Spelthorne U3A K2
WALK LEADER'S GUIDE

Introduction
The aim of this document is to give guidance to walk leaders. It describes the activities they should cover and gives some recommended approaches. Guidance is also given on what to do if there are any incidents on the walk. There is a comprehensive Walk Leader's Checklist available, that can be used alongside this guide.

Main activities
1. Selecting a suitable walk
2. Performing a recce (either in practice or "virtually")
3. Writing a description of the walk, documenting this on a signing-in sheet and providing this to the relevant people
4. Leading the walk
5. Take action and provide feedback if there are any issues, accidents or "near misses"

These are covered in more detail in the following sections.

Selecting a suitable walk
We aim to do walks between 5 and 10 miles. Sometimes there are longer walks (e.g. some stretches of project walks) but these are the exception and will probably attract only a limited number of walkers.

It is desirable to have toilets somewhere at the start and en-route if possible (or at least some areas with bushes etc that people could use).

Walks normally cover lunchtime, so there should be a suitable place to stop, either to have a packed lunch or somewhere to buy lunch (a shop, café or pub).

Performing a Recce
Leaders normally like to try out a walk before they lead it. This is a particularly good idea if you are not sure of the route, or how suitable the pub/café is in reality. If you want to recce a walk, you can claim your expenses using the expenses form. Fill it in and submit it to the Treasurer (Jacqui).
Note: you can claim 30p per mile for travel by car for a recce on the total mileage driven and/or train tickets if appropriate.

For walks that are a significant distance away, it is often possible to do a virtual recce (using the internet, Google maps etc) but of course this does involve a certain amount of risk/uncertainty. It can be argued that even if a walk has been recced, unexpected things can still happen and you may not be able to complete the route as planned. If you are not doing a physical recce, this should be clearly stated in the walk description so that participants are aware.

If you use a published documented description of a walk, it is also helpful to have a map of the area (a paper copy or digital) should the actual path not appear to conform with the description. A compass is also a helpful aid for directions.

Write a description of the walk

We like to have all the walk descriptions prepared in plenty of time. The descriptions and sign-up sheets should be available in time for the Citadel meetings, covering all the walks before the subsequent meeting.

There is a template available to help you write up a description of your walk. It is not compulsory to use this, but if you write your own version it is advisable to include similar content to the template as each section is there for a reason. Feel free to add or remove columns as you wish (e.g. remove Pub Lunch if it is not applicable). Please keep this in an editable format (e.g. Word) so that the text can be extracted for the website and the walking programme.

Please ensure that you describe the walk thoroughly and state if there are significant hills, stiles, busy roads etc. Also provide advice on walking poles, footwear and boot covers, where appropriate.

Once you have completed the form, please send it to Marion (who prepares the programme), Mike (for the website) and Sylvia (for the table at the Citadel). If you have a walk in the next month, please try and be present at the Walking Group desk in the Citadel (or arrange for someone else to cover for you).

Leading the Walk

It is good practice to address the group at the start of the walk, to make sure they know about hazards, lunch etc. Tell them that if they find themselves at the back and losing sight of the group in front, they must shout to the walkers in front to warn them (walkers in front cannot be continuously checking behind them).

On the walk, try to stick together as much as possible. Always wait for everyone to catch up when making a turn off the obvious route. Assign a back-marker if you like, and make sure they have a map of the route. Walkie talkies are available if needed; the back-marker can use the walkie talkie to warn the walk leader that the group is getting split up (and they work where there is no phone network coverage).

Please ensure you have a fully charged mobile phone with you and a compass to aid navigation.

Follow the advice in the Highway Code when leading a group along a country lane where there is no pavement or footpath. Consider wearing fluorescent clothes if appropriate.

Take extra care at situations such as railway level crossings without warning signals.

Provide feedback of any issues

Walks organised by U3A groups automatically have public liability insurance cover, provided the walkers are U3A members. This is not a full personal accident insurance and it is important that all walkers are given information about the possible hazards on the walk and are advised that they walk at their own risk (this should be stated on every walk description). This means you are not liable for any injuries etc that occur during the walk, but as the leader you should document the incident using the “U3A Incident Report Form”. The completed form should be sent to a member of the U3A committee.

If the hazards are adequately described in the walk description document, risk assessments are not normally required (although you could do one for a very difficult walk – see the “Walk Leader Risk Assessment Checklist”).

What to do if someone is injured or becomes unwell

Walk leaders are only expected to do the best they can in the circumstances. As a leader, you may feel more comfortable if you carry a small first aid kit, or at least a few plasters.

If someone gets an injury or collapses for any reason, the group should do their best to keep the person comfortable. Identify the exact location as best you can (place on a map, grid reference, GPS location etc). On a phone, you may be able to see where you are on Google Maps and send the location to emergency services. The app "What 3 Words" lets you share your location.

Once you know the location, phone for help if you have decent phone reception. If not, leave some people with the injured person and at least 2 others should go for help and/or walk to a place where they can get phone reception and call for help.

Procedure in the event of a cancellation

If the walk needs to be cancelled for any reason (e.g. due to the weather) then the walk leader should contact all the people who have signed up. This can be by email, text, WhatsApp (e.g. the car share WhatsApp) or phone call. *If email, WhatsApp or text is chosen, it is important that you ask people to confirm that they have received the notification of the cancellation. If no such notification is received, the walk leader should follow up with a phone call and leave a message if there is no answer.*