

Walk Leader Pointers

The London LDWA group walking programme depends on members volunteering to lead walks. As a new member or a member who has not yet led walks we are sending you this to encourage you to lead for the group when you are ready. Existing leaders - we would welcome your comments. It also contains updated insurance information and an incident report form. Thank you for leading!

Walk planning

NOT ATTACHED - CONTACT WALKS SECRETARY IF NEEDED

A distance of 15-25 miles is recommended for a social walk. Normally the practical maximum is around 25 miles in summer and 20 miles in winter, but if you wish to lead something longer that's up to you, provided it's made clear in the newsletter that only fast walkers should take part.

Do research the walk and plan it bearing in mind the desirability of a stop for lunch at a pub near the halfway mark that serves food and with outdoor seating. The lunch break should be about an hour.

Consider the needs of both those who will need to travel by car and by train. Start the walk from a railway station. Find out the train times to and from your chosen station(s) and plan your walk around them. If possible, choose a train departing from Central London between about 08.30 and 09.30 - this should give those coming from the far side of London a chance to catch it. Note that, if the date of your walk falls beyond the change point from summer to winter timetables or vice versa (normally the last weekends in May and September) before the new times are available, you will need to re-check the train times later.

If the walk is linear (starting and finishing at different points), ensure that motorists can easily return to the start; if both points are on the same line, this will also minimise the costs for those coming by train.

Work out the distance beforehand. Work out how long it should take for both the morning and afternoon walks. Remember that your own pace may not match that of the rest of the group. It can be a good idea to have escape routes and extension in mind if the walk does not go entirely to plan.

If the walk is likely to finish in the dark, advertise the fact so that participants can be prepared for it and can be encouraged in the programme to bring a torch..

Try your best to reconnoitre the route at least a week beforehand. This has several advantages:

- you should be less likely to make a mistake on the day;
- you should find out whether any of the chosen paths has a problem (e.g. diversion, blockage, closure);
- you can make sure that the chosen lunch pub is suitable.

Some members have volunteered to accompany leaders when reccyng routes -- ask the Walks Secretary if you'd like someone to go with you.

It's advisable not to do the reccy too early, as path problems may then arise in the meantime. The optimum "window" is between 2 and 4 weeks beforehand. It can be helpful to do this with a friend who can act as backmarker on the day and take over if you're ill.

Check out the lunch pub. You can do this in person or by phone. Ask for the manager. Make sure they welcome walkers. They'll probably ask how many (say there is usually between 10 and 20) - this can be confirmed on the morning of the walk if necessary. Point out that not everyone may wish to eat. If asked, say that anyone bringing their own food will be asked to eat it outside. If it becomes apparent that the first choice pub is unwilling, give it up and find another one.

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If you can't find a pub providing food in the area, make sure that your party members are aware before you start off and try to find a shop near the station or along the route where food can be bought.

Walk notification

You will need to give details of the walk to the Walks Secretary several (can be up to 4 or 5) months ahead of the walk so it can be included in Strider and the London newsletter.

Include the following details:

- date
- distance
- start station
- departure time and station name of train to start point from Central London
- arrival time of train from London (with change point if relevant)
- return train times
- on linear walks how motorists can return to the start
- name and location of lunch pub (grid reference if possible) and whether or not it provides food
- any additional information eg fast pace, likely to be very muddy, likely to finish in the dark etc
- your name and phone number so people can call for more details (Generally people do not notify if they are coming ahead of time.)

Example:

Sun 29 April Amberley Circular

18 miles. Start Amberley Station 10.27. Train 09.04 from London Victoria. Return trains at 19 mins past the hour. Lunch at the White Horse, Sutton.
Leader: Jane Smith Tel 0208 851 9026

A week of so before the walk

Call National Rail Enquiries on 0345-484950 to check whether any maintenance work is scheduled for the line concerned, as this may affect the arrival time of the advertised train. If this should be the case, ask for the revised arrival time - if there is a substantial change, notify the webmaster so a message can be put on the web and the newsletter, who will circulate a message to the members if possible.

At the start of the walk.

Count the numbers and ask people to introduce themselves so you know all their names.

Make a note of guests - people who are not LDWA members (see insurance section later.)

Introduce yourself as the leader. Tell the party the approximate route on your map, and time and distance to the lunch pub (don't forget to mention if no food is available).

If so arranged, phone the pub to confirm the number (either from a call box at the station or a party member may be willing to use a mobile).

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If possible, ask a committee member or someone you know to act as backmarker - this helps you to know when the rear of the party has caught up, and provides someone to keep an eye on slower walkers. Be clear that people should aim to always be able to see someone in front of them and someone behind. Also be clear that they should stay with you as leader not go ahead, in case they miss a turning.

During the walk

Do show the route to anyone interested.

Be clear that the group should keep together and that if anyone wants to leave the group they should let you know.

Have some toilet stops and suggest which direction ladies go and which for gents.

Stop at junctions for people to catch up and check the number from time to time (but not too often). This is best done at a turning point or on reaching a road after a long path section.

There should be a short stop of about five minutes during the morning and afternoon - this is to give time for a bit of a rest, to have a drink, or to change walking partners.

If you enjoy doing this, point out any places of interest you pass - but don't do this too often.

If you have to walk along a road without a pavement, ask the party to keep right, but at blind right hand bends you should carefully cross over to the left side to provide maximum visibility.

If you have to cross a cropped field on a footpath which has not been cleared, ask them to keep single file (this avoids damaging too much crop and makes the route clearer for other walkers).

At the lunch pub, try to arrive first, and introduce yourself to the bar staff. It can help the image of walkers generally to make a good impression, e.g. thank them when leaving, return our empty glasses to the counter, replace rearranged tables and chairs. Make sure you have all your party when you leave.

If you get lost or take a wrong turning, don't panic! It's best to admit it straight away, rather than plough on regardless and possibly get into a worse situation. Most of the party will be sympathetic and some will offer to help. If you can't work out how to get back on line directly, retrace your steps to the previous known point and start again.

If you find someone can't keep up and is seriously delaying the group, discuss this discreetly with the person and tactfully suggest they might like to take a short cut (to pub or finish) if possible. The situation may be apparent fairly soon after the start in which case return to the station might be the best option. If they have no map, you could give them directions if not too complicated - otherwise consider delegating someone with a map to accompany them. Do suggest they might be better to try Ramblers Association walks in future, or challenge walk with a route description which they can then do at their own pace. If a committee member is present do discuss the situation with them first.

Sometimes you will find people who are unhappy about some of the walk arrangements and who complain and disrupt the group. Don't feel bad but be clear that it is your walk and if they are not happy they can leave the group.

If you find someone is missing call their name and their mobile if known. You could delegate someone to go back along the route, preferably with a mobile to keep in touch, calling their name and

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asking anyone along the way if they have seen the person. The point at which you decide to contact police and relatives/partner (if known) will depend on circumstances e.g. weather, terrain, approaching darkness.

See insurance section below for advice on dealing with any accidents.

After the walk

At the end of the walk, make sure that everyone is accounted for - and wait for the thanks and congratulations! If there's no committee member on your walk, try to let the Walks Secretary know afterwards how many took part.

REMEMBER, IF YOU NEED HELP OR ADVICE WITH ANY ASPECT OF THESE NOTES OR ON LEADING A WALK, FEEL FREE TO ASK THE WALKS SECRETARY OR ANY OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBER.

Insurance information

Following recent discussions with the insurers the following pointers are provided for your information and protection:

Any group walks/activities published in Strider or shown on the Website are covered by the LDWA insurance.

A guest is covered if their names are recorded at the start, which walk leaders should do. However, after three walks, they will only be covered if they join LDWA.

Dogs that come on walks are not covered by the LDWA insurance - nor are any incidents they are involved in....so they are the owners responsibility on a walk. If a dog trips someone, LDWA insurance does not provide cover and the owner would be considered responsible/liable. Mention this discretely to any people with a dog.

Generally any young people aged under 18 should be accompanied by a responsible adult. Be supportive and positively encouraging of them at all times.

The LDWA form for significant incidents is attached. The idea of this is to keep a record of any incidents that happen during a walk in case of a later claim and to keep statistics for risk management. The form goes to the central log held nationally. The Group keeps a copy. Claims may occur years later.

Make short notes about any incident or accident during a walk yourself and after the walk notify the Group Secretary. They will note it in an accident book and inform the insurer.

The group accident book can be used at an event to record incidents at the time, before their significance is known, eg injury proves to be minor so no form needs to be sent in. To save duplication it's really simpler if the forms are done anyway and kept in one place with the Group Secretary, so forming the incident book.

Leaders are advised to keep a copy of the incidents form with them in their packs, in case it is needed.

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