



RAMBLERS

Maidstone

Maidstone Walk Leaders Handbook

Tony Bushe & Colin Philpott

Maidstone Ramblers Group

Contents

1. Aims of this Handbook
2. Preparation for leading a walk
3. What you need to know – planning phase
4. Execution – on the walk
5. What after?



Aims of this Handbook

What it will advise you:

- Some basic Do's and Don'ts
- Choose and Prepare a walk
- Prepare before your walk - assess risks and recce
- What to do at the start of the walk
- What to do on the walk
- What to do at the end of the walk



Things we will cover

Getting started
Insurance and safety
(risk assessment),
Admin stuff

Start and Finish,
Distance, Difficulty,
Lunch stop,
Description of walk

Advertising your walk?
Grades of walk?
Who does what?

Rights of Way?
Where can I walk?
Where can I find a
walking route?

Dogs and other
animals, hazards,
what 'if' happens?

After the walk?
What next?



Getting Started

- Our group have developed training material for map reading and navigation – ask Colin or Tony
- All relevant guidance and forms a leader requires are available on our website.
<https://www.maidstoneramblers.org.uk/newpage>
- National Ramblers provide leader training and you should be registered as a leader with them – ask Colin or Tony
- Support and training can be provided to cover the content of this handbook and new leaders can have a “buddy” experienced leader
- Refer to the Walk Leader Checklist from time to time so you continue to follow best practice



Insurance Essentials

- Civil liability not personal accident insurance
- Covers Leader and all Ramblers members (and non-members for up to three taster walks)

Walks must:

- Have a nominated leader who is a Ramblers member and registered volunteer walk leader - and ideally has recce'd (walked out) the route
- Be submitted to the walks coordinator
- Publicised as a Ramblers activity in advance i.e. In the Maidstone programme and on the web-site
- Have a Walk Register and follow the approach outlined in the Group's Risk Assessment



Where do I find a route?

Various Websites: Outdoor Active, Kent
Ramblers

Books: AA, Pathfinder Guide

Magazines: Country Walking, Ramblers
Walk magazine

Local knowledge:

Ask a walk leader or committee member



Where can I walk?

- Public Footpaths
- Public Bridleways
- Restricted Byways
- Byways Open to All Traffic
- Permissive Paths
- Towpaths along River & Canals
- Country Parks





Planning the walk

- The availability of paths or open countryside
- Stay off roads as much as possible
- Start and finish points - car park?
- Transport - getting there?
- Lunchtime stop - shelter
- Length of walk and timings
- Terrain and weather
- Escape routes
- Check what you can via the internet before the walk out
- What risks might there be? Refer to Maidstone Risk Assessment for the grade of walk planned
- Are you going to limit numbers/request booking? - e.g. the terrain of the walk, for parking issues or lunch arrangements

Walking out a route – doing a recce

- Ask for help – go with someone on your recce
- Mark out your route (distance, time, escape plan) - OS map?
- Alternatively, use an app on your phone (& PC): Outdoor Active, Ordnance Survey – still take a map and compass with you
- Think about breaks, lunch stop, stiles, points of interest, any livestock, crops, sunset?
- Ensure you have registered your phone with the 999 service – so they will accept a text message in emergency





Risk Assessments

- Consider your planned walk against risks listed in the assessment for your grade of walk
- Remember crossing or using roads, livestock and access to emergency services pose the highest risk to the walker
- Managing risk appropriately helps demonstrate your walk is well thought through as supports a standard approach to safety
- Follow the tips provided in the “Maidstone” Risk Assessment for the grade, there is no form to complete
- The RA’s can be found on our website with other leader’s information



First Aid Guidance

It's always a good idea to have a 'first aider' on walks, and we'd definitely recommend having one on any strenuous and technical graded walks. This doesn't have to be the walk leader – it could be another member of the group. But, if you are leading walks, brushing up on your first aid skills is a great way to help you feel prepared and confident.

In the first instance there is guidance on the Ramblers' website [First aid on group walks - Ramblers](#)

There are also links to further training by St Johns and the Red Cross

Maidstone Group also look to provide First Aid skills – contact Colin



Managing Group Size

- With a large group there is a potential for the group to become spread out and possibly split
- In the case of a medical emergency there can be a lot to do at once
- Having an appropriate number of responsible people makes problems less likely
- The leaders can request a backmarker or even middle-markers if numbers are really high
- Sensible ratios (leader/assistant : walkers) by grade are:
 - Easy and Easy Access 1 : 10 - 16
 - Leisurely and Moderate 1 : 10 - 16
 - Strenuous 1 : 6 - 12

Speed v Time

The terrain and weather conditions will affect walking speed – the average speed is about 2 - 2.5 miles hour. But hillier, muddy and windy conditions will slow your speed down.





Walk Grades

How easy is this walk?

Easy Access - walks for everyone, including people with conventional wheelchairs and pushchairs, using easy access paths. Comfortable shoes or trainers can be worn.

•**Easy** - walks for anyone who does not have a mobility difficulty, a specific health problem or is seriously unfit. Suitable for pushchairs if they can be lifted over occasional obstructions. Comfortable shoes or trainers can be worn.

•**Leisurely** - walks for reasonably fit people with at least a little country walking experience. May include unsurfaced rural paths. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are recommended.

•**Moderate** - walks for people with country walking experience and a good level of fitness. May include some steep paths and open country, and may be at a brisk pace. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are essential.

•**Strenuous** - walks for experienced country walkers with an above average fitness level. May include hills and rough country, and may be at a brisk pace. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are essential. People in doubt about their fitness should contact the organiser or leader in advance.

•**Technical** - walks for experienced and very fit walkers with additional technical skills. May require scrambling and use of ice axes or crampons. You must contact the organiser or leader in advance for further details.

Alternative/escape routes

Think about an alternative escape route.

Prepare less exposed alternatives for use if the weather is bad before you set out, and escape routes to shorten the walk if anyone cannot complete the walk or conditions deteriorate on the way.





Ready to submit your walk?

- Use the interactive form on the Maidstone Ramblers website.
- <https://www.maidstoneramblers.org.uk/walk-offer-form>
- Email Colin or Tony for help, if required
- Colin and Tony will coordinate the programme and enter the walks on the local and national association's website.

Information you need to hand

Walk Details:

- Name of leader
- Proposed dates
- Start point
- Postcode and grid ref
- Distance
- Start & finish time
- Key points visited, additional notes
- Lunch stop details
- Walk grade, circular or linear
- Contact details for publication
- Booking required?





Maidstone Ramblers' walks programme

- Issued every 4 months at the start of the preceding month via email only from November 2025
- Then reviewed monthly (by 23rd of the preceding month) when bookings (if requested by leader) can commence - to take account of any changes – distributed by email and published on the Maidstone and national websites)
- Mix of: Circular/Linear; walk distance; travel from Maidstone; days of the week; to suit all members
- Distances vary – usually between 4 and 12 miles
- Different Grades – normally Easy, Leisurely or Moderate



On the Day

- Come equipped with charged mobile phone, map, food, drink, whistle and First Aid kit
- Check the weather conditions
- Introduce yourself and give a brief description about the walk
- Walk Attendance Sheet – leader to complete (includes contact details for non-members)
- Check all members are suitably equipped to cope with terrain and weather conditions. You can turn people away if not equipped
- Appoint a backmarker or other assistants (if group-size requires it)
- Give instructions about any potential hazards, such as road walking (leader/backmarker use high-vis), crossing fields with crops or livestock
- Ask if any one has a medical condition they think you should know about to let you know discreetly – mention the carrying of “In case of Emergency “ Cards



Leadership and group management

Along the way:

- Regularly check numbers
- Avoid large gaps in the group
- Avoid being out of sight
- Adjust the walking speed as necessary
- Make sure gates are closed
- Allow regular rests (particularly after hills)
- Check in with the backmarker/assistants
- Mention/Allow time for stiles and other hazards
- Be aware of your style of leadership and the need to adapt
- Tell people about points of interest



Dogs, Livestock and other Hazards

Cattle on your path:



- So what do you do when cattle are obstructing the path? Find another way, by going around the cattle. If cattle are blocking a path through a field, you're well within your rights to find a safe way, away from the path to avoid them. You should then re-join the footpath as soon as possible – and when you consider it safe to do so.
- If you know cattle will be present, best to opt for no dogs

Dogs on walks:

- We offer the leader a choice “Assistance dogs only” or “Well behaved dogs only”
- If present, ask dog owners to keep their dog on a lead and to stay at the back at all times.



Visit: [Safety - Ramblers](#)



In the event of an incident...

- Keep calm and stay together wherever possible
- If someone is injured, keep them warm and call for help
- Always bring a charged mobile phone (install what three words app)
- 999 - Emergency services – Register your mobile for 999 Texts - Give a precise location i.e. what 3 words, grid reference
- Do not leave anyone on their own
- If you need to send messengers, think about who – if the group is inexperienced, the leader may be the best person to go
- Carry First Aid equipment
- Carry a whistle
- Complete an Incident Report Form as soon as possible after an incident occurs





If you suspect a safeguarding issue...

Should you identify the possibility of a safeguarding issue while leading for the Group please be aware:

The Ramblers is committed to ensuring that children and adults are protected from both deliberate or accidental harm or abuse. We call this Safeguarding. We have a specific set of policies and procedures that everyone is expected to follow. By doing this we will ensure that the Ramblers is a safe organisation.

There are three types of safeguarding concern:

- Where abuse is taking place or has taken place
- Where a volunteer or member of staff's behaviour falls below the expected standard so that they can gain access to someone for the purpose of committing a form of abuse (poor practice)
- Where an individual is unable to look after themselves or their best interests

To report a safeguarding concern, allegation of abuse or malpractice go to <https://www.maidstoneramblers.org.uk/contacts> to find a guide and contact details.



After the walk

- Ask if everyone has enjoyed the walk
- Check everyone is accounted for
- Give any new walker appropriate info
- Within a couple of days submit the Attendance sheet
- Keep your route – you may want to use it again in future (or improve/change it slightly)
- If you wish to put photos on social media, make sure you have permissions



If you need to know anything else,
contact:

tony.bushe@btinternet.com

Tel: 07990 619446

colinjphilpott88@gmail.com

07986 131021