

Cardiff Outdoor Group

Walk Leader Guidelines – the essentials

- Walk leaders must be COG members, participants must be COG members or prospective members (or their children)
- Keep close to the advertised distance/grading & description.
- **Other than for weekends away or where you are very familiar with the area you should walk the route beforehand** – it is much more difficult to change course with a group in tow.
- If you recce your walk, bear in mind the potential risks as you check out the route and consider alternative/escape routes.
- A formal risk assessment must be undertaken for all events. A pro forma risk assessment can be downloaded from the resources page on our website. If you are leading an event involving children you must be aware of our Child Protection policy which can be found on the website.
- Keep to public rights of way/access land
- Whatever the reason, always be prepared to change the route or cancel the walk in the interests of safety.
- If you do not have the experience and/or training required, do not attempt to lead walks in difficult terrain and/or conditions. **Always keep within your capabilities.**
- Check that everyone has appropriate footwear/equipment/food/water.
- If you feel that someone is not fit enough or not adequately prepared to do the walk, you have the discretion to refuse to take them. Err on the side of caution.
- For weekend events you must complete the Emergency Contact Details form (see Resources page of website) and check that each participant is a member of COG

Guidelines

Introduction

In drawing up this guide, we've aimed to set out some simple guidelines for walk and other outdoor event leaders to help make things go as smoothly and safely as possible without making it all too officious. Hopefully we've got the balance right. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Walk Leaders' Essentials which you can also find on the resources page on our website.

The guide is aimed principally at those leading walks but much of the advice will be relevant to other outdoor events.

Planning the route

- Keep to public rights of way/access land
- Keep close to the advertised distance/grading & description
- When working out the timing 2mph is a useful guide to the average walking time taking into account stops
- Check the suitability of the start point for car parking and work out how long it will take to get there from Chapter
- When planning to stop at a pub/café bear in mind that you might not be able to eat your own food there

Check out the route beforehand

- **Where possible you should walk the route beforehand** – it is much more difficult to change course with a group in tow
- In the interests of safety try and find someone to go with you when you check out the route. If heading into a remote area leave details of your intended route and time of return with a third party
- Bear in mind the potential risks as you check out the route and be prepared to consider alternative/escape routes

Know your own limitations

- Leading a walk in thick cloud, fog, snow or ice requires skill, particularly in mountainous terrain. Mountainous areas can be dangerous even in good

weather or conditions may change while you are up there – good map reading skills are essential.

- If you do not have the experience and/or training required, do not attempt to lead such walks. **Always keep within your capabilities.**

Unable to lead the walk/event?

If (*for any reason*) you are unable to lead the walk please inform the programme secretary on programmes@cardiffoutdoorgroup.org.uk and send an email to the group via elist@cardiffoutdoorgroup.org.uk. If you have put a start time for Chapter on the programme you should also turn up at the designated time or ask someone to do so in case someone has not picked up the information.

Carry out a risk assessment

- **Risk assessments must be undertaken for all events.**
- The risk assessment proforma (and guidance notes) can be downloaded from the COG website www.cardiffoutdoorgroup.org.uk on the resources page. If you are unable to access this please contact the programme secretary on programmes@cardiffoutdoorgroup.org.uk
- If in doubt on how to complete the assessment please contact the programme secretary for advice.
- All significant/serious hazards should be included.
- Before the walk/event please return the completed risk assessment to the group's weekend programme secretary.

Weather

- Check the local weather forecast before starting the walk. It may be necessary to change plans or cancel. Be prepared to cut the walk short if conditions deteriorate.
- **Always be prepared to change the route or cancel the walk in the interests of safety**

What to take with you

Essential

- **1:25,000 or 1:50,000 map of the area (1:25,000 is better)**
- Compass
- First Aid kit
- Mobile phone (& coins and credit card for phoning in case the mobile is out of range)
- Waterproofs, food, drink

Advisable

(especially for more strenuous/remote walks or in winter conditions)

- Torch
- Whistle
- Survival bag/group shelter
- Emergency food & water supplies (enough for own use and others if required)

People going direct to the walk start point

Encourage people to go to Chapter rather than direct to the start of the walk (unless, e.g., they live outside Cardiff). This will make it easier to change plans, if necessary, on the day. If people **are** going to the start direct, have their telephone numbers available but ask them to contact you on the morning to confirm the walk is still going ahead.

Before the walk

In the week before the walk you might want to send a general COG e-mail providing tempting details of the walk. Send your details to: elist@cardiffoutdoorgroup.org.uk

At the meeting point (usually Chapter)

Bad weather

- The decision on whether to change the route/location or cancel the walk is at the discretion of the walk leader
- If cancelling the walk you must still go to Chapter in case anyone turns up. If you have given people directions to the start point you should contact them if they have not checked in with you that morning.

Before leaving the meeting point

- It is everyone's own responsibility to get to Chapter with enough time to leave punctually. You do not need to feel you have to wait for people who are running late.
- Make sure that everyone knows you
- Count the number of people participating
- Give a brief outline of the walk to everyone including the expected terrain and conditions and highlight any significant hazards (based on the information within the risk assessment).
- Check that everyone has appropriate footwear/equipment/food/water
- If you feel that someone is not fit enough or not adequately prepared to do the walk, you have the discretion to refuse to take them. Err on the side of caution.
- Try not to give any promises on a time for finishing or returning to Cardiff! If you do, make it vague and give plenty of leeway. Do not put yourself and/or the group under pressure to complete the walk quickly
- Arrange transport for everyone to the start of the walk and count the number of cars
- Give out your mobile phone number. Ideally, have a number for one person in each car
- Make sure someone in each car knows where they are going and how to get there – do not rely on mobile contact en route
- Remember that you may not be able to change the start point if you cannot contact people going direct

During the walk

Before starting out

- Wait until all cars/people leaving the meeting point have arrived
- Count the number of people on the walk – some people may have joined here without going to the meeting point
- If anyone has joined here, repeat the information given at the meeting point about the walk
- If you have more than 15 people in the group, pick someone to bring up the rear and make sure everyone knows who this is. (This doesn't have to be the same person for the whole walk.) Ideally this person should have a map and know the route of the walk
- Make sure that everyone knows where you are heading

On the walk itself

- Be aware of the speed of the slowest person and keep an eye out to make sure that everyone is keeping up with you
- Make regular head counts to make sure that no-one is missing, particularly when restarting after a break or when you change direction
- Don't allow the group to become too spread out. If this happens you are more likely to lose people. Also if someone gets into difficulty there may be no-one around to help them. Do not assume you will be able to contact everyone by mobile phone
- Ensure that dogs are kept on leads where appropriate
- Point out hazards/risks as necessary as you come up to them, e.g. warning of a busy road, boggy ground, etc.
- If stopping to allow stragglers to catch up, give the last arrivals time to rest before starting again
- Keep an eye on the time and be prepared to speed up if necessary
- Ensure that you have refreshment stops as appropriate during the day as well as a lunch stop

- Leave all gates as you found them
- If some people want to break away from the group to take an alternative route, provide them with advice if you can but make them aware that they are taking full responsibility for their own safety. (*Bear in mind that this might affect the transport arrangements for the return journey.*)
- If the weather deteriorates significantly or there are other relevant circumstances you should alter your plans

If something goes wrong

- Be prepared to stop, rethink and take advice
- In case of an accident follow the order of events below:
 - Look after your own safety then
 - The safety of the rest of the group
 - Assess the situation
 - **In an emergency ring 999** and briefly state the facts – any decision on whether to contact mountain rescue (or the coastguard/cliff rescue) will be taken by the emergency services – they can't be contacted directly
 - If no immediate phone available send 2 people to phone for help

And finally

Enjoy your walk/event