

Canberra Bushwalking Club - Guidelines for Leaders

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Before the trip

There are many different leadership styles and often no one 'right' way of doing things, so these notes aim to let leaders know 'what to do' but do not tell them 'how to do it'. They are meant to cover all Club activities, from day walks to long, multi-day walks but not all aspects will apply on each activity.

Getting started

To lead a walk for the Club, contact the Walks Secretary for approval. He/she is responsible for taking all reasonable steps to ensure that Club activities are led by leaders capable of handling the walks they are offering and that these activities are adequately described in the Club activity program. So, if you have not previously led a Club walk, you will need to demonstrate to him/her that you have the relevant abilities and experience. Discuss with him/her where you want to go and whether you can handle the trip's degree of difficulty (distance, terrain, navigational complexities). He/she may discuss your proposed activity and your abilities with other Club members before accepting your offer to lead or may suggest a co-leader.

Preparing for the trip

Once your activity is accepted, you should prepare a good walk [description](#) for publication in the Club activity program and forward this to the Walks Secretary. However, he/she may request an alternative date for your planned activity if, for example, it clashes with other similar activities already on the program or to get a better spread of activities from weekend to weekend.

Gather the information you need to plan the trip e.g. check maps, guide books, climate information and speak to other members or Park rangers. Check whether any restrictions apply to the area where you are planning to walk e.g. limits on party size, designated campsites, fuel stove only areas. Obtain any permits you need to camp or light a fire. You may need to check that your activity complies with the National Park's Plan of Management, if it is in a designated wilderness area.

Plan the route. It may be advisable to do a pre-trip reconnaissance of part or all of the route. You may need to work out distances and times required to intermediate points. Consider the need for alternatives to cope with weather changes or delays due to illness, injury or slower-than-expected progress.

If you are intending to cross private land, seek permission from the landowner beforehand.

You should also consider your party size. If you wish to run the walk with fewer than four participants, including yourself (e.g. if your group is experienced and you are carrying a Personal Locator Beacon - PLB) or more than 16 (because it is easy), you should seek approval from the Walks Secretary or Assistant Walks Secretary when you offer the activity for the Club program or before the activity starts.

You might also consider setting a limit below 16, e.g. in environmentally sensitive areas or if you are a new leader, to make group management easier.

It is your decision whether to include a limit in your walk description. If you do not list a limit in your trip description, you may still decide later, after reviewing the weather forecast, experience levels of the people who wish to take part, or other factors, to set a limit.

If, for any reason, the party size drops below four after the leader has left home, he/she must, in consultation with the other party members, assess matters such as party strength, difficulty of terrain, remoteness and access to help via mobile phone or Personal Locator Beacon, before deciding whether or not it is safe to proceed. Similarly, if the party grows above the approved limit, the leader will need to decide on an appropriate course of action, taking into account the safety of the party and the environment in which you are walking.

It is highly desirable to have someone on the trip with a first aid certificate e.g. from St John Ambulance or Red Cross.

Consider what information other than what is in your walk description that you may need to give to those who contact you about your trip. Participants on walks rated short/easy will need only basic information but, for advanced activities, you may need to discuss matters like whether any special equipment will be required; what skills or experience are needed; the availability of water, campsites and shelter; the expected weather conditions; possible hazards; whether you expect to or have to swim. When talking to prospective participants, try to be as objective as possible – what is ‘simple’ or ‘easy’ to you may be daunting to someone new!

You will need to form an opinion about the ability of those who seek to book on your trip to complete the trip before accepting them. This should be easy for people you know, but you will need to talk to people you do not know about their fitness and experience. Ask them which other leaders they have walked with and check, if necessary, with those leaders. Be careful about the claims of fitness and experience of people you do not know. Non-members are welcome on Club trips but without clear evidence of adequate experience, it is recommended that you not accept them on trips rated long or rough.

You need not accept anyone for your trip whose suitability you doubt, including a concern that a person may not participate harmoniously with others in the party. If you need to reject someone who has expressed an interest in your trip because of lack of fitness or experience, it helps if you can suggest a more suitable alternative from the Club program.

You should suggest that non-members read the Club’s Guidelines for Participants in Club Activities. These can be downloaded from the Club’s web site or obtained from the Membership Secretary.

You should also tell participants that they will need to sign an Acknowledgment of Risks and Obligations form before taking part in your trip. You should mention that the form requires them to advise you of any medical conditions which may affect them. In particular, you should ask whether new participants are asthmatic, epileptic or allergic to insect stings or bites. You should not disclose the medical information received to others without consent, except where necessary for medical treatment or where the safety of the party would otherwise be compromised.

If possible, you should provide a copy of the form to new participants before the day of the walk, e.g. by email, or tell them how to find it on the Club’s website. Anyone not prepared to sign the form should not book on Club walks and leaders are required to refuse participation to anyone who declines to sign the form when presenting for a walk.

A Trip Booking form is found on the Club’s website. Essentially you will need to obtain address, contact phone numbers, car availability and preferably email address so that you can make, and advise participants of, the transport arrangements. Ensure that participants have registered their emergency contact details in the CBC member record, or obtain such details for this trip.

A good walk description

A good walk description helps prospective participants match the trip to their capabilities. In January 2013, the CBC Committee approved the hypothetical description below, as a suggestion.

Saturday 15 December: Desperado Dell M/R

A circuit featuring a rocky viewpoint, a ferny creek and a swamp known for its birdlife. From Dingo Dam car park, climb steeply for 3 km on the Dagga Fire Trail to GR 765650 (GDA) where a rocky outcrop gives views to Mt. Dipsy. The rest is off track: descend to meet Daisy Creek and follow it upstream, with occasional rock scrambling, to Desperado Dell, then return to the cars via the scrubby unnamed ridge which starts at spot height 1137. About 15 kilometres, with 350 metres ascent. A one hour drive from Kambah, all on sealed road. Map: Desperation Point. Leader: Dymphna Dribble, ddribble@gmail.com 02 6262 1234. Please book by 2 pm Thursday. Transport: \$56 per car. Limit: 12.

Essentials:

- Date, trip name, grading, map name, leader details (which are abbreviated in the online version unless the leader has authorized full contact details to be published), transport details and the limit if there is one
- Enough specifics (e.g. place names, grid reference, spot height) to allow a prospective
- participant to work out the route on a map.

Really useful:

- Length in kilometres or in hours
- Height gain
- Information on terrain difficulty.

Leave out:

Comments such as 'This is my favourite part of the Dinkydellas' or 'I first did this walk in 1973'. Such comments use up space without helping a prospective walker self-assess their capability for the walk.

In the week before the walk

- Decide on the transport arrangements for the trip. You may vary the normal Club car pooling system if you feel this is appropriate. For helpful information on transport arrangements please see the [Transport Pooling Guidelines](#) on the Documents page on the website
- If intending to walk on public land, confirm that the area in which you are proposing to walk will not be closed to the public on the day(s) of your trip
- If intending to walk in a NSW State Forest, it is advisable to phone the NSW Game Council (www.gamecouncil.nsw.gov.au, 02 6360 5111). If a shooting application has been granted for the date of your trip, you must reroute, postpone, or cancel your trip.
- Check the weather forecast.
- If a programmed walk is not going to proceed for any reason (eg lack of starters, inclement weather), the leader should advise the cancellation to the Check-In Officer.
- Send the Trip Booking form to the Check-In Officer with the names of participants and their contact details. Remember to fill in the bottom of the form – route, car registration etc. This information should be sent as close as convenient to the time of departure (e.g. the afternoon or evening of the day before a trip with a morning departure) to reduce the chances of subsequent changes to the party.

Things to bring

You should take the following on the walk:

- A first aid kit
- Maps, compass and, unless the walk is very simple, a GPS
- List of participants, and blank Acknowledgement of Risks and Obligations form
- A copy of the Club's Emergency Information Sheet (available on the website)
- A mobile phone, although its coverage is limited in remote areas. Telstra's Next G has the best coverage although a phone suitable for use in remote areas is preferable.
- A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB), especially in remote or difficult country.

During the trip

At the meeting point for the trip

Groups normally meet in Canberra and travel together to the start point of the walk:

- Make sure that everyone has arrived and that everyone has been introduced
- Show the group the route on the map and explain what to expect along the way
- All participants including the Leader must sign the Club's Acknowledgment of Risks and Obligations form.

On the walk

- Do not leave until everyone is ready
- Appoint someone to walk at the back of the group if necessary, especially with a large group
- Re-group regularly, and especially if the trip is about to change direction
- Count the participants occasionally. Check often that no one is left behind, especially after stops or in difficult conditions
- Be alert for any hazards or any physical or other problems within the party
- Watch the weather, adjusting your plans if necessary
- Monitor progress against your plan for the trip and make any adjustments necessary to ensure the trip's smooth completion.

In larger groups, consider:

- Asking participants to choose a 'buddy' and to check that their buddy is present at re-groups
- Advising participants: 'tell someone if you need to leave the party, call out if you can't see the person in front of you, wait if you can't see the person behind you',
- Giving short briefings occasionally (e.g. 'now we will go down this fire trail for about 20 minutes till we reach a creek').

At the end of the walk

- Ensure that all participants have returned
- Arrange for drivers to be reimbursed for their costs and do not leave until all vehicles have started their engines.

On returning home

- Always advise the Check-In Officer of your return by 10.00am the next morning and send him/her the completed Acknowledgment of Risks and Obligations form
- If something happened that resulted in an injury that required or is likely to require medical treatment, complete and forward an Incident Form (available on the Club's website) to the Check-In Officer
- Advise the Check-In Officer of any concerns or of any incident on the trip that led to injury or threatened the safety of the party or that led to you substantially shortening or changing the route of your trip.

It is also a good idea to report information which may be relevant to future trips, such as closed access, new trails, areas affected by fire or regrowth, and participants whose behaviour may have put at risk the safety of the party or adversely affected its enjoyment of the trip.

Minimal impact bushwalking

The Club has developed its own Minimal Impact Bushwalking Code (available on the Club's website) to which all participants in Club activities are bound. You have a responsibility to observe the Code and, if necessary, remind trip participants of their obligations.

Dealing with problems

Leaders may encounter problems on the trips they lead, although serious problems are rare. If a problem arises, stay calm. Do not be afraid to ask for help from any member of the party or to ask for more experienced participants to take charge if you think they are better equipped to handle the situation. In emergencies on overnight trips, the party's food, water and equipment may need to be pooled.

Group spread – faster walkers

If you allow faster members of the party to go ahead, or allow some members of the group to go via an alternate route, make sure that they understand where they are to wait for the rest of the group. Unless those other members are capable of proceeding as an independent group (and include someone with leadership experience) the waiting place should not be far ahead and the time interval should be short.

If you want the faster people to stay with group, it is diplomatic to give them a reason – for instance that you plan to make an unusual and interesting departure from the obvious route.

Group spread - slower walkers

There are different ways to manage slower walkers. Some leaders set a pace with which the slowest walker feels comfortable. Other leaders set a pace that pushes the slower members a little beyond their comfort levels – this is acceptable provided the slower members are not pushed beyond the level of safety. There is no fool-proof way to judge whether a pace is unsafe or just uncomfortable, so it is wise to err on the side of caution, especially in hot weather.

In heavy scrub, or where there are many tracks, bad weather or other difficult conditions, make sure the party keeps together and in contact. Each person should be able to see the person immediately in front and should call out if contact is lost.

If your group is spreading out, don't hesitate to ask others to help, for instance, as messengers, or shepherds.

Separation of a party Member

If someone becomes separated from the party, call out or use a whistle or mobile phone to try to re-establish contact. It is generally not desirable to split the party to look for the separated person, although this can be considered if each of the groups going to search has a GPS or can otherwise be confident of getting back to a designated reassembly point. Check back to where the person was last seen. Investigate likely wrong routes. Spread any waiting party members at intervals across the direction of travel (but keep each person in the line in sight of the next). Try to imagine what the separated person would do and respond accordingly. If the separated person has not been found within a reasonable period of time, urgently contact the Club Check-In Officer or alternate contact on the Emergency Information Sheet. You should not continue towards the destination or the next interim objective unless you believe the missing member is a competent walker who is capable of reaching the next objective independently and has probably decided to do so.

Leaders may ask the Check-In Officer to contact the Police. However, leaders can call the Police directly if they so prefer. Note that if a search is required Police will need to talk direct to the leader at some stage to ascertain details of where the separation occurred, the nature of the terrain and the probable movements and condition of the missing party member, including food, water and equipment carried.

Being unsure of your location

The use of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) means that it is generally easy to find out where you are. GPS receivers may not work, however, in deep ravines, dense bush or if it is heavily overcast so, while leaders are strongly encouraged to carry them, they need to be confident about their general navigational skills. You should encourage members of your party who have a GPS to bring it with them on your trip. It is also wise to carry a spare set of batteries for your GPS.

If you realise that you are unsure of your location, the first question to ask yourself is 'does it really matter'? In most cases you will still be able to get yourself to a known point and complete your walk without difficulty. For instance, you may be able to retrace your steps until you can re-orient yourself, climb to higher ground and take a GPS reading there or take bearings to known points or head towards a 'collecting feature', such as a ridge, track or watercourse, that will take you where you want to go.

If necessary, discuss options with experienced members of your party. Keep the party together. The convention of 'if lost wait until rescued' generally only applies if you are 'truly lost' or you cannot move because of safety risks. In this case, you should set up camp in a prominent spot with access to water and use any aids you can to maximise your visibility. If you expect emergency services to be searching for you, stay at your campsite.

What if people don't follow your instructions?

In signing the Club's Acknowledgment of Risks and Obligations form, all participants agree 'to accept the instructions of the leader of the activity'. Participation in Club activities is, however, voluntary, and participants retain the right to withdraw from an activity if they wish. A leader thus cannot force a participant to follow instructions. If explanation and encouragement do not result in the participant agreeing to a leader's instructions, the leader no longer has a responsibility to the participant.

A wise precaution is to ensure that all the drivers are known to you and reliable. Even walkers with independent minds need a lift home.

Water crossings

These crossings are potentially dangerous and should be approached with care. Where the water is more than knee deep and running fast, crossings should be avoided.

Bad weather

If the weather is bad at the start of your trip or bad weather is forecast, consider cancelling or rerouting the trip. If you proceed, make sure that all participants are properly equipped for the conditions and that no one feels pressured into taking part.

If the trip is rerouted, inform the Check-In Officer of the revised route or note it on the Trip Booking form you have placed in your letterbox or, preferably, emailed to the Check-In Officer. If the route is changed at the last minute, it may not be possible or convenient to notify the change. Where a significant change of route occurs the leader may phone, or send an email or text message to the Check-In Officer, if able to do so. If bad weather occurs during a trip, you should consider modifying or abandoning the trip. Pay particular attention to signs of distress in the party, particularly in cold, wet and windy conditions when the risk of hypothermia is high or in hot conditions when heat exhaustion and dehydration are possible.

Activities should not be undertaken in areas where a Total Fire Ban is in place, unless the activity is within an urban area. A Total Fire Ban differs from a 'Park fire ban'; activities may continue, with caution, where there is a Park fire ban. During a multi-day walk, a leader may not know whether a Total Fire Ban has been declared, or a leader may discover that a Total Fire Ban has been declared but not be in a position to walk out safely. In such cases leaders should minimise risks as much as practicable.

An unplanned night out

If your party suffers a prolonged delay, it may be better to spend a controlled night in the bush rather than risk trying to get back to the cars in the dark. If considering this option, remember that your first responsibility is to yourself and your party rather than to anxious relatives and friends. Stop early enough to find as suitable a spot as possible. Make use of available shelter and keep warm and dry as best you can. Depending on the conditions, the type of walk and the participants, you are likely to have an opportunity to 'self rescue'.

When you do get out, let the Check-In Officer know as soon as possible.

Discrimination and harassment

You should be familiar with the Club's guidelines for dealing with discriminatory or harassing behaviour (see the website). Complaints about discriminatory or harassing behaviour should be referred to the Club's Training and Safety Officer (or another Committee member) in the first instance.

Injury or illness on a trip

Read the Club's Emergency Information Sheet. If an injury or illness does occur on your trip, it is important to act early. The need to look after a casualty has priority over any walking objectives. Do not assume that the medical condition will improve.

If someone in the party is suffering from heat stress, exhaustion or hypothermia, you and others in the party may be nearing the same state. Make use of the first aid skills and resources of the party to treat the casualty. Regularly monitor and record details of the casualty's condition and of any first aid that you administer. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to shorten or rearrange the trip, to lighten the casualty's pack by distributing its contents; or to split the party to retrieve a vehicle or get help. On an overnight trip it may also be necessary to camp to allow the casualty to recover. If this is going to result in the trip being delayed, attempt to contact the Check-In Officer or other Club office holder.

Incidents requiring police involvement

You may stumble on a crime scene on a walk. If this occurs, do not disturb the scene but note the location (take a GPS reading) and other details of the scene and report these to the police. While there has never been death on a Club trip, should this occur, remember that you are not qualified to certify that death has occurred – the casualty may be alive but in a coma and needs to be treated accordingly. For your protection, take extensive notes. In any case, you should treat the site of the death with the same care as you would if it were a crime scene. Take notes of the circumstances surrounding the death; protect the body from animals and the elements; mark the spot clearly; and report to police at the earliest possible opportunity.

Insurance

The Club has Public Liability insurance cover to protect the Club, its leaders and its members from claims made by individuals or companies seeking damages for injury and/or property damage caused by negligent acts

committed on Club bushwalks and some other activities. Our insurance policy only applies to Club activities and does not cover solo activities by Club members. The non-bushwalking activities covered by our insurance vary at the discretion of the insurer; some are excluded and some are covered only if participants sign a 'Risk Waiver' (for risky activities in NSW). The list changes by the year and leaders need to check if intending to undertake such activities.

Leadership training

The Club conducts training for leaders in navigation and in the use of a GPS. Participation in these activities will improve your skills, increase your confidence as a leader and broaden the range of trips you can lead. It will subsidise first aid training undertaken e.g. with St John Ambulance or Red Cross.

Further information

It is suggested that you read the book *Finding Your Way in the Bush* by George Carter, the Club's own highly recommended guide.

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