

---

## SECTION B: LEADERSHIP

### Module 3 : On the day of your walk

#### Before leaving home

- 1 Take note of the **weather forecast** on the morning of your walk, and indeed a day or two beforehand, as well as the **travel news**. If developments may affect your walk, or how people may travel to it, consider any action you can take to alleviate the problems (see paragraphs 4.37 and 4.42).

---

#### At the meeting point

- 2 If you have not already got one, appoint a **backmarker** (see paragraph 2.55, also paragraph 17 below) from the party members. This should preferably be an experienced walker who can map-read. If he or she did not reconnoitre the route with you, give a short briefing on the route.
- 3 It is important to **talk to the party** before setting off. Do not just turn on your heel and go, as this gives a bad impression. You may prefer to stand on a vantage point, if available, to make yourself more easily seen and heard. There are several things to say, as mentioned below. Keep your talk informal – try not to make it sound like a speech.
- 4 Some leaders find it helpful to prepare an **information sheet** which serves as an aide-memoire to things to say at the meeting point, and can also be distributed to the party members if so desired. However, this should not be considered as a substitute for talking.
- 5 Here are the basic things to say before setting off:
  - i First of all, **welcome** the party members.
  - ii **Introduce yourself** as the leader, and then introduce the backmarker.
  - iii Briefly **describe the route** by mentioning its distance, refreshment breaks, toilet facilities and any outstanding items of interest. Use the map to point out the route.

- iv State the expected **finishing time**, pointing out that this might be subject to delay.
  - v Ask party members **not to walk in front of the leader** unless otherwise instructed (see also paragraph 16 below).
  - vi Ask everyone to make sure that the **person behind is in sight** when turning on to a new path.
  - vii Say that people should **feel free to stop** the party briefly for any minor emergency, particularly to remove a stone from a boot or to adjust footwear.
  - viii Say that, if anyone thinks that they may have **difficulty in completing the walk**, they should have a quiet word with you before setting off. This allows anyone with a medical problem to bring it to the leader's attention in private.
  - ix If there are any **toilet facilities** at or near the start, point them out and say how long it will be to the next ones.
  - x Ask if anyone has **any questions**.
- 6 If anyone asks about **leaving en-route**, tell them what the possibilities are. Ask them to let you know if and when they decide to leave the party. Do not raise this subject yourself – it is not to be encouraged. See also paragraph 4.45.
- 7 Check to see that everyone appears **suitably attired** for the expected terrain and weather conditions, and seems **physically capable** of handling them. Of course, you and the backmarker should also wear suitable gear to set a good example. For advice on what to do if anyone is obviously grossly ill-prepared or ill-suited, see paragraph 4.43.
- 8 If there is anyone with an apparent **disability**, such as being deaf, blind or partially sighted, make sure that they are kept informed and aware of any instructions and items of interest. If help is needed, offer it discreetly. It is unlikely that a blind or partially sighted person would come along unaccompanied, but if this happens, make sure that a sighted person accompanies him or her during the walk. People in wheelchairs are unlikely to come unless the walk has been specially vetted for accessibility, and advertised as such.

- 9 ~~**Unaccompanied children** should not be accepted on your party unless you have the written consent of a parent or guardian. However if any turn up unexpectedly, you cannot send them away unless you are near their home, or there is someone to look after them. You will then need to keep a special eye on them, and check that they are accounted for at each rest and refreshment stop, and at the finish.~~
- 10 Most RA groups and affiliated clubs have a policy regarding **dogs** being permitted on their walks, which the leader should enforce. If any party member has one, check that it is on a lead, and point out that it must be kept on its lead on roads; on any land with livestock or game; and where the terrain requires careful footwork. See also paragraph 23 below.
- 11 If **cars** were used for transport to the start, check that they have been parked responsibly (see paragraph 2.37), advising people to move their cars if necessary. For security, warn car passengers not to leave valuables in the car, nor to leave notes which suggest that they will be away all day, or show their address.
- 12 For the benefit of **latecomers**, if practicable, leave a note of the location of your lunch stop at the start, and how to reach it. This is usually only possible at railway stations, where details can be left at the booking office, or at official car parks, if there is a notice board (but not on cars – see paragraph 11 above).
- 13 **Count the number** of people. With a large party, or if starting at a busy railway station, it may be more practicable to do this at a quieter point soon after the start – if possible choose a narrow point such as a gate where people must go in single file. It is sometimes better to ask the backmarker to do the counting, as he or she will have less to do at the start.
- 14 If you have made **special arrangements for catering** at your lunch or tea stop, you may need to ask at the start how many people wish to take advantage of them, and then telephone the establishment to confirm the number. Again this is something for the backmarker to do.

- 15 Before setting off, many leaders make a **list of names** of their party members – this helps them to remember names, it may be of use in an emergency, and can even sometimes be used as evidence of use of a footpath.
- 

## During the walk

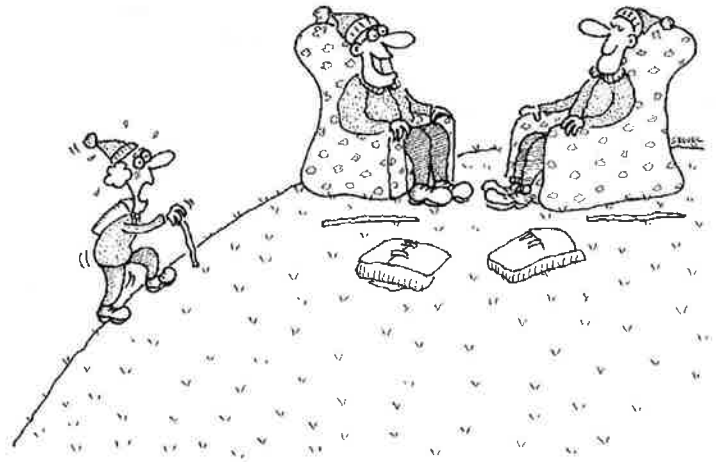
- 16 It is the general rule that **the leader should be at the front** of the party, and party members should be asked not to walk ahead. However, this does not prevent the leader from dropping back from time to time, in order to speak to party members, or encourage the slower ones – in this case those in front should be asked to keep the leader in sight, and told where to wait for further instructions.

It may sometimes be necessary for the leader to ask faster walkers to slow down. Point out that, in the end, the party cannot progress any faster than the pace of its slowest member.

- 17 The **backmarker** should always remain at the back of the party, if necessary giving encouragement to slower members, and making sure that gates have been closed. The backmarker should notify the leader if any member seems to be having difficulty in keeping up. In an emergency, the backmarker could use a whistle to indicate that the leader should stop – one long blast should be sufficient.

For a change, the leader and backmarker can swap positions during part of the walk.

- 18 At frequent intervals, and especially at turning points, **look back** to make sure that all the party members are in sight. Try to avoid large gaps occurring, and if necessary slow down the pace. At crucial turning points, or in poor visibility, wait for the backmarker to arrive or come into sight before continuing.



- 19 Have **rest stops** at suitable points, especially after hill climbs, on reaching roads, after long straight sections or difficult sections. It can be surprising how much a party becomes stretched out at such times, especially if it is a large one, and these stops allow everyone to catch up. They also provide the leader with an opportunity to talk to party members, and for party members to change walking partners.
- Do not move off as soon as the backmarker arrives. Wait a few minutes to allow the slower members a rest – they probably have greater need.
- 20 On re-starting after rest and refreshment stops, **re-count** the number of party members. Keeping track of party members is particularly important in the hills. (See paragraph 4.44 regarding missing members).
- 21 At intervals **check the time** to see whether you are on schedule. If you are running very late, you may need to take a short cut, especially if you might otherwise miss the opening hours of a pub or tea-room, or your bus or train, or light is fading.
- 22 When negotiating an **awkward obstruction** such as a dilapidated stile, a wide ditch, or a stream without a bridge, wait to give assistance if required. Members should be

asked to continue a little way ahead to avoid causing embarrassment to the less able-bodied.

- 23 Make sure that any **dogs** are on a lead when reaching roads; on any land with livestock or game; or in terrain where careful footwork is needed. If necessary, remind the owner that farmers may claim a valid defence if they shoot dogs caught worrying livestock.
- 24 On reaching **points of interest**, wait for the party to catch up, then briefly impart any knowledge you may have (see paragraphs 2.29 to 2.31). This also provides an opportunity for slower walkers to have a rest, without drawing attention to themselves.
- 25 In fields **where crops have not been cleared from rights of way**, providing you are sure of the correct line, ask the party to follow you in single file through the crop. This is preferable to going round the edge of the field, since it reinforces the right of way. When not on a right of way care must be taken not to damage growing crops. (See also paragraph 4.15).

*Also walk single file over newly tilled ground.*



- 26 When **entering buildings** such as pubs, tea-rooms or buildings of interest, ask the party members to clean, remove or cover muddy boots – some walkers carry plastic bags for this purpose.
- 27 Before your party members set about getting their refreshments, let them know the **re-start time** and, if necessary, where the meeting point will be. It may be

advisable to do this a little way before reaching the lunch point, as people may otherwise dash off before you have made your announcement.

- 28 On no account should party members be permitted to eat their **own food** or drink inside a pub, cafe or tea-room, without the permission of the landlord or proprietor – otherwise this gives walkers a bad reputation. On the other hand anyone who wishes to eat their own food should not be made to feel embarrassed, and a suitable place to sit outside should be pointed out.

- 29 Whether you have a picnic or visit a pub, cafe or tea-room, make sure to **clear up after refreshment breaks**. Leave no litter at picnic spots, or anywhere else, for that matter.

Pub staff appreciate glasses and plates being taken back to the bar counter. If you need to move tables, always ask permission, and replace them in the original position on leaving. Remember to thank the staff as you leave.

- 30 If your route passes by or close to **public toilets**, make sure that the party has an opportunity to use them. If you include a pub stop, toilets will be available there.

There are bound to be times of need when no public toilets are available, and advantage will be taken of trees and bushes. This is not normally a problem for men. For women, the leader should discreetly ask the men to continue ahead for a few minutes while the women stop.

- 31 At some stage during the walk, check that everyone is an **RA member**, especially if there are new faces in the party. Most groups and affiliated clubs have a policy of allowing non-members to join a walk on a trial basis, on the understanding that they will join if they wish to come again. Carry a few copies of the RA recruitment leaflet and your programme to give out if required.

- 32 Observe reasonable behaviour by following the **Country Code** wherever possible (see box 18, next page). Copies are obtainable from the Countryside Commission, Countryside Council for Wales, or Scottish Natural Heritage (see appendix 5 for addresses).

**Box 18****The Country Code**

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Guard against all risk of fire
- Fasten all gates
- Keep your dogs under close control
- Keep to public footpaths across farmland
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences hedges, and walls
- Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone
- Take your litter home
- Help to keep all water clean
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Take special care on country roads
- Make no unnecessary noise

---

**Safety considerations**

- 33 Use of **roads** during your walk should be kept to a minimum (see paragraph 2.5). Of course, motorways cannot be used at all by pedestrians.
- 34 **On reaching a road**, wait for the whole party to catch up, and keep them as close together as possible for all the time you have to use it. If the path or track leads straight into a road with no pavement, wait a little way before the junction so that party members do not rush out into the road.
- 35 Where crossing a road is unavoidable, especially main ones, always use if available a **protected or controlled crossing**, such as a footbridge, subway, traffic lights or zebra crossing. Remember that a member of the public has no legal power to hold up traffic – only the police or traffic wardens may do this. However, in practice at zebra crossings, it is usually possible to shepherd the whole party across together.
- 36 If there is **no controlled crossing**, choose a point in the road which provides maximum safety, such as a long straight stretch, the angle of a bend, or the crown of a hill, where the party can be seen by drivers coming from both directions. The leader or backmarker should wait at the crossing point to warn party members of approaching vehicles, and to

make sure that all have crossed safely.

- 37 If your route continues from one path to another on the far side of a road, close to a bend, station someone at the bend to warn of approaching vehicles.
- 38 If you must use a **country road with no pavement or verge**:
- i The party should walk in single file, on the right-hand side of the road (as stipulated in the Highway Code). Discourage people from walking two abreast in order to chat.
  - ii However, there are situations when walking on the right-hand side can be dangerous, especially at right-hand bends, where vehicles driven close to the edge may come into contact with walkers. In such cases the leader should:
    - approach the bend with care, moving out a little to check that there is no oncoming traffic
    - having passed the bend, signal any oncoming traffic to slow down, using the map at arms length
  - iii Alternatively, the leader should move carefully to the left-hand side of the road, asking the party to remain on the right. If a vehicle approaches, tell members to wait some distance back from the bend until it has passed. Also warn the vehicle by waving the map up and down.
  - iv If you have to turn left off the road onto a path shortly after a right-hand bend, it may be practicable for the leader to tell the party to cross to the left-hand side shortly before the bend having first checked that it is safe to do so. During this time the backmarker should watch out for traffic approaching from behind.
  - v At all times, the party should be warned of the approach of a vehicle: by the leader when from ahead; by the backmarker when from behind. The usual way of doing this is by just shouting "car" – this is effective, whatever kind of vehicle it is. At such times, check that everyone is in single file and keeping well in to the side. Repeat the warnings when vehicles follow in succession.
- 39 Some paths cross **railway lines** at unguarded crossings. If you have to use one of these:

- i Wait until the whole party has caught up before crossing. Explain that they will be using an unguarded railway crossing, and say that it is perfectly legal and safe to do so. Tell everyone to “stop, look and listen” before crossing (there is usually a notice to this effect) and ask them to wait on the far side, beyond the fence.
  - ii While the party members are crossing, the backmarker should stand away from the near side of the line, and the leader away from the far side, looking out for approaching trains, and making sure that everyone is taking care.
  - iii Do not continue until satisfied that all party members have crossed safely.
- 40 **Darkness:** see paragraphs 4.30 to 4.32.
- 41 **Bad weather:** see paragraphs 4.33 to 4.36.
- 42 **Do not extend the walk** unless it is convenient for those not wishing to walk further to drop out at the publicised distance.
- 

### After the walk

- 43 On reaching the finish, check that **everyone has been accounted for** and is fixed up with transport.
- 44 Say that you hope everyone enjoyed the walk, and when the **next one** organised by your group or club will be.
- 45 If anyone is **not an RA member**, make sure that they have details of how to join (see paragraph 31 above).
- 46 Hopefully, your party members will now **thank you** for all your time and trouble spent on providing them with an enjoyable day out!
- 47 Some groups or clubs may ask you to write a **report** on your walk. This will be confirmed by your programme officer if appropriate.
- 48 If there have been any problems with obstructions or hazards, remind party members to **follow them up** with the appropriate local authority (see paragraph 4.9).

