

# **Brunel 20s and 30s Walking Group**

## **Weekends Away – Guidelines for Organisers**

### **Introduction**

What follows are guidelines – and not a prescription – drawn from past Group weekends away. They are designed to help organisers of future weekends.

### **Planning**

- Some terrain (e.g. Snowdon) is best suited to 2 and 3 booters and some (e.g. South Downs) to 1 and 2 booters. It's perfectly fine that your weekend doesn't embrace everyone, though you do need to be clear in telling people!
- The only exception is the Christmas weekend – this is aimed at the whole group so should be somewhere that offers good walking for all levels within the group
- When planning your weekend have a look at the maps and maybe consult some people who generally do different walking to you, to check that the terrain offers the range of walks you anticipate.
- The normal source of hostels is the YHA (get the Brunel Group membership number if you are doing so), but there are various websites through which you can find other hostels and bunkhouses etc
- During the busier parts of the year you will need to book the hostel well in advance.
- Establish whether we can have exclusive use of the hostel or part use – in the latter case see if there is scope to reserve a number of rooms and then vary it up or down depending on interest.
- Find out what sort of kitchens the hostel has – and if we have exclusive use then secure access to the warden's kitchen.
- Find out how many people can reasonably sit down together for a group meal, to establish the practicality. This should also enable you to judge if there is space for people who may be staying elsewhere but still want to come to the group meal in the hostel (be clear to anyone who enquires if this is not possible).
- Please don't make any commitments until you have checked with the Programme Secretary that your weekend fits into the programme – e.g. that there are not lots of others on offer at the same time.
- You might want to draft in some help and split the organisational responsibilities – someone to book the hostel, liaise with them and manage bookings and finance, someone to sort the group meal and someone else to organise the walks and their leaders. Certainly on larger weekends away with a bigger attendance and a variety of walks, such as the Christmas event, this helps things remain practical for the organiser.

### **Budgets and Finance**

- The basic principle is that the weekend must be self-funding – the group as a whole should not have to subsidise those who go.
- You should aim to break even on costs without filling all the beds you have reserved – have a chat with a few people (including the Treasurer!) about what seems to be a realistic number of people for the hostel you are booking at the time of year you are going. (It's difficult to be prescriptive, as it depends on timing and number of beds booked in the first place.) Then be a bit more conservative on the pricing – a couple of quid more per person is not an issue normally!

- You should clearly advertise the price for the weekend. It is reasonable to ask for a bit more later to cover the cost of a group meal, but hopefully you will have got past break even on hostel costs and the meal can be funded from this. Group meals generally come in at (well under) £5 per head – but if it is not being funded from the overall cost of the weekend then don't ask people for the additional amount until you know how much it is!
- Given limited fridge space, it can be practical for the organiser to budget for and provide milk – else everyone brings some and there's no space for food!
- Nobody's booking is firm until they have paid! It is generally more straightforward to collect the total cost in one go than to collect deposits.
- If someone who has paid drops out, then they should be refunded if their place is filled by someone else. If their place is not taken then the organiser should use their judgement, taking into account the circumstances and the impact it would have on the finances of the weekend – a partial refund being a possibility. (Providing full a refund for people who drop out and are not replaced is not encouraged, it could create a sense that people can change their minds without any cost, a bad precedent for future weekends.)
- The group is happy to help organisers with funding of deposits for hostels – contact the Treasurer. Obviously we'll be seeking confidence that your plans are consistent with these guidelines.
- Make sure that the deadline for collecting people's payments is before you have to pay the cost of the hostel!
- If you generate a surplus then it's reasonable that it is used during that weekend by those who generated it. However, don't fritter it away needlessly as it can also be handed over to the Group to use as a deposit for future weekends away etc. Do let the Treasurer know how the finances for the weekend panned out (that doesn't mean detailed accounts!).

### **Publicising the Weekend**

- Ideally you should have the date set before the programme comes out, so it fits sensibly with other walks and weekends. People tend to read the programme when it's first published so being on that gets it lodged in their minds.
- The weekend can be publicised in the newsletter, on the website or by special email – just ask the appropriate committee member to do so. This is especially useful if you want to fill the last few places.
- Be clear when publicising about the type of walking and who it is suitable for.
- Set clear deadlines for reserving a place and for payment.
- Most weekends do get fully booked – it is therefore helpful to state if it is a particularly small hostel and the limited number of places available.
- If you get fully booked, then have a reserve list – someone is likely to drop out and someone else may come (and pay) instead, for which both will be grateful.

### **Communications**

- Before the weekend, drop an email to those who are attending setting out the key arrangements. E.g. time they can arrive at the hostel, location of places to eat on that day, whether there will be a group meal on one of the evenings, if parking or fridge space is limited etc.

## **Transport**

- You can choose to let people co-ordinate their own transport or to help them! If you can get an email around a few weeks before with a list of those who are coming then people will generally sort themselves out. You may need to put round a note trying to marry those without lifts with those with spaces. This is very helpful but you should not feel that you are responsible for all of this and your communications should be clear that people are responsible for their own arrangements.

## **Dorms**

- Sometimes we stay in a hostel where we all share a single dorm, sometimes we have lots of rooms.
- If you are only booking part of a hostel, then make sure the rooms you are booking are exclusively for our use. Booking the smallest ones available is also a good idea as people generally prefer smaller rooms and also if you do not end up needing them all it is easier to try and 'sell back' a smaller room to the hostel
- It's up to you how you allocate the rooms! The tradition on the Snowdon weekends has been for everyone to choose which room they go in and mix up. Alternatively, some on other weekends the organisers clearly allocate male and female rooms. A lot of people are happy to mix up, and couples generally prefer to be with their partner (it often makes their life easier), but some people prefer single sex rooms. Judge your audience and make a decision, then be clear in your email before the weekend, or when people arrive, how the rooming should work.

## **Group Meal**

- A group meal is often one of the highlights of a weekend away. However, before you decide to go ahead with one, do check out that you can have access to sufficient kitchen facilities, cutlery and crockery and chairs and tables. Fridge space is often at a premium and sometimes we have found that the kitchen may have lots of rings but only has one oven – make sure you and your cooks know what is available.
- In your communications you can ask for volunteers to cook. It's good to spread the load, though make sure you have enough room in the kitchen for the number of cooks – it's not difficult to ask fewer cooks to make more and however many you have you should be clear with each how many they are catering for.
- Make sure that there is sufficient choice to cater for vegetarians.
- The best option is generally to get access to the warden's kitchen and use that to prepare the group meal – that leaves the other kitchen free for people who are preparing their sandwiches for the next day, making cups of tea etc, You will need to consult with the hostel beforehand to arrange this.
- Put someone in charge of arranging the seating etc – generally it's a tight fit with everyone so get someone to have a think about it and sort it out.

## **Leading on the Weekend (at last, the walking!)**

- As weekend organiser you don't have to lead the walks! You can if you want, but what is more important is that in advance you have sorted out who will be leading what sort of walk.
- Often people like to mix their walking - a short walk one day, a longer one the next. So it is sensible that on any given day all the walks go in generally the same direction so that someone swapping distances the next day does not end up covering the same ground.

- During the weekend make sure everyone knows what walks are on offer and what time they start – you then stand half a chance of leaving the hostel on time in the mornings! If there are a lot of people coming, then it's helpful to publish the walk programme beforehand and on notice boards in the hostel.

**Brunel Group**  
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