# Ramblers Routes
## Britain's best walks from the experts

# Route Development Manual

## Contents

## INTRODUCTION

Ramblers Routes is an online collections of high-quality walking routes. It support the sharing of routes between Ramblers members   All routes developed in the Ramblers Routes site will be published for inclusion in the Ramblers Routes library and made available to people registered on Ramblers website unless  requested otherwise.  Ramblers Routes also has several routes under three miles which are free to anyone registered on the website.

This manual supports route developers and checkers in planning and developing their routes.  It describes what makes a good route, how to develop a route by using the on-line system and how to check a route.

There are two more manuals available which give more information on how to use the on-line interfaces and tools to add the routes to the database.

All of these resources can be found in the Ramblers Routes toolkit by visiting:

www.ramblers.org.uk >Volunteer zone >Support and development >Volunteer toolkits >Ramblers Routes toolkit

To sign up to Ramblers Routes use the Ramblers Routes registration process page in the toolkit.

## SECTION 1: Route requirements

### a.  What sort of a route is suitable?

The Ramblers believes that walking is an activity that everyone should enjoy. To reflect this, we provide routes for a wide range of walkers.  Some people will look for challenging walks in demanding countryside while others want a short, gentle stroll in a city environment.  Most walkers fall somewhere in between.  Many people associate the Ramblers with walking in the countryside but urban routes with plenty of interest are also popular.

Before you develop a route, consider:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Who** | Keep in mind the type of walker you expect to follow your route.  Bear in mind that the shorter routes are more likely to appeal to walkers who may be slower and less agile. |
| **Format** | Circular or linear routes are preferable to "out and back" routes.  If you are designing a linear route, ensure there is a way to get people back to the start. |
| **Time** | No route should take longer than a day as the database is aimed at day walkers.  Since walking speeds vary you need to take into account the ability of different walkers**\***, the terrain of your specific route and include reasonable breaks when calculating the time needed. |

**\*Note: a reasonably fit walker can expect to cover anything from around 3 miles per hour when crossing good ground with a range of moderate climbs and downhill.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Length** | The majority of our walks are less than 12 miles.  Consider splitting much longer walks into two or more sections to allow people to enjoy each leg separately. |
| **Countryside** | If possible follow clear, well-marked and well-maintained paths. Avoid designing routes that include excessive walking along busy roads.  Consider potential escape routes and |

ways to shorten the route.  Think about seasonal influences - some paths may become impassable or dangerous during winter as a result of ice or strong winds.

**Urban**            These are generally shorter but if including lots of points of interest, allow more time to look around.  Look for quiet but safe streets to avoid lots of dodging round people or traffic.

**Hills**            Try to keep the steeper climbs in the middle of the route when the walkers have warmed up but before they get too tired.

**Accessibility**    Most walkers can cope with uneven ground, stiles etc.  However, if your walk is aimed at the less agile or classified as pushchair or wheelchair friendly, check that there are no unexpected stiles, steps, gravel or uneven ground.

**Getting there**    We encourage the use of public transport to reach walking areas.  This isn't always practical but it's always worth checking public transport options and to change the start point if necessary.

**Car parking**      Provide information on parking facilities and check that parking will not cause inconvenience to residents or businesses.

**Facilities**       Help the walker by mentioning refreshments, toilets, etc. on the route.

**Conflicts**        Stick to rights of way and do not trespass. Try to avoid any unnecessary conflict with landowners, recreational users or areas of conservation. Equally important, is the need to uphold the traditional uses and rights that have been secured by walkers over many years.

## b.  Add interest

It may seem obvious, but the most popular routes are those that take people to places they feel they want to visit. You need to encourage people to want to follow your route and to pick it out of others in the area so make it sound interesting. Think about including one or more of:

- Points of interest such as churches, photogenic villages, historic buildings, ancient monuments, stately homes, country parks, nature reserves etc.
- Good views.
- A variety of landscapes and contrasting scenery are particularly appealing. For example, a mix of open spaces and woodland, or new houses and old buildings.
- A theme such as historical event or a type of wildlife.
- The opportunity to walk beside water.
- Things to pause and watch such a canal lock, steam railway station, a working windmill or waterwheel.

## c.  Think about safety

Walking, particularly in remote areas, will always carry some risk.  As in other outdoor activities, walkers must take responsibility for their own safety whilst on a walk.  However, you should take the time to review your route to identify possible hazards and decide how best to avoid/address them.  When evaluating a risk, bear in mind both the frequency of occurrence and the severity of the consequences. Often, a note in the route description drawing attention to the hazards will be adequate.

Types of hazard that might need to be addressed include:
- busy road crossings
- rough or dangerous sections, particularly rocky
- area of difficult navigation or remote
- cliffs, quarries
- dangerous stiles, bridges, etc.
- seasonal hazards.

## SECTION 2: Planning and designing your route

Developing a good route takes time and effort. You will find you might need to walk the entire route or some sections more than once. Walking the route at draft stage will take longer than walking the finished route, as you explore alternative paths, look for access points, change your mind and retrace your steps and so on. It also takes time to get the wording right for the directions, to research points of interest, timetables, facilities etc. and to enter it all on the computer.

### a. Rough out the route

The first stage is to work out a rough route and any alternative routes, drawing on your own local knowledge, maps, local information and guides. The mapping tool in the Ramblers Routes system is helpful in working out your route as you can draw it on the map and try out alternatives with the computer automatically calculating the distance each time. It is also worth roughly working out the directions to expand/correct as you walk the route.

### b. Try out the route

The next stage is to see how your route works on the ground. Only by walking it will you be able to identify the most attractive options, any off road alternatives, blocked paths, unexpected hazards etc. This will also allow you to explore any alternative path options, look for access points, note points of interest, facilities etc. to add to the route and as well as take pictures to illustrate the route.

### c. Draft the route on the Ramblers Routes database

You don't have to do this all at once. You can add and change things right up until you pass it on to the checking stage. You may find you need more time to re-walk sections and carry out further research into points of interest, transport options, facilities etc.

### d. Finalise the route

Finally, you might want to print off the route card and have one final walk through of your route so as to double check the map, ensure your directions are clear and that nothing has changed along the way.

### e. Submit for checking

Once you are happy with your route, make sure it conforms to the style guidelines in this manual (section 3). Then submit the route for checking by an independent checker.

## SECTION 3: Transcribing your Route

The Ramblers provides two options to add routes to the database:  A Wizard and Advanced builder. Both are accessed through the main Ramblers website.  Details of how to log on and manuals for using the system can be found in the Volunteer Zone.

## 1. Plotting your route

### a. Mapping the route

First you should title your route and then plot the route on the map.  You have a choice of map types so select the one that works best with your route.  For example, when plotting routes in the countryside an Ordnance Survey map is generally best but the Open Street Map works much better for sections of routes through towns or cities.

The following map layers are available:

- Bing Road Maps
- Bing Aerial Photos
- Bing Hybrid
- Ordnance Survey
- Open Street Map.

### b. Alternative routes

It may be that in the course of your research you have identified sections that are inaccessible during certain times of the year, prove difficult for people with disabilities or limited walking experience, or you may want to offer an option to cut the route short. In this case you should plot this section on the map as an 'alternative route'.

Whilst alternative routes are useful, try not to have too many as this can be confusing to the walker.  While not essential, it is usually easier to follow if you can start at an alternative route from a waypoint.

### c. Waypoints

Waypoints are added to the route to break it up into manageable sections and help navigation.  Try to position your waypoints at significant points but avoid adding too many.  Read the 'Route Description' section for more guidance.  The first waypoint i.e. Number 1 should be put at the start point.

When selecting your waypoints try to use distinctive features on the ground that will be easily identified by the walker. Typical waypoints could include unique buildings, monuments, road junctions, stiles, etc.

### d. Points of interest

Be selective on the points of interest that you include on your route but try to have clear and succinct information. Ideally the points of interest should complement your route theme and serve as further points by which walkers can navigate.  Only give the point a name on the map screen as the details are entered on the description tab.

## 2. Describing your route

You have three opportunities to describe your route:

### a. Title

This is the first piece of information that attracts the user's attention when searching for a route in the database.  It is important therefore that the title gives the reader a sense of its theme and location. Route

titles such as "A Walk through Time" or "A Roman Reminder" are catchy and give a sense of the route's theme but give very little indication of its location. Likewise, titles such as "Norham" or "Doddington" give a sense of the location of the route but very little idea as to what the route will involve or in which county it is in if you don't know the area.

A popular style for titling routes is to give the start-point and end-point of the route, for example "East Hoathly to Gun Hill" or "Banner's Gate to Aston Hall". However, if your route is centred on a specific theme you may wish to expand upon this.

Ramblers Routes limits you to 66 characters and we recommend that you try to be creative and develop a title that is both catchy and informative, for example:

- "Where Falcons Fly –Symonds Yat, Herefordshire"
- "Six Dales around Thixendale, N Yorks."
- "Six Tons and a Ham – The Langtons of Leicestershire"

### b. Summary

This is shown in the listing of routes on the Ramblers website so it needs to sell the best features.  If the user likes what they read here, they are more likely to open the route card. The route summary is intended to:

- let people know roughly where the route runs
- help people judge quickly if the route will be suitable for their needs and/or interesting
- encourage them to look at the detail of the route.

The summary could also include the location, themes, features and difficulty of the route, or any points of interest on the way.  The summary is limited to 255 characters.

### c. Route description

This section holds the detailed instructions that appear on the route card.  The aim is to be clear, concise, consistent, accurate and easy to understand, so that your readers can feel confident they will not get lost when following your route.  It is important to make the distinction between directions and interpretation.

- Directions are the practical instructions for following the route: for example, "Turn into Green Street on the left, go through the gate into the park, follow the path ahead and go right at the fork."
- Interpretation is further information about the surroundings, typically about heritage, wildlife and interesting features to look out for.  It can be very important – a sense of discovery is one of things that motivate people to walk but it needs to be separated from directions to keep them easy.  Interpretation can be further subdivided into brief information such as 'Good views on the right" and more detailed points of interest such as "St Mary's church was built in the Gothic style in 1817…"

### d. Writing directions

- Keep it simple, using everyday language, short sentences and short paragraphs. Practicality and intelligibility is more important than literary style but don't just list instructions, the directions should still read well.
- Avoid jargon, codes, acronyms and abbreviations.  Always write "Turn left…" not "turn L. …

- Try to be concise. A long text gives the impression of a long walk and the instructions may look too complicated.  If the directions over a short distance are becoming too long and complicated, consider simplifying the route itself.
- Try to think about how someone new to the route will see things – what is obvious to you might not be obvious to them, especially if you're very familiar with the route.
- Divide your description into shorter sections between recognisable points e.g. a landmark or a junction.
- The number of sections/waypoints will be determined by your route description.  Don't add a waypoint for every sentence as it breaks up the flow of the description. Equally very long paragraphs of direction are hard to follow so split these within a waypoint if it makes it easier.  Waypoints tend to be closer on city walks with lots of instructions while in the country you may find you only need a waypoint every few miles.
- Landmarks should be unmistakeable. "Turn right by the large red brick building" is fine so long as you don't pass another vaguely red building first.  And don't assume, for example, that everyone will understand "turn right at the patch of birch trees" as not everyone knows what a birch tree looks like. Beware of changing/vanishing landmarks e.g. pubs changing name, barns being demolished etc.
- Consider mentioning all prominent landmarks passed otherwise the reader may wonder why you haven't and worry that they're in the wrong place!
- Signs can be useful e.g. "Turn right at the next junction, following the sign to the station" – but take care if you think signs could be changed. Street name boards and traffic signs are usually fine as these are regularly replaced, while pedestrian and promoted route signing may be less reliable.
- Don't only use right and left.  Help your reader by mentioning things that will aid their navigation and confirm to them that they are on the right route e.g. "take the second left into Church Street", "keep ahead until you pass a children's playground".
- Waypoints and landmarks serve to give the walker confidence they are still on the route.
- Avoid any reliance on compass directions.  Not everyone carries a compass or can use one.
- Don't be afraid to give multiple clues: "Turn left along the lake, with the water on your right".
- If the route runs for a long distance without turning, reassure the reader. For example "Follow the main path for quite a long time, passing some buildings and a sports field, until you reach the road at Beech Avenue."
- GPS coordinates and/or grid references are helpful in difficult terrain to supplement the directions but shouldn't be added to every waypoint.
- Think in particular about how you describe the very start. You need to orientate people first: "With your back to the station". Be aware of snares like multiple exits to stations!
- If a junction is complicated, take some time to describe it in detail.
- Think carefully about how you describe a junction:
  - "Turn/go left" – implies a turn of around 90°.
  - "Fork left" – implies the path ahead branches at an angle of less than 90°.
  - "Follow the main path as it curves left" – implies there is a bend in the path but no junction, or possibly a junction with a path that is obviously much narrower or less important.
  - "Keep ahead and slightly to the left" – implies that the path continues at the same width but with a slight bend to the left, or a "staggered junction" where the path continuing ahead is clearly visible but shifted slightly to the left.
  - "Go/keep ahead" is best reserved for when the path really is more-or-less directly ahead and there is no need to "stagger" round a junction.

- For a more complicated junction: "You reach a complicated junction of five paths: take the second path on your left, towards the church tower." is better than distinguishing different kinds of left – half-left, sharp left etc.

### e. Adding interpretation

Interpretation is additional information about the surroundings along the route, typically about heritage, wildlife and interesting features. Interpretation is a good way to motivate people to get out and walk in order to explore their local area at close hand.

The background information you could provide about any particular walk is limitless, so interpretation involves deciding which information is most interesting. Unless a special interest is the theme of your route, do not overdo the interest stops but try to include at least one.

Brief information of no more than a line or two, can be added into the directions.

However, most points of interest (POI) merit more detail. These should be mentioned in the description (this confirms the walker is on the route) with more detail entered into the POI section lower down the screen. In this section, provide interesting summaries of the POIs and, if you can, also provide web links for people who want even more information.

Some places of interest provide welcome facilities such refreshments and toilets. Mention if an admission fee is payable and who runs it e.g. English Heritage, Historic Scotland, Welsh Historical Monuments, so that walkers know to take along their membership cards.

To help you find information relating to your route:

- Make a note of any existing interpretation along the way: blue plaques and other inscriptions identifying buildings, information boards in parks and nature reserves etc.
- Note any interesting facts about places on route that you already know.
- Where you're using part of an existing route that already has a leaflet or description, there's no harm in taking key facts from the interpretation, so long as you don't copy whole sentences and paragraphs.
- Make a note of sources of further information. For example, where your walk passes a museum or visitor attraction, note its phone number and website.
- The internet this can often produce results on the most seemingly obscure local features, and wikipedia.org has a lot of information. Websites run by councils and local organisations can help too.
- Check out books on local history and culture or speak to local civic/history societies and talk to people in the community.

### 3. Themes and features

Themes and features add 'labels' to your route which users use to narrow down their search of the Ramblers Routes database. If there is a pub on your route or it is pushchair friendly, tick the relevant boxes. This is for people who are using the 'Find a walk' function on the Ramblers website. Currently themes and features are split into five groups:

**Suitability**      child friendly, dog friendly, no car needed, pushchair friendly, small groups only, wheelchair friendly

| | |
|---|---|
| **Surroundings** | city, town, coast, country park, farmland, hill, lake, pond, reservoir, marsh, moor, heath, mountain, open country, park, green space, river, canal, village, woodland |
| **Theme** | adventure, architecture, arts, culture, family fun, garden, history, heritage, long distance path, treasure hunt, geocaching, wildlife, nature |
| **Special status** | area of outstanding natural beauty, national scenic area, heritage coast, community forest, regional park, conservation area, historic park/garden, national park, national trail, Scotland's great trail, nature designation, open access land, Ramblers success, world heritage site |
| **Facilities** | baby changing facilities, bed and breakfast, camping, bothy, disabled toilet, hostel, parking, refreshments, shelter, and toilet |

### 4. Route grading

Grading a route is a subjective exercise and depends on the standards of the person setting the grade. What is a leisurely route for one person could be a strenuous route to another.

To help limit the subjectivity, we have devised a system that gives consideration of the main factors:

- terrain
- height gain
- distance
- required navigation skills
- equipment required
- potential exposure.

It is important to familiarise yourself with the grading system and be as objective as possible in the grading of your route.

- **Easy Access** routes for everyone, including people with conventional wheelchairs and pushchairs, using easy access paths. Comfortable shoes or trainers can be worn. Assistance may be needed to push wheelchairs on some sections.
- **Easy** routes for anyone of a reasonable fitness level who does not have a mobility difficulty. Suitable for pushchairs if they can be lifted over occasional obstructions. Comfortable shoes or trainers can be worn. Paths are clearly identifiable on the ground.
- **Leisurely** routes for reasonably fit people. May include unsurfaced paths. Walking shoes or boots and warm, waterproof clothing are recommended. Paths can be identified on the ground or through following clear landmarks.
- **Moderate** routes for people with a good level of fitness and at least a little country walking experience. May include some steep paths and open country. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are recommended. Most paths are clearly defined but map reading skills are recommended.
- **Strenuous** routes for experienced walkers, with a high level of fitness. May involve some pathless sections across wild valleys, rough country, open moorland or mountains tops. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are necessary. Paths may be unclear on the ground so map and compass skills are essential.
- **Technical** routes for very experienced walkers, with a high level of fitness and competence. May involve some pathless sections across wild valleys, rough country, open moorland, or mountains tops.

May also involve some scrambling or exposed sections. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are necessary. Paths may be unclear on the ground so good map and compass skills are essential.

## 5. Getting there

Make sure you provide enough detail for people to get to the starting point including postcode, grid reference and/or GPS coordinates.

Where transport exists, check out the timetables, including Sundays. Provide details and links to the relevant websites.

For people coming by car provide information on parking facilities, if possible in an official car park and include a note on any charges.

## 6. Photographs

A picture is worth a thousand words! A selection of good photographs will give the user an idea of what to expect and will go a long way to encouraging someone to go on the walk.

We require at least one photo for the route and no more than six good photographs.  Photos are there to give users a taste of the route, not to describe every waymark.  Choose the best or the most interesting to be the 'default image' which appears alongside the summary on the website and will help 'sell' your walk and make it stand out.

What constitutes a good photograph is highly subjective but always consider:

- Is there a clear centre of interest?
- Is the image well composed?
- Is the image focused and correctly exposed?
- Does the image complement the route?

Use photos that you've taken yourself or ones that a photographer has given you written permission to use; the photographer will probably want to be credited. Don't copy images from Google or other websites on the internet without permission.

## 7. Risk assessment

Walking is a relatively low risk activity, and it's important to avoid worrying so much about the minor risks that you forget about the major benefits. However, we should act responsibly in taking account of risks to the personal safety of users of our routes. The Ramblers Routes risk assessment might sound technical but in fact it's common sense.

As you walk the route, look out for potential hazards, and for each make a note of:

- **Location** This doesn't have to be a grid reference – you could use a written note – "By Green Park Lake, "Junction of Farmers Hill and Church Street" or key to points on a map.
- **Hazard** For example: lake, road crossing, busy road, play equipment.
- **Effect** For example: falling in/getting wet, traffic accident, falling off.
- **Who might be harmed?** This is often "all walkers" but you should also note where there are particular hazards for more vulnerable users. For example: 'All walkers, particularly those with health problems", "Young children".

- **Measures to minimise** These are your recommendations to a walk leader for reducing the risk. For example: "Advise caution", "Take special care".

## SECTION 4: Route checking

Routes need to be checked thoroughly and assessed by an independent person before they can be publicised and used. It's easy to miss your own mistakes, particularly if you know the route well. You may miss or forget to mention some features of importance, safety issues and so on and it's always good to have a fresh eye. A great way to understand this process is to start by checking someone else's route to have a feel for the process.

### 1. Carrying out the route check

To check the route, take the route description and map provided by the route developer and attempt to walk the route. As you do so:

- check the clarity and accuracy of the route description
- assess the practicality and attractiveness of the route
- carry out a simple risk assessment of the route.

It should be possible to do all three on a single pass of the route, but occasionally you may feel you need to walk a route twice. If a description is written in both directions, then it also needs to be checked in both directions. You should also check out any alternative routes.

You should take with you:

- The route description and map
- A map or street atlas of the area, so you can find your way if you get lost or if you want to look for alternative routes.

### a. Check the clarity and accuracy of the route description

- Is the description clear, consistent and easy to follow? Is it concise? Is it in simple English? Does it meet the guidelines in section three? If not, how might it be improved?
- Is the description accurate? It's surprisingly easy to write "turn left" when you mean "turn right" and if you get lost other people will!
- If there are places where the description is difficult to follow, are these because the route itself is too complicated? Could it be simplified?
- Don't forget to check all the other details including things like transport information, opening times, locations of start and finish points.
- Check the timing.

### b. Assess the practicality and attractiveness of the route

- Does the route meet the criteria for its difficulty classification and any special features (e.g. child friendly, dog friendly, wheelchair friendly)? If not, is there a way to change the route, or is it easier to change the classification?
- Is the route as attractive as it could be, referring to the guidelines in section 3? Sometimes unattractive sections are unavoidable, but can you see obvious ways to improve the route?
- Make sure any possible dangers have been highlighted.

### 2. Acting on the route check report

If there aren't any problems with the route, then you can simply submit the route card for authorisation/publication without making any amendments. Please indicate under the comments tab that you are happy with the route and did not need to make any amendments.

If the problems are only minor errors, small amendments to the description or grading without changing the route, extra information etc. please make the changes and list them on the comments tab (advance builder screens only) and submit.

If you feel the route itself needs major changes or you feel that it is not suitable for publication, please do not submit but contact us to discuss.

### 3. Abandon a route

If you do decide that you don't want to work anymore on a route that you have adopted, click on the 'Abandon route' button so that the route can be made available for someone else.

**If you have any queries or problems with using Ramblers Routes or developing and checking routes, please email
[volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com](mailto:volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com) or call us on 020 7339 8500.**