



# Leaders' Handbook

4<sup>th</sup> Edition, September 2018

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## **Summary**

Wirral Ramblers have, for many years, offered a weekly programme of Sunday walks by coach, covering a variety of destinations and with, typically, four or five walks being offered from each destination. The walk leaders are an essential and integral part of the walks.

This Handbook has therefore been prepared in order to assist walk leaders in the planning, development and leadership of their walks. It aims to appeal both to new and aspiring leaders, whilst also offering a reference text for more experienced leaders.

The Handbook is structured into a series of clearly defined sections, addressing the planning, reconnaissance, co-ordination and leadership of the walks, together with associated activities. Walk leadership itself is addressed via reference to the Walk Leader Toolkit guidelines and information, published by The Ramblers.

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## **1. Introduction**

Wirral Ramblers (or “the Club”) has offered a weekly Sunday walks programme by coach, dating back to the 1970s. Such walks continue to be popular to this day, with some 4 or 5 walks usually on offer each Sunday, ranging from the more demanding to the leisurely.

The Walk Leaders are, self-evidently, an essential and integral part of the walking programme; indeed, without leaders, there would be no walks. This Handbook has been prepared such as to set out and provide appropriate guidance in relation to walk leadership, within the context of the Sunday coach rambles programme.

Individual Sections within the Handbook describe the planning and development of the walks, essential pre-walk activities, through to the leadership of the walks.

The Handbook aims to appeal both to new and aspiring leaders, whilst also offering a reference text for more experienced leaders. Further information on the organisation and delivery of the Sunday coach rambles programme, as a whole, is available from the complementary Sunday Coach Rambles Handbook<sup>1</sup>.

## **2. Walk Gratings System**

The Club uses a simple points based grading system, to categorise walks, ranging from the more demanding (A grades), through to the more leisurely (D grades). Each grade of walk is defined by a lower limit and upper limit points allocation. Further details on the walks grading system are provided in Appendix 1.

New and aspiring leaders may wish to consider planning, reconnoitring and leading their first one or two walks, in conjunction with a more experienced leader. As such, they are very welcome to approach any of the leaders, or any Committee member, in this regard.

## **3. Walk Planning and Reconnaissance**

Section 3 aims to provide Good Practice Guidance for planning and reconnaissance. However, it is recognised that leaders are free to develop their own methodologies, as appropriate to the circumstances in hand.

### **3.1 Planning**

Individual leaders are responsible for the planning of their own particular walks, consistent with their chosen walk grading. In planning the walks, leaders may wish to consider:-

- Previous walks around the destination in question, based upon the back catalogue of Route Descriptions available to members, on the web-site;
- Particular features in the area, eg peaks, viewpoints, buildings, monuments etc;

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<sup>1</sup> Wirral Ramblers, Sunday Coach Rambles Manual, accessible via:  
[www.wirralramblers.org.uk/images/pdf/Coach-Manual.pdf](http://www.wirralramblers.org.uk/images/pdf/Coach-Manual.pdf)

- History and heritage; and
- The time of the year and, in particular, the available daylight hours.

Each individual leader should aim to plan a varied and interesting walk, measuring the total linear distance and summing all the individual ascents, to calculate an initial estimate of the points rating. Should any adjustment be required, then the route can be modified, accordingly. The planning stage should also include an initial estimate of the timings for the walk, taking into account the anticipated terrain and the ascents/descents. Walks may be planned either as linear walks, taking advantage of a drop-off en-route, or as circular walks, starting and finishing at the designated coach destinations.

In the planning of linear walks, the list of preferred coach routes, available on the Club web-site, should be used to identify potential drop-off points en-route to the coach destination. Should any deviations from the preferred coach routes be desired, then these should be kept to a minimum, such as to avoid undue disruption to other walks. Any such deviation(s) must be agreed with the B Plus leader, at the planning stage, and, preferably, at least 4 weeks prior to the walk(s) in question. The B Plus leader should then notify the other leaders and the Rambles Secretary of any such deviation(s) agreed.

In planning the walks, leaders should, as far as practicable, aim to use designated Public Rights of Way and Permissive Paths, although alternative routes, across Access Land, may also be considered. Excessive road walking should be avoided. For walks in the winter months, with more limited daylight hours, consideration should be given towards planning walks nearer the lower limit of their grade's point range.

In addition to the planning, development and leadership of the B Plus walk, the B Plus leader is also responsible for various other activities, principally in relation to the co-ordination of the walks and acting as the principal interface with the coach driver. These aspects are covered, as appropriate, in the text and, for convenience, are also summarised, in Appendix 2.

### **3.2 The Reconnaissance**

Once a walk has been planned, the next stage is for the leader to undertake a reconnaissance of the route ("the recce"), ahead of walk date in question. It is recommended that such recces should be conducted some 2 to 4 weeks ahead of the walks themselves, both to provide time for any re-visiting of the route, should this be required, and to also avoid having to conduct such recces in bad weather.

Leaders may claim travel expenses for their recces, up to the cost of a seat on the coach. They may also claim for tunnel tolls and for parking, as appropriate. For linear walks, bus/rail fares may also be claimed<sup>2</sup>, from/to the start point for the walk. All leaders are also eligible for a complimentary seat on the coach, on the day of their walk.

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<sup>2</sup> or taxi fares, if local bus/rail services are unavailable

In planning and executing the recce, leaders should start with their initial estimates of timings and waypoints, in the form of a draft route card, and note the timings achieved in practice. Some adjustment of the achieved timings may be appropriate, after the recce, both to take account for any delays encountered in determining the route in the recce, whilst also noting that extra time may be required to lead an extended party on the day, over multiple obstructions or stiles.

Individual leaders may also find it useful to make their own particular notes on the recce, eg recording details of particular features, landmarks etc., that may help facilitate the walk on the day.

The B Plus leader should also pay due attention to the suitability of the proposed comfort stop en-route (as appropriate), the latter stages of the coach route to the destination and, specifically, should identify an appropriate and safe parking spot for the coach, where it can be available to walkers, for at least 1½ hours prior to the designated departure time. In some cases, it may be possible to come to a local arrangement with a Pub or other facility, where the coach can use their car park, in anticipation of the patronage of the group, after the walk.

#### **4. Route Descriptions**

Once a recce has been satisfactorily completed, the next stage is to summarise the key features of the walk, in the form of a Route Description. Such Route Descriptions are produced for the benefit of the membership, both for promoting the walks and in facilitating the choice of individual walks on the day.

Further information of the preparation and submission of the Route Descriptions is provided in Appendix 3. The completed Route Descriptions should be submitted to the Route Descriptions Officer, as soon as practicable after completing the recce and certainly no later than 09-00 hours, on the Monday preceding the walk in question. Leaders may also, at their own discretion, wish to copy their Route Descriptions to the other leaders.

#### **5. Ahead of the Walk/On the Day Activities**

##### **5.1 Leaders' pre-Walk Activities**

The leaders are advised to run through their proposed route, the Walk Leader's check list (see also Section 6) and to take note of the weather forecast for the day. In the event of severe adverse weather conditions being forecast, then options to shorten the route and/or reduce the ascent and potential exposure to such adverse conditions should be considered. If any leader still has concerns in relation to the advisability of proceeding with his/her walk, in the light of the forecast conditions, then, in the first instance, they should discuss these with the B Plus party leader.

##### **5.2 On the Day**

The B Plus party leader should make himself/herself known to the coach driver and confirm the preferred route to the destination and any planned comfort stop, en-route. (Note: The Coach driver is responsible for the navigation to intended

destination, with the B Plus party leader, only being required to assist with directions in the latter stages of the journey). The B Plus party leader should advise the driver of any intended drop-offs en-route and of the arrangements for coach parking, at the destination. The B Plus leader should also ensure that all other leaders are advised of the coach parking arrangements.

All leaders should take receipt of a First Aid kit, from the First Aid Kit Holder, and carry this throughout the walk, in their rucksack. The First Aid kits should be returned to the First Aid Kit Holder, at the end of the day.

All leaders should ensure that they have Coach Mobile Number available, prior to starting their walks (or entered into their mobiles' speed dial directories). This number is:- 07895-152449.

In the event of drop-offs en-route, then the appropriate leaders should re-iterate the requirement for their parties to bring their rucksacks on-board the coach and should move forward, on the coach, to advise the driver of the drop-off point(s).

## **6. Walk Leadership**

Walk leadership represents a natural progression from walking with a group and provides the opportunity to develop and plan walks of the leader's own choosing, whilst also transferring the leader's enthusiasm for walking, to the group. The leaders must ensure that the walks are conducted in a safe, enjoyable, sociable and responsible fashion and within the time constraints on the day.

All Wirral Ramblers walks are subject to a minimum of 3 persons on the walk, ie Leader plus 2.

Wirral Ramblers, as one of the constituent groups of The Ramblers, follows the guidance provided for leaders in The Ramblers Walk Leaders Toolkit, accessible via The Ramblers web-site ([www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk); Home > volunteer zone > support and development > volunteer-toolkits-alphabetically-sorted > walk leader toolkit).

Specifically, the attention of Wirral Group's leaders is drawn to the following documentation and information:

- Walk Leader Role Description;
- Walk Leader's Checklist;
- Leading Walks in Remote Areas; and
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Current and prospective leaders are requested to note the guidance provided in this documentation and to apply it, as appropriate, to their own particular walks.

# **Appendices**

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## **Appendix 1: Walks Grading System**

The Club uses a simple grading system to help leaders plan walks of suitable standard and to provide an indication to members of nature of the walks. There is overlap between walks to be used at the leader's discretion.

The grading is based on a points system, that takes into account the mileage, ascent, terrain and (any) scrambling involved in the walk. The greater the number of points, the more challenging and strenuous is the walk.

### **A1.1 Points Allocation**

Mileage:	1 point per mile; and
Ascent:	1 point per 500 feet of climbing.

Additional points should be added for terrain and any scrambling, in accordance with the guidelines, below:

Terrain:	0 point - easy walking, well defined paths, fair terrain; 1 point - mixed, fairly rough or boggy terrain; 2 points - sustained very rough terrain.
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Scrambling:	1 point for some moderate scrambling; 2 points for difficult, exposed scrambling.
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### **A1.2 Walk Gradings**

The individual points allocations are then summated to give the total number of points for the anticipated route, with the gradings of individual walks' categories falling within the following ranges.

A Walks:	18 to 23 points;
B Plus Walks:	14 to 18 points;
B Minus Walks:	11 to 14 points;
C Walks:	7 to 11 points; and
D Walks:	5 to 7 points.

It is recommended that B Minus walks do not climb above a height of 2,000' during the winter months.

## Appendix 2: The Especial Role of the B Plus Leader

In addition to planning and leading the B Plus walk, the B Plus party leader is also responsible for the following activities:-

- Deciding on the suitability of the en-route comfort stop (as appropriate);
- Deciding on/agreeing to any reasonable requests for variations in the latter stages of the coach route, such as to facilitate drop-offs en-route;
- Identifying suitable and appropriate parking for the coach, such for the various walks to return to, at the end of the day<sup>3</sup>;
- Communicating such coach parking information to the coach driver and other walks leaders, prior to disembarking from the coach;
- Briefing the coach driver on any intended drop-offs en-route and the party leader(s) responsible for these;
- Guiding the coach driver in the latter stages of the journey, to the intended destination<sup>4</sup>;and
- Engaging in consultation ahead of the walk, with the Chair and the Treasurer, in the event of anticipated severe adverse weather conditions.

In the absence of a B Plus leader, the duties above shall be assumed by the B Minus party leader.
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<sup>3</sup> Guided by the initial suggestions for coach parking, as provided in the preferred coach routes information.

<sup>4</sup> Should the B Plus party leader disembark prior to the intended destination, then he/she shall brief and designate one of the other leaders, to perform this duty.

### Appendix 3: Route Descriptions Guidelines

- Route Descriptions should clearly describe the route, via reference to a series of specific features and waypoints, and should also draw attention to any other specific aspects of the walk (eg exposed sections, scrambling, rough terrain, viewpoints etc). The reason(s) for any extra points allocations should be stated;
- The Route Descriptions should also clearly state the starting point of the walk, either in terms of the Coach Destination (for circular walks), or a two letter/six figure Ordnance Survey Grid Reference and complementary details (for linear walks);
- For linear walks, state clearly the requirement for “Rucksacks on coach”, after any stop;
- Individual Route Descriptions should be limited to circa 3 to 4 lines of text (circa 75 words maximum), together with the appropriate figures for distance (miles and kilometres), ascent (feet and metres) and points;
- Route Descriptions should be written up and submitted as soon as practicable after completing the recce and, in any case, no later than 09:00 hours on the Monday preceding the Sunday’s walk in question;
- Early submissions are positively welcomed!
- Route Descriptions should be e:mailed to:- [wirralroutes@gmail.com](mailto:wirralroutes@gmail.com)