

Unit 5 – Conducting the Walk

5.1 During the week prior to your walk:

- Consider whether to contact DEPI and check your walk area has not been closed, eg. Fires, landslides, road closures, snow.
- Assemble and check extra requirements for your walk (whistle, at least 2 maps, printed driving directions from meeting point to walk start – include your mobile phone number, recommended travel costs, emergency contact numbers, mobile phone charged, GPS, paper/pen, reading glasses if needed, who will be your whips etc.
- Ensure you include a blank copy of your club's Acknowledgement of Risks Form for Temporary Members if you have a visitor on your walk.
- Check that walk day will not be a total fire ban day in your designated walk area. (It is recommended that all day walks in that area are cancelled on a total fire ban day). Ring Bushfire Information Line 1800240667 during summer and autumn to obtain advice re DEPI planned burns (or the DEPI website) and status/risk of bushfire in your walk area. If a total fire ban day, it will usually be announced at 5.00 pm the day before. Follow your club's procedures for this.
- Check on the expected temperatures for the day as you may need to cancel or modify the activity. Where possible, cancellations should be made no later than the day before.

Resources:

Parks Victoria:

- <http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/>

Department of the Environment and Primary Industry

- <http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/fire-and-emergencies/planned-burns>
- <http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/forestry-and-land-use/visiting-parks-and-forests>

Bureau of Meteorology

- www.bom.gov.au

5.2 On the day of the walk:

- Conduct a "risk assessment" to determine if planned walk needs to be modified due to conditions, eg heat, rain and slippery tracks. Be prepared to change/shorten walk if necessary.
- Be early to the meeting point to mark off walk participants on Booking/Registration Form as they arrive.
- Have temporary members complete your club's Acknowledgement of Risks Form for Temporary Members and collect fee.
- Check all participants have the required equipment and supplies. It is not too late to refuse to take any participant on the walk if they are not adequately equipped. As

leader you have absolute discretion on who to take. If you refuse to take someone you should give adequate reasons for the refusal.

- Consider taking in your car a spare bottle of water and rain jacket which you could lend to any walker who has forgotten theirs.
- Arrange car-pooling as necessary. (Try to even numbers across cars keeping the number of cars to a minimum).
- Give instructions/maps to drivers on how to reach re-assembly point (or walk start point if going direct). Include your mobile phone number.
- At walk start, check that all cars are parked safely in an orderly manner. (Ask drivers to lock).

5.3 At the start of the walk:

- When all walkers have arrived at the actual start point for the activity, you are advised to take your Booking/Registration Form and Acknowledgement of Risk Forms with you in case you need to refer to them on the activity. Follow your club's rules here.
- Gather your participants together. (Many clubs form a circle).
- Welcome all visitors and new members and ask they be made welcome on the walk.
- You may choose to Number off and Name off
- Outline your walk and any points of interest.
- Advise if poles are now recommended, more water, any part that may require extra caution because of weather or terrain changes.
- Remind participants and inform visitors of standard procedures:
 - Stopping at any track intersection (on sustained tracks with few or no intersections it is prudent to nominate a time to stop and regroup (eg at 10am stop and re-group))
 - Keeping together as a group and keeping the walker behind you in view
 - Toilet stops while on the walk and at any walk break (packs must be left in middle of track so whip is aware you are having a stop - toilet stops must be at least 100 metres from watercourses)
 - The whistle code (ONE long blast = acknowledgement of a distress signal, THREE short blasts together – regularly spaced-emergency signal from person/s in distress = Stop and re-group with your leader, FOUR short blasts close together = EMERGENCY, re-group immediately with leader)
 - Rubbish and what to do with it
- Depending on your club's procedures, you may advise/recommended Petrol Costs (or car pool cost).
- Introduce the whip and his/her role. (The whip's role may be shared over the day, but on each change ensure all walkers are told of the change. It may be helpful to hand the whip a map of your walk.)
- Ensure you (or the walker you asked) have a mobile phone (in case of need), if not ask group.
- Depending on the activity, you may choose to ask if there are any first aiders in the group. (All members, including leaders, are encouraged to complete the club's First Aid Training course).

5.4 Skills and Duties of the Whip:

Choosing your whip:

- This is an important role and should be given to an experienced, strong walker who is capable of making contact with you if you are actually near the front of the group
- (Preferably) knows the walk
- Ideally has done recce with leader but is not acting as mentor
- If changing whips during the day, say after morning tea or lunch, a new whip must have all the listed attributes and if changed, every walker should be made aware of the change

Knows when to communicate with the leader:

- Slows down leader if needs be
- Calls for regroup/consolidation if needs be
- Checks/confers with leader at halts to verify all is well

Keeps track of numbers especially after halts/breaks:

- Knows how many are in the group and counts the number in the group when leaving after any break to ensure that no one is left behind

Has empathy with the group:

- Encourages and helps stragglers/strugglers
- Recognises fatigue/distress in walkers
- Assists anyone having difficulties
- Waits for/with laggards
- Calls a halt if needs be
- Encourages slower walkers

Assists the leader:

- Keeps the group together
- Supports the leader in emergencies etc
- Ensures everyone is in front of the whip:
- Keeps track of anyone who goes “off track” for a toilet stop
- Stays at the back
- Waits for walkers who go off track
- Prods laggards (and recalcitrant photographers!)

5.5 During the walk:

- Lead walkers, setting a pace that is consistent with the grade, walk distance and participants’ capabilities.
- Stop/pause at all track intersections to re-group or have a drinks break.
- Make use of interesting features to have a drink stop. On hot days increase the frequency of drink stops.
- If intersections are few, consider stopping regularly, say every 15minutes on the hour, quarter, half etc to re-group.
- Do not allow the front of the group to move off as soon as the Whip catches up – slower walkers need their breaks just as much as the faster walkers.

- Regulate the group's speed keeping the group together. (Monitor speed and rein in the "race horses" and encourage the slower walkers)
- Keep in contact with your whip.
- Check the condition of all walkers, especially visitors and whether they are having difficulties.
- Ensure morning tea and lunch breaks are of adequate time so walkers are refreshed and rested. It is recommended to give them warning "5 minutes" then "2 minutes" before re-starting walk. Make sure everyone is ready to depart ensuring no one is still in the bush.
- The length of the walk should not be extended (or changed substantially) unless absolutely necessary or by agreement of all walkers.
- If faced with difficulties, discuss the situation with other experienced members.

5.6 At the completion of the walk:

- It is suggested you reform the circle and count off to ensure everyone has returned safely.
- Check the condition of walkers especially new members and any temporary members.
- Record detail of any incident/accident (and details of two witnesses).
- Thank the "whip(s)" and any other people who have assisted in making the walk successful.
- Advise where the afternoon tea venue will be.
- Thank your walkers!
- You may encourage walkers to stretch/warm-down etc.
- Remind walkers to clean their boots to reduce chances of spreading Cinnamon fungus.
- Make sure all cars are mobile, including your own, leave in convoy for home or afternoon tea venue.
- Once you are home, complete all your club's paperwork requirements.

If problems have been encountered adversely affecting your expected return time, phone and advise a contact person as soon as able of the changed circumstances so they can answer any home inquiries etc. If you originally used a contact system for this walk, and walk is successfully completed, phone your contact and tell them.

If an **accident or incident occurred during the walk**, which may result in medical assistance / possible insurance claims, as soon as possible contact your club's designated person with details. A walk is deemed to commence from the meeting point and to finish at the designated finish point.

Print and complete an Accident / Incident Near Miss Form post or email the form to your club's designated person. If unsure whether to submit form, discuss with your club's designated person or another member of your club's executive.

If a **Critical Incident** occurs, follow the Bushwalking Victoria guidelines or your club's policy for management of a critical incident.

Handling critical incidents is covered in more detail in unit 7 Critical Incident Management.

