

Footloose303 Information for Walk Leaders

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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](#). Please read it before leading a walk.

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.), they 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 '[Routes](#)' map - click on the icons to download maps for each walk.

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. If you come across one why not scan it and email it to footloose303@gmail.com and we will add it to the walks library?

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 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 someone 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.

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 reccy it well. The more familiar 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). See the

'refreshments' page for a map of cafes and pubs. Contact the venue to make sure they are open (and until when) and give them an estimate of numbers. Some will allow you to use the car park while you walk, or stay open outside normal hours for a big enough group. 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 Doodle once it has been reached (do warn people in advance), or have a limit for the number of cars that can be accommodated at the start.
5. If you're planning a linear walk using a bus or hired minibus (the Moor Rover is good on Exmoor), 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 (an alternative for the coast and the Dunkery area is a 1:12,500 [Croydecycle](#) 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* you need to have the skills, equipment and experience to do this safely (see the Safe walking page). Contact Mike at mike-footloose303@hotmail.com or John at john.widger@btinternet.com if you are planning such a walk. (*in other words somewhere where you are over about 30 minutes from a public road). 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.

Use our advice sheets / check lists - [link to H&S page](#).

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](#) 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](#) 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](#) to see who has them.
- We have a very good book on navigation and map reading called "Navigation for Walkers". Contact Mike at mike-footloose303@hotmail.com to borrow a copy.

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 and the nearest postcode works best. Giving a OS grid ref helps you and those walking learn about grid references also! A very useful tool to find a grid reference and the nearest post code is www.gridreferencefinder.com, or use Streetmap (www.streetmap.co.uk), 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.

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](#). 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](#) or a similar tool. Just enter the location or post code, it will calculate the travel time for you and then add 5/10 minutes or so for safety's sake.

Set up the Doodle

Set up the [Doodle](#) (which we would add is actually a doodle!). Have a look at the instruction sheet - [link to sheet](#).

If you need help please do ask someone who has done it before.

Dogs?

We currently have five members who are allowed to bring dogs on walks (this only applies to people who joined before the rules were changed). However, you can say 'no dogs please' if you have concerns about horses or cattle, or you are not confident with dogs being present. The Ramblers advice is "Be prepared for cattle to react to your presence, especially if you have a dog with you". You can also give advice to help dog owners choose - e.g. 'lots of ladder stiles to cross'.

One week before the walk - email out the information

Put the information in an email. To help you we have a template for the wording - [link to template](#). 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. Do not forget that you need send from the email address which you have registered with Gagglemail.

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. 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.

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 whatever.

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.

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 Doodle). 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?

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! You will get there one day! 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, ie. do not trespass, and respect the country code. 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 marked a clearly marked up copy of an OS map. Please contact Mike W, Steve H, Peter W or John W if you need last minute help.

After the walk

Who was on the walk?

Please email the list of who came (first name and at least initial of surname) to membershipfootloose303@gmail.com. This is a requirement of our insurance and helps us know when new members walk.

Recording and reporting near misses or accidents

Our insurance requires that an incident must be reported within 10 days of it occurring. 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 your walk isn't already in the [Routes](#) section, please send the route to [Stan](#) so that it can be put on. A pdf with a 1:25000 map is ideal, otherwise a jpeg or pdf, 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!