

Ramblers' Association Doncaster Group  
Guidelines for Walking Parties

- 1 Responsibility

The leader has overall responsibility for the party.
  
- 2 Planning the route

As far as possible the route should be off roads and on rights of way or other land or routes over which the public have a right of access. Taking a group where no right of way or right of access exists is totally unacceptable. Start and finish points should be convenient. If possible they should be accessible by public transport. Car parking should be available. A walk for inexperienced walkers should not exceed about 5 miles, and for experienced walkers it should not exceed about 10-12 miles. Bear in mind that more time is needed when there are numerous stiles and that the bigger the group the slower the progress. Terrain will obviously affect the distance which can be walked. Undulating countryside does not greatly affect the pace but significant ascents or descents do slow progress. Walks with groups should, if possible, be reconnoitred. This ensures that possible footpath or navigation problems can be avoided. It may be advisable to inform the publican of a group visit if a pub stop is included on the walk.
  
- 3 The walk
  - 3.1 The leader

The leader should be properly equipped for whatever is planned that day. The leader should be physically fit enough to complete the day's plans with ease so as to have the reserves to deal with any emergency. The leader should have sufficient navigation skills to complete the walk safely in any conditions.
  - 3.2 The briefing

Ensure that all party members are suitably equipped to cope with the weather conditions. This assessment would be subjective, but in extreme circumstances the leader would be justified in turning away someone s/he thought lacked proper footwear or clothing and who could thus endanger the safety of others. Introduce yourself and any newcomers. Give a brief description of the route, including any potential hazards. If possible give an outline of the route on the map. Give the expected time of return. Inform the party of the back-marker.
  - 3.3 During the walk

The greatest priority is not to allow the party to be split. Whilst everyone needs to walk at a pace comfortable to themselves it will be necessary to stop the front of the party frequently to enable the rear of the party to catch-up. It is advisable to stop the party just after stiles. It will be necessary to stop the front of the party at the top of steep hills. Keeping the party close together is particularly important in poor visibility and in wooded country.

It is necessary for the leader to be able to control the front of the party, either by being at the front or by telling the people at the front where they should stop next.

When the party is stopped and those at the rear have caught-up give everyone, including those who have just caught-up, a few minutes rest.

Using a back-marker means that you do not need to keep checking the number in the party; as long as you can see the back-marker your whole party should be present. Check unobtrusively with the back-marker that people at the rear of the group are coping well.

The duration of lunch-stops will depend on the weather, fine weather allowing a leisurely lunch, poor weather making the opposite advisable. It is not acceptable to eat own lunches in a pub unless permission has been obtained.

If the group go into a pub it is advisable to set a departure time, usually of about 45 minutes hence. The leader should ensure that all members of the party know the departure time.

During the walk ensure that newcomers are made to feel welcome.

Party members are usually interested to receive information on points of interest during the walk.

Be alert to possible problems for individual party members, a sudden change in the weather, road walking, etc.

Involve other members of the party as necessary, for example to support a member of the party who may be unwell. Advice from RA Head Office when road walking is to walk in single file against oncoming traffic. Be aware of blind bends.

At the end of the walk any incidents, accidents or footpath obstructions should be reported to Group officers. The Group Secretary keeps a record of incidents and accidents and informs Head Office in the event of a possible insurance claim.

#### 4 Party members

Members of the party have a responsibility to the leader. These responsibilities include:

- 4.1 Accept and support the leader's decisions. If you have any comments to make to the leader about the management of the party or of the route then do so in private.
- 4.2 Do not pressure the leader regarding the pace of the walk.
- 4.3 Party members should not walk more than two abreast across fields.
- 4.4 Any dogs must be on a lead.
- 4.5 You must inform the leader if you intend to leave the party.

May 2006