

How to Plan a Walk: Practical Help (Handout)

By Ruth Ginever & Robin Kellett

Let's be honest – when you first lead a walk, it's intimidating. Not only do you have to control a group but you also worry about the quality of the experience – will it be as good as other walks you've been on?

But all you have to remember is this:

IF YOU PUT YOUR HEART INTO IT, PEOPLE WILL LOVE IT

Of course that might be hard to believe at this stage – so here are some tips on this process – and remember, it's easier than it seems.

Finding an idea for a route

So you need to find a route and don't know where to start. Here are some ideas:

- **Repetition is not a crime**
If you've been on a walk you liked, why not put it on the programme yourself? We don't apply copyright to walks we've done in Brunel – imitation is the best form of flattery
- **Ask someone to help you**
Brunel is packed with walking experience – and people who'd be happy to pre-walk a new or not so new route with you – just ask around or if you're stuck, email the group and we'll find a volunteer
- **Guidebooks are BRILLIANT**
There are published guidebooks with ready-made walks that you can do "as is" or tailor for your requirements – and we also own some books ourselves (ask the committee for details)
- **Online walks**
There's a wealth of free walks online – if you search for Cotswolds walks you get this site (http://www.walkingbritain.co.uk/walks/walks/walk_list/Cotswolds_AONB/) with around 20 free walks you can use to inspire you. Philip Twelves recommends <http://www.walkwest.co.uk/walkwesthomepage.html> as a great source of inspiration for walks moreover (books available for purchase as PDF)
- **Read a map**
The entire OS map range is available free online on <http://maps.bing.com/>. You can look at the whole of the UK in Landranger (1:50,000 scale) and Explorer (more detailed 1:25,000 scale) formats. See right – could the **Usk Valley Walk** be a good route for a group? Great though the internet is, remember that you **MUST** always have a paper map with you for the real thing! (maps in guidebooks aren't always great either).

Pre-walking Checklist

Always pre-walk the routes before leading them – guidebooks have mistakes and aren't always clear. Also check the following (bring a pen & paper to make notes):

- Time taken from meeting point to start (determines your start time for the Programme)
- Sufficient car parking at start/finish of walk?
- Local pub/tea shop for drink/cake lunch/ during or after the walk
- Total time taken for walk (subtract any major map-reading time)
- Place for late morning stop, place for lunch, place for afternoon stop (if needed)
- Points of interest (sometimes it's nice to know not just the route but interesting facts about the area)
- Wildlife & Plantlife of note



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- Streams/barbed wire/difficult stiles (you may wish to vary a route if obstacles are too great)

You also need to work out the total distance. There are a number of ways of measuring distance. One thing you should note is that each grid square on the Orange Explorer OS maps = 1km across. You can also measure distance using the scale on the map. As a rule of thumb, a very fit group will cover 4km per hr including stops. Generally we do not travel that fast and 3km/hr is a more realistic distance covered (and again, remember to allow extra time for stops and any steep climbs/descents).

All of these points help you prepare for the moment your group meets you and you explain to them what the walk's all about. Once you've captured all these information points, and you're happy with the walk go ahead and submit your walk at the link below & we'll be in touch to check we're OK with the details & let you know it has been published on the website: <http://www.brunelwalking.org.uk/walkleading.html>

Your Gear/Your Group's Gear

You're responsible for the safety of your group. Come prepared for the conditions and you need to ask your group if they also have the right kit, come rain or shine. Incidentally, it is good practice to check the weather before you go – if you are going to the Black Mts/Brecon Beacons visit here:

http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/outdoor/mountainsafety/brecon/brecon_latest_pressure.html

For Exmoor and Dartmoor there are less detailed forecasts here:

http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/uk/sw/sw_forecast_weather.html

Brunel has published a PDF explaining how to use the Mountain Area Forecasts – this is also available from the Walk Leading page on the website.

Gear-wise we have put together the table below with suggestions of what you might check with members of your group who you do not know (it's probably OK to assume experienced members of Brunel know the drill here).

Item	Leader	Walk participant
Waterproof jacket	Yes	Yes
Waterproof trousers	Ideally	Ideally
Walking boots	Yes	Yes
Walking trousers/shorts (NOT jeans)	Yes	Yes
Warm hat (sun hat if hot)	Yes	Yes
Personal Water – on a hot day women 2L; men 3L	Yes	Yes
Lunch & snacks	Yes	Yes
Head torch	Yes	Nice to have
Warm layers of clothing	Yes	Yes
Dry clothing/shoes for the car	Yes	Yes (especially if wet!)
Suncream (summer)	Yes	Nice to have
First aid kit	Yes	Nice to have
Compass & map	Yes	Nice to have



As the Scouts Say – Be Prepared

From the meeting point to the walk start

Try and keep cars to a minimum – it's better for the environment and saves money – so at least 3 and ideally 4 to each car if we can; partly to save the planet, partly so that our drivers can recoup the costs of petrol etc from their passengers and partly because some walks may have small parking areas at their start (so we don't turn up in a massive convoy and then find there is no space to park).

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Please put together a map for your group detailing how to get from the meeting point (typically one of St Mary Redcliffe, the Water Tower on the Downs or a car park in Bradley Stoke) to the walk. An example of such a map is shown opposite – you can use online resources or just draw a map and photocopy it.

It's good practice to try and ensure new members are mixed with experienced members who know their way around the area when sorting out cars for the drive to a walk start – remember some people will be completely new to Bristol so you'll want to ensure that they meet experienced Brunellers as quickly as possible

Interacting with your Group on the Walk

Keep talking to your group; whether you lead from the front or not. It's advisable at the start of the walk to do the following:

- Count the group (including yourself). Do it again just to make sure. Each time you stop, check the group numbers
- Remind people about the route – show them on a map ideally and describe “the first bit” for them
- Ask everyone to tell you if they are stopping to nip to the loo – or take a photo

Also, ask someone you trust to backmark; this person will be the sheepdog keeping your group together. And it's good practice to ask your group if they're tired or indeed if they feel like pressing on past the original rest point you planned. Be flexible!

Further Reading & Navigation

This short hand-out has NOT covered navigation – which Brunel teaches separately on regular Walk Leader Training Days – if you are interested in learning more about this please ask a committee member. Paul Overall is also happy to assist with navigation questions (paul.everall@gmail.com). More information is here <http://www.brunelwalking.org.uk/walkleading.html>.

We can also recommend a couple of books for further reading, both of which are available on the Internet to buy and both of which are packed with helpful & practical tips on walking & walk leading in the hills (including navigation):

- *Hillwalking – The Official Handbook of the Mountain Leader and Walking Group Leader Schemes* by Steve Long
- *Navigation for Walkers* by Julian Tippet

