



The Polytechnic Rambling Club

In association with THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER
Founded 1885

Affiliated to the Ramblers' Association (Inner London Area)
Affiliated to HF Holidays

Polytechnic Rambling Club – guidance for walk leaders

Thank you for agreeing to lead a walk for the Polytechnic Rambling Club. We hope this guide will give you some useful tips on how to prepare for your walk and help to ensure everything goes safely and smoothly on the day.

The names and contact details of the Club Secretary and Programme Co-ordinators referred to in this guide can be found at the top of the current walks programme.

We take the safety of walkers seriously. In order to keep everyone safe we ask that our walk leaders:

- do a walkover as close as possible to the date of the walk (unless in exceptional circumstances)
- complete a risk assessment before you lead the walk.
- consider any weather hazards such as heat or high winds.
- give a safety briefing at the start of the walk.
- take a list of names before the walk starts and do regular headcounts.

In return we ask participants to listen to the safety briefing, comply with instructions from the leader and be aware of their surroundings and their fellow walkers.

Choosing your walk:

All our walks are accessed by public transport and most walks start between 10am and 10.30am. Trains leaving London before 9am should be avoided.

Consider:

- **Time of year.** Most walks range in length from 5 to 12 miles, sometimes longer in the summer. In winter 9-10 miles is the maximum length due to limited daylight.
- **Location.** including public transport options and journey time to the starting point of the walk
- **Terrain.** Including ascents and descents, stiles.
- **The average pace of the group.** For most walks this is around 3km (1.9 miles) / hr.
- **Whether linear or circular.**

Walk details

Once you have planned your walk please send details to the Programme Co-ordinators, include:

- Brief description including features of interest and type of walk (hilly, strenuous, stiles, leisurely pace).
- Length
- Starting and finishing points and London station meeting point. If you are not specifying a particular train you may want to say meet at xxxx for a prompt start at 10.30am. This allows time for walkers to use toilets etc with the expectation that the walk will start on time.
- Train times. All train times will be checked before the programme is published. Timetable information can be found at www.nationalrail.co.uk.
- Lunch arrangements
- Ordnance Survey Landranger and/or Explorer map sheet no. (e.g, LR/EX 165).
- Your mobile phone number. This will not be published online unless you tell us otherwise and you can stipulate it is only for use on the day of the walk.

Risk assessment

You are required to complete a risk assessment before every walk you lead. The risk assessment should be completed during or immediately after your walkover. It allows you to identify and note any hazards on the route that you need to inform walkers of either before the day of the walk or in your safety briefing at the start of the walk.

The walkover:

It is essential that you familiarise yourself with the route; this will normally mean undertaking a walkover (recce).

- Check the length and note critical navigation points, hazards and possible problems.
- Note hazards that walkers should be advised of in advance as they may affect their decision to join a walk, for example stiles, steep ascents or descents, difficult terrain
- Note hazards that you need to warn walkers about in the safety briefing on the day and as you encounter them, including cattle, golf courses, road walking and difficult road crossings
- Check: timings, rest and toilet points, alternative routes / options to shorten walk including buses if available, mobile phone coverage.
- Locate a suitable picnic spot, ideally but not necessarily about halfway through the walk.
- If you plan to visit a pub or café or offer the option of a pub lunch check whether you need to book and the menu on offer. If time is limited you may prefer to ask walkers to bring a picnic and get a drink at the pub/café.
- Report any serious path or access problems to the local highway authority. Note that path problems now have to be reported to relevant local authority and not to Ramblers.
- Complete the risk assessment form and return to the Club Secretary. A hard copy on the day of the walk is acceptable.

Weather hazards

- Heat is becoming a significant issue. The committee has decided that no walk should go ahead if there is a red heat health alert in place in the area the walk is taking place. Also if the forecast temperature or the “feels like” temperature is at or above 32C on the Met Office website, cancellation is advisable due to the health impacts of strenuous exercise at that temperature. The “feels like” temperature takes account of humidity and wind and may be a few degrees above or below the actual temperature. If there is an amber heat health warning in place the walk may be able to go ahead, depending on the nature of the walk and the leader’s view. It is a good idea to send a message to potential walkers to highlight the amount of shade etc. so they can decide whether they can cope with the conditions.
- If your walk includes exposed areas, especially on the coast, you should check the Met Office forecast for wind warnings and consider alternative routes if needed. The same applies to walks through woods. Note that some land-owners close woods in high winds.

A few days before your walk

- Recheck transport details using www.nationalrail.co.uk as it will show revised times if there are any track works on the day. For London Underground/Overground journeys check status update on tfl.gov.uk. Seek advice from the Club Secretary if engineering works make the journey unfeasibly long.
- Check weather forecasts and consider if any adjustments are needed. If there is a heat health alert in place or a severe weather warning such as for strong winds or ice and snow, please seek advice from the Club Secretary and/or the Programme Co-ordinators. We rarely cancel walks but occasionally it is unavoidable if it would be unsafe to go ahead. Any decision to cancel or make a major change to a walk should be made 48 hours in advance if possible to allow time to communicate to members.
- Send any changes to published details to the Club Secretary who will email members and update the website. This should include any hazards or obstacles that you need to advise members about ahead of the walk if these are not mentioned in the programme.
- Confirm arrangements with the pub if applicable.
- If you find you are unable to lead your walk please let the Club Secretary know at the earliest opportunity. It may be possible to find another leader.

What to bring

- A map (paper or digital) is strongly recommended even if you are following written instructions
- A basic first aid kit is recommended
- If you are relying on a mapping app on your phone consider bringing a powerbank

On the day

- If there are transport problems on the day (for example, cancellation of the advertised train) you can put a message on the WhatsApp social group if you use it but bear in mind that not all members use it.
- Keep your mobile on and to hand as walkers may contact you,
- Do a head-count and make a list of walkers names (including names and contact details of any guests for insurance purposes) before you start walking. This is important in case someone gets lost. You can ask someone to help with this.
- You **must** give a safety briefing before you start, mentioning any hazards identified on the walkover e.g. busy roads, livestock, slip hazards). You can use your risk assessment to help with this. It is also helpful to give an overview of the walk (length and time, points of interest, refreshment stops).
- If the group is greater than 8 or involves significant walking on roads without pavements you should appoint a backmarker. Consider giving your backmarker a copy of the walk (paper or digital).
- You are not expected to wait for latecomers before starting a walk. If the walk is starting from a station with a frequent train service and someone has let you know they are on their way, you may feel it's reasonable to wait up to ten minutes, although this will depend on the walk length and weather conditions. Similarly you are not expected to wait for latecomers by car.
- For walks starting from stations with a frequent train service we give a meeting time and a walk start time 15 minutes later. It is for participants to make sure they are ready to start at the walk start time and you are not expected to wait beyond that time.
- In the unlikely event that you are concerned about a walker's ability to complete a walk safely, either due to inadequate clothing/equipment or doubts about their fitness, you can refuse to accept them on the walk. You may want to seek advice from an experienced leader if you are considering this.

During the walk

- Set a pace that you and the group are comfortable with and that allows you to complete the walk in the time available (consider daylight in the winter months).
- Stay in sight of or communication with the backmarker. Keep your mobile on in case the backmarker or another walker needs to contact you.
- If the group gets spread out you should stop regularly to wait for slower walkers to catch up. Try to allow time for those catching up to rest before moving off again. It is especially important to keep the group together if you are walking across a golf course, through a field of animals, or along a busy road.
- If walkers go ahead of you, especially if they are out of sight or ear shot, they are no longer considered part of the group and you are not responsible for them. The same applies if someone decides to take a different route for whatever reason.
- When changing direction make sure that the group has seen where you are going.
- When walking on roads where no pavement is available walk in single file facing the on-coming traffic (except on a right hand bend).
- Help the group across stiles, roads, gates, railway lines and in poor weather as required.
- Allow for time for regrouping, head counts and water breaks (especially in hot weather). Crossing stiles can be very time consuming for a large group.
- If weather or other conditions change and it becomes unsafe to continue the walk on the planned route, be prepared to make adjustments or cut the walk short.

At the end of the walk.

- Check everyone has returned to the end point. Make sure that everyone knows how to get to the station/bus stop if the walk doesn't finish there.
- In the unlikely event that an incident has occurred it should be reported to the Secretary or other Club official who will complete the incident log. By 'incident' we mean, (for example) accidents to walkers (even if minor), damage to property or land or trespass. The Club Officials and Committee will decide whether it is necessary to report the incident to our insurers. In the event of a serious accident or other incident please notify the Club Secretary (07719 452023) or a Committee member by phone
- Pass the list of names to the Committee member who keeps the records for the Rambler of the Year award.



- Pass your risk assessment form to the Club Secretary (email or hard copy) if you haven't already done so
- Please consider writing a short account of the walk for our website and send it to the Club Secretary.

If in doubt

- If you encounter any difficulties on the day do ask for help if you need it. There are usually experienced leaders on the walk who are happy to help with route finding or who can advise on what to do in the unlikely event of an accident or other incident.
- If you have any concerns following the walk please do contact the Club Secretary or another committee member. We are happy to hear leaders' feedback.

Polytechnic Rambling Club
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