**Footloose303 Information for Walk Leaders**

***updated 21.3.23***

**The vital role**

By leading a walk you are making a significant contribution to the success and enjoyment of the group.  So, first of all - thank you.  The leader takes on great responsibility, much, if not all of which, lies in common sense and being prepared.  A walk can take on a different perspective when you have got a group of people behind you and so these notes have been prepared to help you.  It is definitely worth remembering the adage: “better safe than sorry”!

If you have not done it before (or for a while) we hope that this section will help and guide you.

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**Safety**There's lots of information on safety on the Safe Walking page on the web site (<http://footloose303.emyspot.com/pages/safe-walking.html>).  Please read it before leading a walk.

Also be aware that it is still easy to catch coronavirus, and though for most people this will be a relatively mild illness this isn’t always the case. There’s an advice/risk assessment sheet for Covid here: <http://footloose303.emyspot.com/medias/files/ra-covid.pdf>

**Walk ideas

Start with a local walk you know**
Often the best starting point is to do a walk you already know. If it is a bit short have a look to see if you can add a bit to it.  Walks are generally in the 7-12 mile range, 3 miles or so for evening walks.
 **Use past walks as a starting point**
A good starting point for a future walk can be a past one. They can be re-done (walks always feel different at others times of year etc.), thay can be varied (change the route a bit, make longer or shorter) or they may just introduce you to an area. Have a look at the walking routes map on the web site (<http://footloose303.emyspot.com/pages/walking-routes.html> - you need to be logged in to see this). Click on the icons to download maps for each walk. For Exmoor and the Quantocks there are also lots of walking routes [here](http://exmoorwalker.uk/).

**Walks in books, magazines and on the web**
Local magazines and papers sometimes have walks in them, and there are lots on the web. Some may be a bit short but they can be a good starting point.

**Ask another member to help you**
Some members are good map readers and may be able to work with you to develop a route. Ask around when you are on a walk.

**Moorland (and sometimes coastal) walks - They have dangers!**

Do not forget that walking on moorland can have greater danger than countryside walks. The mist can come down requiring good navigation, if somone has an accident it can be a long way and take a long time to get help. Also conditions underfoot can be much tougher. Take care and seek advice if you are not familiar with this kind of walk.  Similar points apply to parts of the coast, e.g. paths a long distance from roads, narrow paths above drops, the effect of bad weather, tides if you need to cross a beach.

**Getting organised**

1. Choose a walk that's around 7-12 miles (2.5-4 miles for evening walks) and suitable for the time of year.  The occasional slightly longer/tougher walk (e.g. the black walks on our Routes page) is OK particularly in summer, but check the programme to make sure there aren't very long or strenuous walks in consecutive weeks.
2. Pair up with another member to help you choose the walk and recce it well. The more familar you are with the route the easier it is but never be afraid of asking for help.
3. Do not forget that you will need somewhere to park cars at the start, and we try to end with a visit to a nearby pub or tea shop (which could be a short drive away if necessary), or ‘bring and share’ (see below).  See the Refreshments page (<http://footloose303.emyspot.com/pages/refreshments-parking-accommodation.html>) for a map of cafes and pubs (this is slightly out of date, so don’t rely on it).  Contact the venue to make sure they are open (and until when) and give them an estimate of numbers.  Some are happy to extend their opening hours if the group is big enough, and some pubs will buy or make cake is you ask. Some will also allow you to use the car park while you walk, or stay open outside normal hours for a big enough group.  As an alternative we sometimes have ‘bring and share’ refreshments – e.g. the walk leader and a couple of volunteers bring cake, and everyone is asked to bring a flask. After a long drive it's useful to know where toilets are, and maybe have the option of a cup of tea or coffee before starting.
4. Have a contingency plan if a large number of people sign up for your walk.  You can put a limit on numbers and close the sign-up page once it has been reached (**do warn people in advance if you are setting limit on numbers or closing sign-up early**).  You may also need to limit that the number of cars at the start – as well as using the car share points, it can help to suggest a place near the start where people can leave cars.
5. If you're planning a linear walk using a bus or hired minibus, make sure you have worked out all the logistics and costs - ask around at a walk if you're unsure.  It's usually better to park at the finish and take the bus back to the start.
6. Need a map? You will need a 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map (a good alternative for the coast and a few inland areas – most of Exmoor, plus a few parts of east Devon and Dorset - is a 1:12,500 [Croydecycle](http://www.croydecycle.co.uk/mapsandguides.htm) map).  We have a full set of local maps which available for loan. If you would like to borrow one contact Val at footloose303@gmail.com.
7. **Danger**! If you are planning to walk on moorland and other remote areas **– where you are 30 minutes or more from a public road -** you need to have the skills, equipment and experience to do this safely (see the Safe walking page <http://footloose303.emyspot.com/pages/safe-walking.html>). Contact Mike, John or Stan for advice you are planning such a walk.  Also be aware of narrow paths above drops (typically on the coast), which some people will find unnerving and could become dangerous in or after bad weather - check that there is an alternative route if needed, or put a warning in your walk description.  For both of these kinds of walk, be prepared to do an alternative if the weather forecast is unsuitable.  See the safety pages on the web site.

**Maps and equipment to help you**

We have the following equipment to help you safely recce and lead walks:

* A full set of Explorer maps of the local area. Open [this link](https://www.dropbox.com/s/b9x580libeb6vz7/Equipment%20loan%20list.xlsx?dl=0) to see the list. To borrow them you need to contact Val at footloose303@gmail.com
* Hand held GPS units. You can use these to measure the length of a walk, check where you are at any point via a grid reference and see your location by having a basic map. Open [this link](https://www.dropbox.com/s/b9x580libeb6vz7/Equipment%20loan%20list.xlsx?dl=0) to see who has them.
* We have survival shelters which you can take with you. They can be life savers if you or a walker get very wet or cold. Open [this link](https://www.dropbox.com/s/b9x580libeb6vz7/Equipment%20loan%20list.xlsx?dl=0) to see who has them.
* We have a very good book on navigation and map reading called "Navigation for Walkers". Contact Mike to borrow a copy.

**Getting the walk on the programme and the web site**
**Reserving your spot**

Check the [calendar](http://footloose303.emyspot.com/agenda/) to see when the next available dates are and what other walks people are putting on. Main-programme walks can be on a Saturday, Sunday or bank holiday. Ideally choose a date so that your walk is in a different area from the one the week before or after (less critical if you are walking in the centre of the Footloose catchment, e.g. Taunton/Ilminster area). Contact Stan to get your walk on the programme – the minimum information is the approximate area and distance. If you have a suitable photo that helps too.

**At least three weeks before**

This is when the walk comes up on the front page of the web site. Having enough detail lets members plan ahead – many won’t want to wait until the week before to decide if it’s one they want to do. **Check your walk on the** [**calendar**](http://footloose303.emyspot.com/agenda/), and make sure that there are basic details of the walk – location, distance and whether it’s gentle, moderate or more strenuous, plus anything that you want to add to ‘sell’ your walk, or if there are any restrictions e.g. limited parking, group size, book in advance for minibus. Send the details to Stan to put on the web site. You don’t need details such as the precise start location or when to meet at this stage.

**A week before**

**Assemble all the details and send out the email – see below.**

**Letting people know about the walk**
**Locate the start**
First of all make sure that people can find your walk meet point. A post code is not enough and in rural areas may be a long way from the meet point. A mix of clear directions to find the car park, a link to Streetmap showing the exact location, the nearest postcode, and a [What3Words](https://what3words.com/relay.zealous.gain) link works best. Giving an OS grid ref helps you and those walking learn about grid references also! Streetmap ([www.streetmap.co.uk](http://www.streetmap.co.uk/)) allows you to identify grid references and post codes: zoom to 1:25,000, position the arrow at the start, and click on the small print 'click here to convert coordinates': this will give the post code and the National Grid reference (usually starts ST, SS or similar). You can also cut and paste a hyperlink from Streetmap: use the link given below the map, not the one in the top bar, then the map will appear at the correct scale.

**Car sharing and journey times**
Most walks have car sharing meet points as well as the walk meet point. Details of these are on the [Meet points page](http://footloose303.emyspot.com/pages/car-sharing-meet-points.html).  We usually start the walks at between 10.00 and 10.30 but this will vary depending upon travel time, winter sunset time, length of walk and when the pub or tea shop shuts. A good way to calculate the travel time from the car sharing meet points is to use [AA Route Planner](http://www.theaa.com/route-planner/index.jsp) or a similar tool, e.g. on Google Maps. Just enter the location or post code for the meet point and the walks start, it will calculate the travel time for you and then add 5/10 minutes or so for leeway and to let people put their boots on.
**Set up the sign-up page**
We’re currently using Framadate to enable members to sign up for the walk. Set up a Framadate poll, and copy the public link into your email. Framadate is here: <https://framadate.org/abc/en/>, and an instruction sheet here: <http://footloose303.emyspot.com/medias/files/creating-a-poll-using-framadate.pdf> If you need help please do ask someone who has done it before.

**Dogs?**
We no longer allow dogs on walks. There is one long-standing member who joined (with dog) before the rules changed. If you are particularly concerned that the walk isn’t suitable for dogs you can put a reminder about this rule in the email.

**One week before the walk - email out the information**
Put the information in an email.  To help you we have a [template](http://footloose303.emyspot.com/medias/files/template-for-walk-emails.docx) for the wording. Then send the email to footloose303@gaggle.email. The email will automatically go to all full members and the membership secretary will email all temporary members. You need to send from the email address which you have registered with Gagglemail. If you don’t receive your own email, first check that you are using the right email address to send from (Gagglemail will only accept emails from registered addresses), then if you can’t solve the problem contact Stan.

**Leading the walk**

**Need help?**It is always nice to have someone you know with you to provide help and support. Do not be afraid to ask someone else if you feel you would like help.
**Preparation**
Download the check-list and go through it. This acts as your risk assessment for the walk. You can find the check lists and other safety advice on the ["Walking safely" page](http://footloose303.emyspot.com/pages/safe-walking.html).  Make sure you have a small first aid kit with you, and carry a fully-charged mobile phone.  It is also worth registering it (start by texting '999') so that you can use SMS text to contact the emergency services if the signal is poor.

**Unprepared walkers**
This is a difficult one. What should you do if someone turns up for your walk and you think their footwear and clothing are really not suitable for the terrain and/or weather conditions? **You have the right to not take them if you choose**.  Remember if they run into trouble during the walk e.g. sprained ankle, then it means the whole walk has to be curtailed and so the whole party is affected.  **You** have to make the decision.  In summer the dangers may be more limited, and a word for the future might be best.  In the winter you may need to say “sorry no go”.

**Brief the group**
Before you set off tell the group about the walk, where you are going, how long and hard and any particular dangers they should be aware of, for example busy roads, difficult paths, clifftops.

**Walk to the weakest member**
Generally members know their capabilities and will match these to the walk you describe on the programme. However, sometimes someone may struggle. If this is the case you may need to change the pace, shorten the walk, make more stops, or find someone who knows the route to accompany the walker.

**Do not lose people - back marking**
You need to ask someone to back mark. Thus, when you regularly glance behind you, if you can see the backmarker it means you have got the full party there. If not, stop and check.  Make sure the back marker knows what to do. They should: make sure you know when someone has had to stop for any reason (so the whole group stops); make sure gates are shut (or left open if they were before, so you need to communicate this down the line!); and generally keep an eye on the group for problems. Don’t be shy of shouting things down the line, and don’t forget to change back markers during the walk. With large groups you might need a ‘middle marker’ to relay messages.

**Know who is on the walk and keep a count – the numbers game**
Take with you the list of walkers who are coming (from the sign-up). At the meet point adjust the list so you know who is on the walk (see also after the walk). Count how many this is and make sure you have that number at the end! The best thing is to check numbers at regular intervals, eg. at water stops, stile stops, coffee stops, etc.

**Roads - crazy motorists or crazy walkers?**
Traffic is probably the biggest risk while walking.

Pick crossing points with clear sight lines, if necessary position someone to warn cars / walkers.  When road walking, generally make sure the group walks on the right, facing oncoming traffic (in single file if necessary). On blind right hand bends swap sides. On narrow lanes it is best to pass a vehicle on the driver’s side or tuck into a field gate or similar.

**Stops on route**
Whilst a reasonable pace is desirable, don’t forget to have water stops, breathers on steep ascents, ‘layers on/layers off’ stops, lunch, elevenses, etc! If you stop at a pub or cafe during the walk, do check if they allow people to eat their own sandwiches, and don't trail mud inside!

**The route - rights of way**
Make sure you follow Rights of Way/permissive paths/access land, i.e. do not trespass, and respect the country code. You have the right to pass along a right of way, but not necessarily to do anything else (e.g. picnic), and you have equal priority with other people who have a right to use the land. Another adage to conclude: ‘Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints.’ Warn people of particular dangers as you progress, for example busy road crossings, slippery mud/rock, sheer drops.

**New members - make them feel at home**
If a new member phones you to say they are coming please do “smile on the phone”. For many it is a big step. Talk the nature of the walk through with them – a muddy, hilly, twelve miler may be too much. When they arrive make sure you greet them and introduce them to others in the party. At the end of the walk try to make a special point of saying, “Cheerio, hope to see you again soon.”

**You are ill and cannot lead**
If at the last moment you are unable to lead for some reason we do have several experienced leaders who can walk a route off a map. However, they must have a clearly marked up copy of an OS map. Please contact Mike W, Peter W, Stan or John if you need last minute help.

**After the walk**
**Who was on the walk?**
Please keep a list of walkers for at least 2 months after the walk**.** This is a requirement of our insuranceand helps us know when new members walk. If someone wants to claim on the insurance for something that happened on the walk but isn’t immediately apparent, for instance a twisted ankle that turns out to be broken, you could be asked to verify that they were actually present.

**Recording and reporting near misses or accidents**
Our insurance requires that an incident must be reported within 10 days of it occuring. An incident form can be obtained from Gill. She can help you complete the form and please do make sure it is returned to her in good time to forward to our insurers.
**The route**
If you are happy with your route and it isn’t already in the [Routes](http://footloose303.emyspot.com/pages/walking-routes.html) section, please send it to Stan so that it can be put on.  A jpeg or pdf with a 1:25000 map is ideal, otherwise a gpx file (from gps), or paper map for scanning.  Include the length, amount of ascent and descent (or an estimate of the grade, see the Routes section), and show where you started from.

**To conclude - A big thank you for leading the walk!**