

Guidance Notes for North of Scotland LDWA Social Walk Leaders

If you have any queries, please contact Bea Jefferson, Social Walks Co-ordinator
walks.northofscotland@ldwa.org.uk

Planning the walk

If you have an idea for a walk, contact Bea. If you are not confident about leading the walk, don't worry, we can buddy you up with a more experienced walk leader.

Bea will discuss a suitable date for the walk with you.

To put the walk on the website, Bea needs the following information:

- Start time and place. There's no standard start time. Take into account daylight hours, distance members will need to travel and any other factors such as public transport availability and Café opening times.
- Distance in miles and the total ascent if it is a long route.
- Approximate duration of the walk, if it is longer than 20 miles.
- Route description. As well as giving a general description of where the walk will be, this should convey how demanding the walk is – for example, by giving the heights of any summits and/or saying if the route is on good paths and tracks or pathless terrain. This is important so that members can assess if a walk is within their capabilities. If the expectation is that the route will be walked at a fast 'strider' pace, make this clear.
- General notes. Add anything else you think walkers should know, such as planned cafe stops, public transport availability and whether dogs are permitted. If the walk is not suitable for dogs, state this and say why this is the case.

Bea will put the walk on the website and check the entry with you before publishing.

Bookings for walks go to Bea at walks.northofscotland@ldwa.org.uk. (We used to put the walk leader's email on the website, but this has caused issues with junk email).

Bea will forward bookings to you. When replying to the person booking, please check you are replying to their email rather than the 'walks' email.

Before the walk

The walk leader normally checks the route before the walk (though this may not be possible where the walk is a long distance away). This is to ensure you are confident with navigating the walk and to check for potential hazards. If there are parts of the route which

could be a problem in bad conditions, such as stream crossings and exposed ridges, check for alternative route options.

We don't normally produce written risk assessments for each individual social walk. However, if the walk is particularly challenging, or if it is held in conjunction with another organisation (such as a walking festival) which insist on risk assessments, it may be appropriate to provide one. Bea will assist with producing a risk assessment if it is needed. A generic risk assessment for social walks is attached. Please read this.

If you would like a LDWA first aid kit for the walk and/or an emergency shelter, contact Bea.

A few days before the walk, check the weather forecast and consider implications for the walk. If the weather would make the walk or travelling to the walk hazardous, discuss cancellation or postponement with Bea.

After prolonged dry weather, check if any wildfire warnings are in place
<https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/outdoors/wildfires/wildfire-danger-assessments/>

You may wish to send out an email to walkers booked on the walk a day or two before the walk if there is additional information which it would be helpful to pass on. This could include a GPX of the route and a map, information on parking, encouraging car sharing, expected weather conditions, condition of paths underfoot, whether livestock is likely to be present, locations of toilets/shops etc, any equipment requirements e.g. head torch.

On the walk

Remember to bring a list of walkers and their emergency contacts. Currently we ask those booking to send their emergency contact details to the walk leader in advance. The LDWA has established a new system whereby they recommend walkers complete a register at the start of the walk which includes emergency contact details or where they can be found. Walk leaders can opt to try this new system if they would prefer not to collect emergency contact details in advance.

Welcome people to the walk, particularly any new members or guests. Let new members and guests know that we share photos on social media, and to indicate whether they would prefer not have their photo taken.

It can be helpful to give a short overview of the route and to say where we will be taking breaks. Some walkers like paper copies of the route if you are able to print these.

If you have a large group, you may wish to ask a member to be a back marker.

Keep the group together as far as practical unless it has been decided in advance to split into 'striders' and 'wasps' (walking at a slower pace). This may involve asking faster

walkers to wait at certain points. If you do need to split the group, for example if a walker feels unable to complete the full route, try to ensure a minimum of three people in any one group and that there is a nominated person who phone/text you to confirm they have got back safely.

If there is a potential hazard coming up, such as a busy road, unfenced cliff edge, cows with calves, give a verbal warning in plenty of time to make walkers aware (especially those with dogs).

After the walk

Send a list of names of walkers to Bea with a walk report. The names are kept securely on the LDWA system. The walk report is public and available on the website. Keep the walk report short - Bea often uses it for a Facebook post with selected photos from taken from the WhatsApp group. If you have a GPX file, send this to Bea for uploading to the website.

If there have been any accidents or incidents, let Bea know as we will need to complete an incident report and submit it to the LDWA.

The LDWA has further detailed guidance for walk leaders:

https://ldwa.org.uk/website/downloads/toolkit/Guidelines_on_Leading_Local_Group_Social_Walks_April_2025.pdf

Risk Assessment for North of Scotland Social Walks

Hazard	Mitigation
Trips and falls resulting in an injury	Route checked by the walk leader prior to the walk Description of the walk allows participants to gauge route difficulty The walk leader will give a verbal warning when approaching potentially hazardous sections of the route The walk leader will carry a first aid kit to deal with minor injuries The walk leader will carry a mobile phone to summon help in an emergency The walk leader will carry an emergency shelter if the walk is in a remote area where there would potentially be a prolonged wait for assistance
Walker becoming unwell or unfit to continue	Description of the walk allows participants to gauge route difficulty Route check by the walk leader allows identification of possible opt out points The walk leader will carry a mobile phone to summon help in an emergency The walk leader will carry an emergency shelter if the walk is in a remote area where there would potentially be a prolonged wait for assistance
River/stream crossings	Route checked by the walk leader prior to the walk and potentially difficult crossings identified Alternative routes and crossing points identified for potentially difficult crossings Weather conditions checked in advance of the walk and route amended if watercourses likely to be in spate
Weather conditions	Weather forecast checked in advance of the walk Walk cancelled/postponed if weather would make the walk or travel to the walk unduly hazardous Walkers advised prior to the walk if expected weather conditions could cause difficulty and reminded of sensible precautions
Livestock	Likely presence of livestock identified on route check by walk leader. If possible, the route should avoid cows with calves in spring/early summer Walkers with dogs advised of livestock in advance by walk leader where possible Dogs to be kept on leads around livestock (unless approached by cattle, when it is safer to release the dog)
Ticks and insects	Walk leader to ensure first aid kit contains tick remover

	Walkers advised prior to the walk if the walk route and weather conditions mean that ticks and insects are likely to be particularly problematic and reminded of sensible precautions
Getting lost or separated from group	Route checked by the walk leader prior to the walk The walk leader will keep the group together as far as is practical. In the event of the group splitting, the minimum group size should be three, with at least one person in the group being a competent navigator
Busy roads	Route checked by the walk leader prior to the walk When approaching a busy road, the walk leader will verbally warn walkers of the approaching hazard
Wildfires	The walk leader will check for wildfire warnings in advance of the walk Walk will be cancelled/postponed or rerouted if there are active wildfires in the walk area Any smokers in the group will be advised by the walk leader that they must not smoke in areas where wildfire warnings are in place