

BLUE MOUNTAIN
CONSERVATION SOCIETY
BUSHWALKING GROUP

LEADER'S HANDBOOK

4th. Edition - July, 2020.

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INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to the Blue Mountains Conservation Society Bushwalking Group's "Walking for Pleasure Program"

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Walk Leader for the Blue Mountains Conservation Society's Bushwalking Group Thank you also to all the existing Bushwalk Leaders of BMCS's Bushwalking Group. This manual is directed equally to existing leaders, new leaders and intending leaders.

As a Walk Leader you are an important & crucial part of the success of the walking program.

Your involvement as a volunteer in the program is greatly appreciated-without your support this program would not be possible. Blue Mountains Conversation Society Bushwalking Group provides support to the various walking groups by promoting, printing & distributing programs, providing walks information on the Society's website as well as providing this handbook for all walk leaders.

This training manual is designed to assist all walk leaders and back up leaders with setting up and running a walking group program. All walk leaders & back up leaders are required to read this manual.

The Conservation Society's Bushwalking Group currently has **SIX** groups, namely:

Monday Leisure Walks- Short Day Walks of 3-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness

Tuesday Leisure Walks- Medium Day walks of 3-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness.

Thursday Pleasure Walks-Walks of 2-3 hours conducted at a leisurely pace to suit walkers on the day.

Thursday Interpretive Walks- walks of 2-5 hours duration, conducted for enjoyment of walking whilst observing nature and gaining some knowledge along the way.

Saturday Walks- Usually a full day longer walk at a faster pace at Grades generally from 2 to 5

Plant Study Group- Second Sunday of the Month

Each group has a Walks Co-ordinator and these are overseen by a Walks Convenor

ROLES

This section details the broad responsibilities of the walks leader and the walkers. Remember almost anyone can be a walks leader because most of the things you do are simply common sense. However, 'forewarned is forearmed'. For those interested in becoming a walks leader, please contact the Walks Convenor, the Walks Coordinator or a leader of any group.

ROLES OF A LEADER

The primary role of the walks leader is to ensure duty of care for you and the walkers. Duty of care is defined as ‘an individual, group or organisation, undertaking an activity, has a duty under the law to make certain that all reasonable steps are undertaken to ensure the safety, health and well-being of participants and others likely to be affected by the activity’ (p.18 *Walking for Pleasure* NSW Sport and Recreation 2008).

Given this duty of care:

- Only choose walks that are within your capabilities as a Leader
- Ensure that prospective walkers have information about the level of difficulty of the publicised walks
- Be prepared to be honest with someone who, in your opinion, is not able to do the walk and be prepared to refuse their attendance on the walk.
- If for some reason a walker is unable to continue the walk & wants to return, then someone from the group should return with that person.

ROLE OF A WALKER

The primary role of the walker is to accept that you are part of a group and that you are under the direction of the leader for the duration of the walk. You need to know your own limitations and take responsibility for yourself. You need to be open and honest with the leader and abide by their decisions. Remember that

the leaders are volunteers and like to know that their work is appreciated.

- If you are an inexperienced walker or have not walked for some time, it is advisable to see your Doctor first
- Contact the leader or coordinator some days prior to the walk to discuss any medical conditions that may affect your ability to bushwalk. (these may be physical or mental)
- When a walk is grade 4 or 5, it is a pre-requisite that you contact the leader beforehand (preferably by mid-week)
- If there is a published limitation of the numbers of walkers for a particular walk, you must contact the leader beforehand and as soon as possible.
- Where transport is an issue the leader may request intending participants to contact him/her prior to the walk to confirm an adequate number of suitable vehicles(eg 4WD) or that space is available on bus transport.
- Ensure that you bring equipment and clothing to cover you for all contingencies
- Bring your own, food, water, medication and first aid kit
- When car pooling involves long distances, passengers are to contribute towards running costs by paying a minimum of \$5-00.
- Before starting the walk, please complete any necessary forms and sign the attendance sheet, noting any additional hazards as described by the Walks Leader on the day.

- During the walk whilst under the direction of the leader:
 - Please remain with the group during the activity
 - Do not leave the group without informing the leader or designated tail ender
 - Please inform the leader or the designated “tail ender” should you need to have a comfort stop or if you are having any difficulties such as pace, blisters or shortage of water.
 - Stay behind the leader as you may go the wrong way.
(If the leader gives permission for you to go ahead of him/her, you must wait at the next fork of the track or intersection for instructions from the leader)
 - Be prepared to wait while others catch up
 - Stop and tell the leader or another walker if you are experiencing chest pains, nausea or dizziness
 - If you lose contact with the person in front of you, stop and wait and please do not go off in a different direction
 - If you lose contact with the person behind you, please inform the leader
 - Stay well back from the edge of cliffs or long drops (a body length is recommended, more for children).
 - Particularly in remote areas, if you are the driver of the second last vehicle to

leave, wait to see that the last vehicle starts and is able to move off. Don't expect the leader to do this as he/she may be a passenger in a vehicle that has already left.

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PLANNING AND LEADING WALKS

PLANNING

BMCS Bushwalking Group offers members opportunities to bushwalk each Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sundays once a month. Planning for each group's activities occurs usually 3 months in advance and is scheduled by each Group Coordinator. Contributions to the planning process are encouraged from potential leaders, new leaders and experienced leaders.

Walks in the lower Blue Mountains should be avoided in summer

Planning considerations include:

- Walk suitability
 - New leaders should only lead walks that they feel comfortable with
 - Selection of walks tailored to the ability of the Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday groups.
 - Lead a walk that is the same as or similar to a walk they have been on.
- Variety
 - Selection of walks of different degrees of difficulty

- Selection of local and out-of-area walks
- Anticipated weather conditions
 - Seasonal variations
- Public transport connections
 - Frequency of train arrivals and departures and the possibility of track work.
- Public holidays and school holidays
 - Possible impact on group size
 - Possible impact on public transport
- Availability of group transport
 - Availability of Council bus
 - Availability of appropriately licensed driver
- Car pooling
 - Necessity for car pooling
 - Suitability of drop-off and pick-up points
- Possible organisational assistance with other activities
 - Annual bushwalkers picnic
 - Barbeques
 - Training workshops
- Communication
 - Consistent approach
 - Make sure the meeting place is clearly indicated.
 - Check Hut News and/or BMCS Website for up to date info such as: “Bring lunch or BBQ included”.
 - Access routes-you must seek permission before you cross private land, preferably by telephone, letter or email rather than

just turning up and expecting permission to be granted.

- Do you have the map for the walk?

BEFORE YOUR WALK

Where possible, pre-walk the proposed walk in the week before the activity to identify any hazards other than those expected, so that injury risks can be minimised. It is preferable that these "walk throughs" are **NOT** done alone but should be accompanied by at least one other walker.

If unable to find an accompanying walker, contact the co-ordinator who may help with a second walker. Pre-walks (aka "walk throughs") should be advised to the Convenor preferably by email with copy to co-ordinator. If email not available, contact convenor by phone with call(s) to be recorded in a diary. This will ensure a paper trail if pre-walkers do not return. Pre-walkers should advise convenor of their safe return as soon as possible.

As a Walk Leader you must take reasonable care to avoid acts, omissions or situations which you could reasonably foresee, that are likely to injure members. Try to avoid tracks & trails which are particularly slippery, steep or uneven, or contain other foreseeable risks. (Not easy in the Blue Mountains!)

Have an alternative plan in case of unforeseen circumstances.

Be aware that some people may not be confident crossing roads, or using pedestrian lights or islands.

You can choose the same route each time or a variety of routes during the year. During the "walk through" the Walk Leader should check on the location of toilets, shade

areas, water facilities, rest stops(including morning tea & lunch stops).

The Walk Leader should also assess the grade of the walk.

ON THE DAY OF THE WALK

It is advisable that the designated walk leader should attend at the starting point irrespective of the weather conditions (New or long term members may show up)”. If it is not convenient for the walk leader to attend then another reliable person could be requested to attend the start. The co-ordinator should be advised.

Bring walks sign-on sheet, activity report, incident report, temporary member forms, child risk waiver forms.

Leave comprehensive details of the walk with a reliable person including instructions as to what to do if you do not return near to the expected time.

On the day of the walk and also the evening before, the leader should check the weather conditions and in summer-fire situations, and decide if the walk will go ahead.

Commence an Attendance Sheet for the day & include where necessary, any known additional risks.

START OF THE WALK

For safety reasons a minimum of four(4) persons be on a group activity for it to be considered a group activity. Walks should only proceed with four(4) or more adults.

Welcome the walkers and introduce new walkers to the group. Introduce yourself and other Walk Leaders to the group. If necessary clearly describe any potential hazards to all intending participants and politely exclude any participant who, in the leader's judgement may have difficulty in completing the activity.

It is recommended that a map, compass, torches and first aid kit, plus any other appropriate equipment is brought to the activity.

Have everybody sign the attendance sheet (incorporating the risk waiver). Temporary Members are to also sign the Temporary Members Risk Waiver.

.Children under the age of 18 years must be accompanied by an adult. This person is to complete the Child Risk Waiver Form.

Check that walkers wear appropriate clothing, footwear, a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and have sufficient drinking water (i.e. 2 litres in hot weather). The leader should ask any participant who has not got appropriate clothing etc. nor is able to borrow such from another member, to exclude themselves from the activity.

Ask the group if there are any injuries or health issues that you should be aware of (i.e. that may impact on his/her ability to complete the walk in the expected time, and advise that they may prefer to tell you in confidence..All Participants are asked to report any incidents, no matter how minor they seem at the time.

If a walker is unwell they should not walk. Ask them to come to another walk when they are fully recovered.

Check whether anyone is carrying a mobile phone, a GPS or PLB (Personal Locator Beacon) for emergency use. Check whether any participant has a first aid certificate or medical skills.

Make sure all members of the walk are aware of the route and objectives of the walk, the grading and the approximate time it should take to complete it.

A warm up session could be considered.

Count the participants.

Appoint a “tail ender” and advise participants not to fall behind this person.

DURING THE WALK

*Watch out for hazards-particularly those that are unexpected, and inform other walkers.

*If there is an accident or injury, keep participants calm and follow any appropriate emergency procedures. Utilise leaders/walkers proficient in First Aid.

*Ensure that the pace you set is acceptable to all members.

*Allow for regular water breaks and rest stops allowing people to re-group. Ensure that fast walkers wait at rest stops long enough for slow walkers to have a long enough rest break.

*Remind walkers to stay together and always have a leader at the front and back of the group.

* All participants to wait at track junctions. This is an opportunity to re-group & stop the party being “spread out”

*Participant numbers should be checked regularly to ensure no one is missing.

*If any falls or injuries occur during the walk, record this on the Activity Report form and if necessary, complete an Incident Report form..

* As the leader you should keep a constant eye out for people having trouble coping whether it is from lack of fitness, inadequate equipment, illness or whatever. You should pace the walk and time the breaks to meet the needs of the weakest member of the party-not the speedsters and definitely not the needs of some planned objective. It is better to rest early than to risk pushing someone into collapse and to change the objectives rather than risk the party becoming stranded. If a member is having trouble coping it may be necessary to lighten their pack load, despite their objections.

AFTER THE WALK

*Head count-ensure that all participants have arrived at the finishing point.

*Ensure that all cars start before the last car leaves

* In hot weather , consider a cool down session.

* In cold weather a warm down session may be appropriate.

* Do a quick check to ensure that there have been no incidents-no matter how minor.

* Complete the Activity Report Form and **without delay**, send it to the Walks Co-ordinator with the Attendance Sheet etc.

* Contact the person with whom the trip details were left to inform them of your return.

WALK GRADES

The current walk grades of the Bushwalking Group are:

Grade 1: (Easy) Fairly flat walk on roads, fire trails and walking tracks.

Grade 2: Easy/Medium-mainly easy. but with some rough and/or steep sections, possibly some natural obstacles and some steps.

Grade 3: (Medium) May include rough/steep sections, many steps, a steep climb and descent, natural obstacles, some off-track walking.

Grade 4: (Medium/Hard) May include more of the above with a greater degree of difficulty and requiring navigational opportunities.

Grade 5: (Hard) The Bushwalking Group occasionally arrange a walk considered most suited to experienced and very fit walkers but it is conducted at a moderate pace. It is likely to include some or all of the following: rough/steep sections, steep climbs and descents, many steps, natural obstacles, off-track walking and almost certainly with navigational requirements.

Exploratory: Sections of walks may be “exploratory” i.e. not surveyed by the leader or not walked within the last 12 months. If a walk is “part exploratory” this will be noted in the walk

description. It is unlikely that such a walk would be publicised but should it be so, it would be mandatory for any walker to contact the Walk Leader before attempting the walk. This applies also to Grades 4 & 5.

SUITABLE EQUIPMENT/APPAREL/FOOTWEAR

Walkers will need:

- *Suitable non-slip protective footwear- quality hiking boots with ankle support are recommended, but are not always suitable for all walkers.

- * In all cases, break in new footwear.

- * Backpack, hat, wet weather gear, warm clothing.

- *Water – 1 litre minimum, more in hot weather or for long/hard walks.

- *A morning snack, and lunch for longer and all day walks.

- *Each leader should be in possession of a First Aid kit and it's the leader's responsibility to ensure that that kit or one similar is available on the walk. If any items are used ,it is the leader's responsibility to advise the co-ordinator to arrange replacement items(s).

- *Additional items such as sun screen, insect repellent, field guides, map, trowel, toilet paper, rope, insect netting, matches, small torch and a whistle. Make your own list.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES AND FIRST AID

Severe Injury:

- * Make contact with the closest walk leader either by calling out or sending two walkers to get them.

- * The leader will consult with two(2) other responsible walkers and decide on a course of action, especially if the group is to be split up, or there is to be an enforced overnight stay in the bush. Appoint these two(2) as deputies.

- *Assess the injured person.

- *Reassure the injured and the rest of the group. Tell the rest of the group and if necessary(in the case of an enforced overnight stay), declare all property-such as food, torches etc. as common property to be allocated and used as the leader deems fit and proper and to the best advantage of the group and the injured person

- *If within mobile telephone range, the leader or a person appointed by him/her should call 000 or 112 and ask for an ambulance

If in a remote area with no ambulance access, the **Personal Locater Beacon** should be activated..Know status of injured person and your location so the ambulance can find you.Any calls to police, relatives and/or rescue personnel should only be made by the leader, to avoid confusion

- *Cover person with extra clothing or a space blanket.

- *Stick together as a group or divide in accordance with the decision of the consultation group (see above)

- *Choose someone to go with the injured person to the hospital.

*Write an incident report, get witnesses statements and photos.

Minor Injury:

*Make contact with the closest walk leader either by calling out or sending two walkers to get them.

*Assess the injured person.

*If the injured person needs to see a doctor, choose two walkers to go with the injured person and get the nearest car to take the injured to a doctor.

*If the injured person does not need to go to a doctor, stay with them until they are ready to continue. Provide them with appropriate first aid kit items.

*Write an incident report, get witness statements and photos.

CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society Bushwalking Group practises minimal impact bushwalking.

Tread softly and take only memories away with you. The following are ten(10) everyday living things you can do when you're bushwalking:

1. Stay on the track.
2. Avoid walking on sensitive vegetation by staying on hard ground wherever possible and avoid easily eroded soils-delicate vegetation is easily damaged by tramping

3. Don't walk around wet areas on the track- this just widens the bog area.
4. Keep group size small so that you won't have a significant impact on the environment
5. Use fuel or gas stoves rather than wood fires, and **always** comply with fire bans.
6. Where there are no toilet facilities, bury human waste at least 100 metres away from watercourses to a depth of 15cm or take it with you if possible.
7. Leave the bush as you found it-don't pick flowers or break tree limbs(even if you think the wood is dead it provides an important habitat for many insects and other animals.
8. Take a look around before you leave lunch spots and camping areas to check that you haven't left any signs of your use.
9. Take all your rubbish with you, including organic waste such as apple cores and citrus peel, and do the right thing and collect any other rubbish you see on the way.
10. At the end of each trip take a moment to think about ways you could lessen your "footprint" even more on your next walk.

FIRST AID KIT /LEADERS PACK

*First Aid Kit should contain at least the following:

2 Triangle Bandages 2 Elastic Crepe
Bandages. Snake Bite Bandage

Painkillers, including for insect bites/stings

Scissors. Antiseptic cream. Band-aids.

Sterile gloves. Safety pins. Adhesive tape.

1 Space Blanket Steri-strips

*Leader's Pack should contain the following:

Maps. First Aid Kit Rope(s)

Whistle Torch Matches GPS
(if available)

Locater Beacon Reflective Item
(If appropriate) (e.g.Mirror/Compact Disc)

Mobile Phone Compass.

INSURANCE

Under current guidelines, all walkers should be paid up members of the Society and also covered by insurance by payment of a levy -currently \$20-00 per annum.

Any claim enquiries should be reported to the Walks Convenor

Any claims should be submitted ‘on line’ via the Bushwalking Australia website in a timely manner.

WEB SITE, CONTACTS, PHONE NUMBERS

Triple zero 000 is the Australian universal emergency call number but remember – no mobile coverage = no emergency call. A further number – 112, can also be utilised

Be prepared to climb to a higher point which may give more reliable coverage and reception.

The Conservation Society’s website can be found at : www.bluemountains.org.au. Within this site under a section sub headed “Bushwalking” there are details of all future walks, definition of gradings, names & contact details of the Walks Convenor and the various Walk Co-ordinators, plus other prudent information.

The Society has a current monthly newsletter called “Hut News” which is available to members via the website or by mail. In this newsletter are details of walks during the

current month which include the date of the walk, name of & a brief description of the walk, the grade, the leader's name & contact 'phone number, meeting place & time.

FORMS

The forms utilised by the Bushwalking Group are as follows:

Walk Attendance Sheet

Activity Report Form

Incident Report Form

Temporary Member Form

Child Risk Waiver Form

Monthly Activities Reporting Form.

Note: The Walk Attendance Sheet & Activity Report Form can be printed on the same sheet of paper-one on front, the other on the reverse.

The same applies to the Temporary Member Form and Child Risk Waiver Form.

The Monthly Activities Reporting Form is to be completed by Walk Co-ordinators & forwarded to the Registrar with other appropriate documentation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Blue Mountains Conservation Society Bushwalking Group-Bushwalker’s Guide”-2nd. Edition, February, 2007.

“A Risk Management Framework for the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs (NSW) Inc.

“Sydney Bushwalkers Handbook” 1st. Edition-
November,2002
Second Printing-January,2004.

“Walking For Pleasure”-NSW Sport & Recreation (2008)

The Society thanks the following members for contributions to the production of this handbook:

Jim Percy

Liz van Reyswoud

Bob van Reyswoud

Gail Schwedler

Judith Dyer

Maurice Kerkham

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Sue Nicol

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Ken Godbehere

Ros King Simone Bowskill Heather Hull

