



## **Guidelines for Leaders**

**The following is a list of ideas and suggestions, which may be helpful when leading a walk. It does not pretend to be either comprehensive or mandatory.**

### **Background Information**

The basic task is to be in control of the group without spoiling their enjoyment. In leading, there is rarely a perfect answer. You do not have to be forcing the pace from the front all the time or continually be at the back with the slowest member. At all costs do not let others dictate the route or pace. You have to learn to make your own judgements, allowing for the personalities and abilities of those present. The more experience you can gain, the more you are liable to feel at home leading a group. That means both walking in different areas and gleaning information from more experienced people.

### **Preparation – Prior to the Walk**

- Get a weather forecast and adjust the route if necessary e.g. cold weather could mean two short lunch stops instead of one longer one. If you have internet access we recommend, <http://www.mwis.org.uk/index.php>, [www.metcheck.com](http://www.metcheck.com) and [www.bbc.co.uk/weather](http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather).
- Plan your route – work out total distance, height gained, how long it will take and work out escape routes. Learn as much about the area as possible.
- Consider the use of a Route Planner (or Detailed Route card) and assess any potential risks
- Check you own kit and ensure you have your map, map case, compass and whistle. Other equipment depending on the time of year and where you are leading may include, GPS, mobile phone head torch, spare batteries, bivvy bag, first aid kit, spare food and clothing.

### **Before Starting the Walk**

- Make it clear that you are the leader – this is particularly important if there are people out for the first time.
- If there are guest walkers out for the first time who are not accompanied by a member, indicate to them approximately how long the walk will take and the height gained so that they are fully aware and do not take on more than they are capable of. Make a visual assessment of their footwear and equipment to determine their suitability for the walk, weather and time of year. If as leader you have any reservations with respect to the ability of the guest to complete the walk you should in the first instance report your concerns to any committee member/s on the walk. You will be then face with a difficult situation, you will have to discreetly advise the guest of your concerns, advise them that members and guests are responsible for their own actions, however as the nominated leader you consider that walk or their equipment may not be suitable and you can not accept them on the walk. (Note:- Members are responsible for ensuring guests are fully informed as to the walk and suitably equipped)
- Brief the group regarding the route and any potential hazards, especially if there is scrambling involved, based on your assessment.

- Chat to the people out for the first time, make them welcome and advise them about staying with the group and following the leader. Point out that if they leave the group the leader is no longer responsible for them.
- If someone turns up inadequately dressed/equipped you have the right and duty of care to say they cannot come on the walk as the club cannot accept responsibility for them.
- In poor conditions make it clear to members the importance of remaining close together; appoint a back marker who realises s/he must alert you (by an agreed means of visual communication) if there is a problem.

### **During the Walk**

- In poor conditions, take time to take bearings and work out timings. If unsure ask for confirmation from someone else in the group.
- During the walk, be as democratic as possible but you must take the final decisions. If someone wants to do their own thing, make it clear to them they are not part of the group.
- Do not assume everyone can do what you can – they may not have the same head for heights or be as confident at scrambling.
- If someone attempts to force the pace, continually “leads” the walk, make it clear to them why you are stopping or the importance of stopping on occasions to let the group assemble. Make it clear that pushing ahead is not an option unless sanctioned by the leader with a definite visible feature stated.
- In good weather you do not always have to be at the front, but in poor visibility you must lead from the front and have a back marker/s.
- 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 as advised by the country side code.
- Regularly check the members, the condition of your group and, where required, offer advice, point out dangerous conditions – gullies, streams etc.
- Adjust lunch stops according to weather conditions and condition of group; some of the less fit may prefer a longer stop, but weather conditions may dictate otherwise.
- In case of an accident, follow the procedures outlined by Mountain Rescue England & Wales.
- Report the accident as soon as possible to the chairperson or a member of the committee.
- If there is a scramble, make it optional.
- Be aware of environmental advice to walkers and lead by example.i.e. use stiles where available rather than crossing walls or fences: avoid taking short cuts on zig-zag paths as this creates new lines for run-off of water and increases erosion.