

Guidance for Walk Leaders

This guidance aims to help walk leaders leading a successful, enjoyable and seamless walk. It points out the things to consider before, during and after the walk and the actions that need to be taken to ensure that the relevant members of the committee can do their part in the organisation of the walks.

1) Planning the walk

You might already have a certain walk in mind because you know the area well or because you have done a certain walk in the past. If you are still looking for any ideas, the internet is full of resources. Local councils often offer detailed descriptions of walks around their area to promote it and attract visitors. A good source is also the website Walkshire (www.yorkshire.com/walkshire) or just ask one of our experienced walk leaders who will be happy to give you any suggestions and information. If you are good with maps, just look at your chosen area and plot your route. To make sure your walk is the right distance, you can buy a wheeled measuring tool that you can roll along the route on a paper map, and it shows the distance. Alternatively, you can use apps such as the one from Ordnance Survey which allows you to mark and measure your route on a map in the app. Apps are also a great help if you get lost on your walk as they show you your current position via GPS and can give you directions.

2) Doing the recce

This is the most important part. It is recommended to do it twice, as the first time you will possibly get lost, and it all might take longer than expected. You will be more focused on finding your way than any other details. The second recce can be considered as a test walk and it will help you to be more confident on the actual walking day and give you a better idea where and when to stop for breaks and the time it all takes. It is also a chance to make any changes if something did not turn out as expected the first time, such as a difficult stretch or road crossing you would rather avoid. It is also recommended to do the recce as close as possible to the actual walking day for a better chance to encounter similar conditions as on the actual walking day, thus minimising any problems you might encounter. If, for example, you are doing a recce in summer when the ground is dry and easy to walk on, and then do the actual walk in winter when it's muddy or when certain paths could be flooded etc., you might run into unexpected problems. But don't leave the recce too late either, as you will have to provide information about your walk to the club secretary about a week before the actual walk so he/she can put it in the round robin to the members.

During the recce it is also important to find the best way to get to the start and end of the walk, and where to park. This information has to be provided to the coach coordinator within the committee, who will relay it to the coach company about a week in advance of the actual walk. You also have to make sure that there is an opportunity for a toilet stop either on the way to, or at the start of the walk.

During your recce it is also helpful to look out for possible shortcuts. On the actual walking day it might be unusually hot, it might rain heavily or one of the walkers might not be able to continue the walk due to injury or exhaustion. Always consider a plan B.

3) On the day of the walk

You might have to speak to the coach driver again about the best way to get to the destination, the parking and the toilet stop. At the destination, arrange a departure time with the driver and get his or her mobile number in case something does not go to plan. Do not set the departure time too late. As a rule of thumb, make sure the coach driver can be back at his depot before 6pm.

Once everyone has got off the coach, has sorted out everything they need, and is ready to go, call out for those who want to do your specific walk (either the long, medium or steady walk). Before you set off, explain to them a little bit about your walk (where you are heading, whether there are any steep climbs, the distance etc.). Also, do a head count so you can later make sure that you haven't lost anyone. Carry your radio and make sure you know how to use it.

Set off and check from time to time that your pace is right and comfortable for everyone. Stop if necessary so slower walkers can catch up and have a little stop as well. This is particularly important after a climb to make sure people can catch their breath before continuing. Watch out at road crossings that everyone gets across safely. During breaks, also ensure that everyone has finished their drink and/or food before setting off again. Announce that you are ready to go about 2 minutes before setting off again to give people time to pack up.

Tips for dealing with possible problems during the walk:

- If a **walker gets injured or is feeling unwell** you must decide which action to take. Get one of the first aiders, or call 999 or 112 to get help in more serious cases. If **someone is struggling with the distance or the heat**, ask the backmarker to stay with them and walk a shortcut back to the coach while you continue with your walk. Or you might have to look to get to the nearest road so an ambulance or the coach can pick them up.
- **The fast walker.** Sometimes a walker will persistently dash off far ahead (not always in the right direction) and be difficult to keep track of. Tactfully point out that, on a group walk, walkers are expected to stay with the group. Anyone not accepting this should be told to continue independently and under their own responsibility for route finding. On the other hand, if there is a section where walkers' paces are obviously going to vary, for example on a steep ascent, there is no harm in telling faster walkers to go ahead and wait at an obvious landmark, such as at the top of the hill.
- **Obey the Country Code.** Keep to the marked path, don't drop any litter and ensure that the backmarker or the last person knows how to leave any gates (either open or closed). If someone in your group does anything to the contrary you should point this out politely but firmly. Should a group be challenged by a landowner or other countryside user, be polite, calm and cooperative but without conceding access rights, etc. The official Country Code can be found on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code/the-countryside-code-advice-for-countryside-visitors> or on the Selby Fell Walkers Website (PDF-Document)
- **Getting lost.** If you have done your recces you should be fairly confident about where you are heading. But you might sometimes feel any doubt or get it wrong. Check with

the backmarker about his opinion. Be adept with the map or your app to relocate and get back to the intended route, perhaps even without anyone noticing the error.

Role of the backmarker

The main role of the backmarker is to walk at the back of the group and to make sure that no one gets lost or left behind. If a fellow walker falls back to have a comfort stop or to take photos, the backmarker keeps an eye out that that person is able to join the group again. The backmarker also stays with walkers who are struggling, accompanying them on a shortcut if necessary (see above). It is therefore essential that the backmarker knows the route as well as the walk leader in order to not get lost themselves if someone falls too far behind. Carrying the radios is also a good way of informing the walk leader at the front of any emergencies or problems occurring.

4) At the end of the walk

Make sure to regroup and inform everybody about the time to be back at the coach. Where necessary provide directions to the coach.

Now relax and enjoy a well-deserved drink in the pub or a tearoom. Congratulate yourself.

5) Summary and checklist

a) Recce

- Consider a good time and place to have a coffee and a lunch break
- Note the total amount of time the walk takes to inform any decisions about coach return times
- Have a plan B in case you want or need to shorten your walk
- Find out where the coach can park
- Find out the best route for the coach to the start of the walk and any possibilities for a toilet stop en-route or at the start of the walk
- Find out if any pubs or tearooms are open on walk day for any after walk refreshments

b) About one week before the walk

- Provide the club secretary with any details about the walk: distance, difficulties, points of interest, climbs, styles etc.
- Provide the coach coordinator with any details about the route to the start to the walk, any toilet stops and any parking possibilities

c) On walking day

- On the coach: Make sure the coach driver knows where to go and park; get his or her mobile number and inform him or her about the departure time to drive back to Selby
- At the start: Make a head count and give your group some information about the walk ahead; Carry your radio and be sure how to use it

- After setting off: Make sure your pace is in line with the group's abilities and stop occasionally (particularly after a climb) so people at the back can regroup and have a breather as well
- Take adequate coffee and lunch breaks ensuring people have finished their drink or food before setting off again
- Make sure at road crossings or difficult bits that everyone is safe
- At the end of the walk, before everyone is heading off to different pubs or tearooms, make sure, everyone knows how to get back to the coach and the departure time