

LEADING WALKS

A GUIDE FOR NEW AND EXISTING LEADERS

Walk leaders are the Club's most valuable resource. Without them there would be no Club and so you, as a leader, are making the single biggest contribution to the Club's success that any member can make. This is something about which you can feel proud. Remember, although you are leading people on your walk, you are doing this as a volunteer and when you lead a walk you have the right to assume that each person on your walk, by signing the Attendance Sheet, assumes responsibility for their own health and safety.

SELECTING A WALK

- Choose a walk that you have enjoyed walking and that is well within your capabilities as a leader.
- If you need ideas for walks, you can talk to other leaders, refer to the Ramblers Walks Bank and past Walks Programs, or consult walking books and leaflets. The website www.wildwalks.com is a good source of detailed information on hundreds of walks throughout the Sydney area.
- It's your choice whether to lead a walk on your own, or to co-lead a walk with someone else.
- If you are new to leading, you may want to consider reasonably straightforward walks that are easy to get to by public transport. Members may be reluctant to go on more adventurous activities with a new leader until they know them better and a level of trust has been established.

Nobody 'owns' a walk, so don't worry about choosing a walk you have seen offered before by other leaders. Some walks are rightly popular, and every additional walk offered to members is a bonus.

PLANNING A WALK AND PRE-WALKING

- Do pre-walk the intended route before submitting the walk for the Walks Program. The pre-walk is a good confidence booster and helps you determine the approximate walking time and grade of walk.
- Work out suitable spots for morning tea and lunch and add extra time for these and any other activities you may have planned. Check to see if there are toilets and taps with drinking water along the way. Check for mobile phone coverage if out of urban areas.
- If possible, pre-walk your walk at the same time and under similar seasonal conditions as your programmed walk. It can make quite a difference to planned stopping points. Also, be aware of tidal variations when planning coastal walks.
- Think about problems that might arise on the walk, such as an injury or illness that requires the walk to be shortened or some walkers to exit before the planned finish. Work out exit routes for these circumstances.
- Make an alternative plan for situations that may change, such as a creek subject to flash flooding, track erosion or closure, or transport changes.
- Note points where people may get lost.

Pre-walks are covered by our public liability insurance. If a significant incident or accident occurs on your pre-walk, an Incident Report Form should be completed as for any other Club walk. This should be sent to the President and Walks Co-ordinator as soon as practical, confirming that this walk took place as a recognised and authorised club activity. Remember to keep a copy for your own records.

As for all Club walks, however, there is a minimum number of walkers required for the walk to be covered by our insurance: **three** walkers (including the leader) in urban areas; **four** walkers in bushland if there is known mobile phone coverage; and **five** walkers in more remote areas where mobile coverage is either absent or unknown.

- Check public transport connections to and from the walk. Make sure you allow sufficient time for connections if multiple forms of transport are used.
- It is a good idea to pre-walk the intended route again at least once just before the actual walk takes place, even if you think you know it. Track conditions change and this will enable you to assess any current issues and/or potential risks such as creek crossings, slippery tracks or busy road crossings.

SUBMITTING A WALK FOR THE MAIN WALKS PROGRAM

- Complete the Walks Submission Form, which can be found in each Walks Program. Alternatively, it can be downloaded from the Club website www.wearamblers.org.au. Go first to 'Forms and Links', then 'Forms for Walks Leaders'. Choose the PDF version to print off if you want to complete it manually, or the Word version if you want to complete and send it electronically.
- Ensure that you describe the walk clearly, identifying potential hazards. State if there are no 'drop out' points during the walk.
- Include the walk grade (1–6) and approximate kilometres. Full descriptions of each grade are included in the Walks Program, but if you are unsure, it's better to

over-estimate the grade than to under-estimate it.

- Nominate a preferred date for your walk, but if you can be flexible, indicate this as well.
- Email the completed form to wearamblerssydney5@gmail.com or post it to the Walks Co-ordinator, PO Box Q1687, Queen Victoria Building, NSW 1230. Either way, make sure it arrives by the due date given in the current Walks Program.

SUBMITTING A SHORT NOTICE WALK

- These walks are notified by email to all members who supply an email address.
- There are a number of good reasons why people choose to offer a Short Notice Walk. Such walks are a valuable supplement to those published in the quarterly Walks Program.
- Check the main program first to see what else is happening on the day you have chosen. It's good to fill a gap, but it can also be valuable to have a second option for walkers on popular days such as Wednesdays and Saturdays, when groups tend to be large.
- Complete the submission form as described for the main Walks Program. The preferred Word format is without the table structure as this does not transfer well in emails. Email your walk to the Short Notice Walks Co-ordinator at wearamblerssydney6@gmail.com. This mailbox will be checked once a week on Monday and details of any Short Notice Walks received that week will be sent out to members shortly afterwards.
- You can submit your walk at any time, but please ensure you allow sufficient time for your information to be circulated before your walk is due to take place, bearing in mind this weekly cycle.

UNDER 18 AGE WALKERS

- Club membership continues to be restricted to people over 18. Walk leaders MAY, and entirely at their discretion, allow a person under 18 to join their walk as a Temporary Member (Visitor) providing all the conditions shown in the Policy Document *Children Attending Walks* are followed.

PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

- People with a disability over the age of 18 MAY be Members or Temporary Members providing all conditions shown in the Policy Document *People with a Disability* are followed.

A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE WALK

- Double check all transport arrangements, particularly trackwork for trains.
Transport Info Line (for transport times and trackwork): Phone 131 500 or see www.transportnsw.info
- Check expected weather conditions and, if applicable, fire conditions and park or track closures. For **park closures**: Check the National Parks website <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/NationalParks/FireClosure.aspx> or contact the relevant Park Office by phone.
Rural Fire Service: The RFS website gives current fire conditions updates about 5 pm each night during fire season: <http://www.bushfire.nsw.gov.au/> or phone 1800 679737.
For planned hazard reduction burns see: http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/dsp_content.cfm?cat_id=689
- For bushwalks, leave comprehensive details of the walk with a reliable person, including instructions on what to do if you do not return at the expected time.
- Temporary Members (Visitors) need your approval as leader to go on the walk. When they contact you, it is important to determine whether they are capable of doing the walk at a steady pace. The best way of doing this is to ask for examples of their recent walks. Suggest an easier walk if you think they may have problems completing your walk. Visitors accompanying members also need your approval and it is the responsibility of each member to assess their guest's capability and advise you accordingly.
- If you find you are unable to lead your walk after the details have been published, it is your responsibility to find a substitute leader. You may know someone who is familiar with your route and is willing to step in. If not, each Walks Program lists names and contact details of experienced leaders currently willing to act as substitute leaders. If contacting them still proves unsuccessful,

as a last resort notify the Walks Co-ordinator, giving as much notice as possible.

CANCELLING WALKS IN EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS

- Leaders should always check expected weather conditions for their walk the day before, preferably after 5 pm when the most up-to-date information will be available.
- Even with this preparation, conditions on the ground can be different from those predicted, so be prepared to adapt your plans, remembering that the safety and welfare of your group must always be your first priority when making decisions about the walk.
- Risks you might be comfortable taking as an individual may not be acceptable if you are leading a Ramblers walk.
- Leaders should not enter a National Park if it is closed, or take the group along any closed track unless they have specific permission to do so from the responsible authority.
- A walk should not go ahead in a bushfire prone area on a Total Fire Ban day or when a **severe, extreme** or **catastrophic** fire warning rating has been issued.
- Heat stress or heat exhaustion are real risks. Leaders should consider cancelling or modifying a walk when the temperature is predicted to exceed 30 degrees. Whether it is wise to go ahead will depend on factors such as the level of heat and humidity, the nature of the walk, and the availability of shade and exit points.
- The Club will always support your decision as leader if you decide to cancel or change a walk because you consider it unwise to proceed.
- You may be able to offer an alternative walk or activity. While this will be much appreciated, you are under no obligation to do so.

ON THE DAY OF THE WALK

- Ensure that you carry whatever equipment is required. Leaders must carry a suitable first aid kit and where possible a fully charged mobile phone. Other items could include compass, map, track notes, pen and whistle. Remember to pack the Attendance Sheets

for Members and Temporary Members and a blank Incident Report Form. These will have been sent to you in the Leader's pack, and additional copies can be downloaded from the Ramblers website.

- Check the latest weather forecast.
- Get to the meeting point early.
- All walkers, including members and Temporary Members, must fill in the details on the appropriate Attendance Sheet and sign it. Check that emergency contact details are provided by everyone. This number is for someone who can be contacted in case of an emergency involving the person concerned. Add any additional risks not already listed in the space provided on the form.
- If your walk is outside urban areas, and you do not carry a mobile phone yourself, you should ensure someone in your group is carrying one.
- There must be a minimum of **three** walkers (including the leader) in urban areas; **four** walkers in bushland if there is known mobile phone coverage; and **five** walkers in more remote areas where mobile coverage is either absent or unknown. ***Unless these conditions are met, the walk will not be regarded as an authorised Club walk, and so will not be covered by the Club's public liability insurance.***
- Ensure everyone has adequate food and water: generally a minimum of one litre for a day walk or two litres or more in hotter conditions is recommended. People will need to carry more than this if there are no taps on the walk. In hot weather it is a good idea to carry an electrolyte replacer, such as Gatorade® or staminade®, as well. For more on the importance of adequate liquids, see the 'Hydration' factsheet available on the Australian Institute of Sport website: www.ausport.gov.au/ais/nutrition.
- Choose a place to form a circle that will not inconvenience other people and is quiet enough for you to be heard. Welcome everyone and ask everyone to introduce themselves and 'number off', ensuring the numbers counted match the number on the completed Attendance Sheet. Make sure to extend a special welcome to new members and visitors.
- During the circle, give details of the walk. People like to have information on expected terrain, possible hazards, and whether there will be toilets and water available. A rough time for the completion of the walk is helpful,

but do allow yourself some flexibility as walks can sometimes take much longer than expected.

- Set your ground rules assertively and clearly. Walkers must walk behind the leader and ahead of the tail at all times. They must also do their best to keep sight of the

Check that first time or inexperienced members and visitors are wearing suitable footwear, using a backpack and carrying food and water. The leader has the right to refuse the participation of anyone they consider may present a risk to themselves or to the group.

walkers in front and behind them. Ask them to let you know if they are having trouble keeping up or lose sight of the person behind them. If your walk includes pavements and shared cycle paths, remind the group of the importance of considering other users and not blocking their way.

- If appropriate to the walk, ascertain if anyone is carrying a mobile phone, GPS or EPIRB for emergency use and whether any participants have a current first aid certificate and/or medical training.
- Appoint a tail unless this is obviously not necessary. Either prearrange with a fellow walker or ask for a volunteer. Preferably it should be someone who knows the route, or at least has some experience of the area. Swap mobile phone numbers in case the group becomes separated. Ask another walker to wait at track junctions to ensure everybody goes the right way. Instruct people who need to leave the track for a few minutes to let the tail know and to leave their packs on the track.
- If it is a large group, appoint a middle person to liaise between you and the person who is the tail.

DURING THE WALK

- On shared paths, continue to ensure your group remains aware of the rights of other people using the same space—this is important for the Club's good reputation.
- Give warning of any hazards encountered (low branch, slippery area, car approaching) as the walk progresses.

- Carry out regular head counts to ensure you have everyone, especially after rest breaks and toilet stops.
- Have regular drink and rest breaks. People often need to be reminded to drink in all weather conditions but especially when it is hot and/or humid.
- Look back frequently to make sure the tail is in sight and if necessary wait for them to catch up. This will give you a good idea of the pace of the walk, which is necessarily set by the slowest walker. Don't take off as soon as the tail arrives. Slower or less fit walkers will need time to catch their breath and have a drink. Be aware of anyone who is struggling, and take appropriate action. Request that walkers make sure that they can see the person behind them and, if they can't, to alert the leader so that the group can wait for them to catch up.
- Cross roads safely. Cross as a group or in small groups using traffic lights, pedestrian crossings and traffic islands where available.
- When you stop for morning tea and lunch advise people how long you will be stopping and then give about five minutes warning before you head off again.
- If anyone decides to leave the walk early, ensure they sign the back of the Attendance Sheet to acknowledge their decision. If necessary, the leader has the right to sign off a walker during the walk.
- Finish the walk in a suitable spot to make any final comments and say farewell. Don't forget to thank those who have acted as tail. Advise walkers of public transport times if you know them.
- At the end of the walk you may want to offer a coffee option if there is a cafe nearby.

ACCIDENTS OR INJURIES ON THE WALK

- Halt the walk while you assess the situation. Let the rest of the group know what is

happening. If the party needs to be split (e.g. to allow an injured member to walk out slowly), appoint a leader for each group.

- While each walker is advised to carry their own first aid kit, it is important that you make sure you are well equipped in case someone forgets supplies.
- The role of the leader is that of a manager rather than a first aid expert. Ask the person in the group with the most first aid experience or current qualifications to carry out first aid with your support.
- Administer first aid as soon as possible.
- If necessary, use a mobile phone to call for assistance. Dial 000 in any emergency situation. If this does not connect, dialling 112 should get you through via any service provider in the area. An app, 'Emergency+', is available for iPhones and Android phones from the iStore and Google App store, respectively. It provides GPS co-ordinates for your location, plus direct links to emergency services.
- In the event of a significant incident or injury, complete an Incident Report Form and return it to the President as soon as practical, with a copy to the Walks Co-ordinator and one for your own records. In the event of serious injury, or if the injured walker indicates a wish to take matters further, inform the President by phone or email as soon as possible.
- Contact the injured/ill walker after the walk to check on his/her health.

AFTER THE WALK

- If you have left details of your walk with someone in case of emergency (see above), remember to let that person know as soon as the group has returned.
- Send the Attendance Sheet to the Walks Co-ordinator, as advised on the form.

HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY WALK!

 Information is also available on the Club website: www.wearamblers.org.au