needs, such as people with disabilities, are interested in joining Ramblers walks. How easy it is for a person with a disability to join a regular Group walk will vary according to the walk and to the particular disability: there are more practical issues involved in taking a wheelchair user on a walk than, say, someone who is deaf but otherwise able-bodied. However, you should try to accommodate everyone wherever this is practical. Some Areas and Groups also make a point of laying on walks specially designed for people with various disabilities, and we are keen to encourage this. When taking people with disabilities on your walks, you should bear in mind the following points:

The Ramblers cannot take on any medical responsibilities; where appropriate, carers should be in attendance unless a prior arrangement has been made with the Walk Leader. It is important that participants or carers consult with the leader before the day of the walk to discuss all aspects of the route. Ramblers Groups and members are covered by our public liability insurance policy, and if any groups of disabled persons join the walk they must be placed on record as being under the Ramblers organisation for the duration of the outing.

**Further information is available from Karen Inkster, Led Walks Officer
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020 7339 8519 or ledwalks@ramblers.org.uk**