

**ALTRINCHAM & DISTRICT RAMBLING CLUB**

**HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY**

**and**

**GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS TAKING PART IN CLUB WALKS**

**It is the sole responsibility of each member of the Altrincham and District Rambling Club to make themselves fully conversant with the Club’s Health and Safety Policy**

**‘It is a requirement of the Insurance Policy taken out by The Club that any Member who introduces a guest to a walk or any other Club activity ensures that their guest has read the ‘Guidelines for Members taking part in Club Walks’.**

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during coach trips.	

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

**Ramblers Association** at:- [www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)

**Torro Lightning Impacts Division** at:- [www.torro.org.uk](http://www.torro.org.uk)

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# **1. Members (Walkers)**

## **The Club will not be responsible for any personal injury or loss or damage to personal property**

Only members, prospective members and their personal guests on the day are permitted on Club Walks.

It is the personal responsibility of Club Members, prospective members and guests to ensure that they:-

- are physically fit for the walk they have decided to undertake.
- are able to complete the walk unaided in the time allotted for that walk plus any time which may have to be added due to unforeseen or unexpected circumstances. If in any doubt you should seek guidance from the leader in advance of the walk. (Please!! At a reasonable time; not just before midnight the night prior)
- are properly clothed, have the correct footwear and other accoutrements for a full day in open country, paying due regard to the area being visited, the time of year and all weather conditions likely to be encountered.
- have adequate food and drink.
- carry a whistle and know the international distress signal (6 loud blasts repeated at one minute intervals).
- are fully conversant with this document.

Any walker who feels that a particular leader cannot be relied upon to guide a walk in the way they would like should not proceed with the walk.

### **Problems whilst on a walk**

Any walker who feels that the leader has strayed from a recognised route or into some other danger must immediately bring these concerns to the attention of the leader. As each walker is responsible for their own safety, if they feel at risk they must inform the leader of their concerns and that they are not prepared to continue the walk. Should the leader decide to continue the walk regardless of their concerns, those intending to leave the party must inform the leader of their intended actions. In the above circumstances, the walk leader must, after careful consideration, inform the party of the problem raised and his/her intentions.

## Dogs.

Dogs can only be taken on a Club walk with the prior permission of the walk leader. (Dogs must be on a lead at all times)

## Your Leader

Walks leaders agree only to guide members and friends over a route using recognised footpaths and other public rights of way. However, when in rough upland country, e.g. open access land, the route chosen may deviate from any recognised path.

## Start Point of a Walk

All rambles meet as stated in the Club's monthly circular.

A decision to cancel or change a ramble will be taken by the leader or his/her deputy at that meeting point.

Walkers who proceed directly to the start point of any walk must accept that they are unlikely to be informed of any changes to that day's programme.

## Transport

Members requiring transport must not wear dirty footwear or clothing whilst in a vehicle.

## Transport Costs

Payment of transport costs should be made without the need for a reminder from the driver.

## **2. Leaders**

### Qualifications

All Altrincham and District Rambling Club's walks leaders are volunteers. There is no warranty that any have received any form of training in Out Door Pursuits or Leadership or other formal training of any sort.

### Planning the Walk - Basic Guidelines

In planning a walk, you should think carefully about the following:-

- Available Paths or Open Country

Stay off roads as much as possible: metalled surfaces are hard on feet, and the constant wariness of traffic will diminish your enjoyment.

- Start and Finish Points  
Are they convenient, suitable and easy to find?  
Are public toilets nearby?
- Backmarkers.  
A backmarker, ideally with knowledge of the route, should be appointed before the walk commences.
- Transport  
There should be somewhere to park vehicles safely and without causing annoyance or obstruction to others.
- Lunchtime Halt  
It should be recognised that lunch and other stops will normally be taken in the open.
- Mobile Phone  
Carrying a mobile phone may be useful but should not be relied on in an emergency.

### Walk Description

Clarity in walks' descriptions is important in order for members to understand what to expect on the walk. Your walk description should be set out in the Club's Monthly Circular, giving the following details:-

Leader's Name

Date and Time at Meeting Point

Area to be visited, Car Park and Map Reference

Travel Cost

Walk Category:

- 1 Strenuous. Rough country with steep climbing and exposed ridges.
- 2 Fairly strenuous. Rough country with lesser gradients than 1.
- 3 Moderate. Easy gradients, undulating country.
- 4 Easy. Little or no climbing.

Distance In full miles and half miles only.

Route A brief guide to the walk and planned route.

### Terrain and Weather.

Prevailing conditions will affect walking speed; for walks in upland country, you should add about 30 minutes for every 300m/1000ft of ascent. More time may need to be added if muddy or windy conditions are anticipated.

## Newcomers

Although experienced walkers can walk much longer distances, a total of around 10 miles a day, or 5 miles in half a day in gently undulating countryside, or less over more hilly terrain, is enough for many walkers.

## Before the Walk

Introduce yourself as the leader of the walk and, without appearing officious, make sure that cars are parked responsibly, and, before setting off, give a brief description of the route, together with details of the lunchtime break, and other occasional stops, and estimated finishing time. If there are a number of new members or visitors, remind them of the countryside code. A count of the number of walkers should be made before the start and a list of names taken.

If there is much road walking involved, remind the group that we generally walk in single file on the right side of the road to face the oncoming traffic, crossing over when about to approach the inside of a sharp bend. Please note that the most recent version of the *Highway Code* gives contrary advice, but is referring to organised marches. The leader and back-marker are, however, recommended to wear reflective arm bands on the left arm on any walk involving considerable road walking.

Advise the party not to walk more than two abreast when crossing fields that are ploughed or in crop and stick strictly to the public right of way. If sheep and cattle are likely to be encountered, dog-owners should be advised at this stage, and reminded that Club Rules require dogs should be on a lead at all times.

Finally, appoint a backmarker (preferably someone who knows the route as well as you) and make sure he or she is known to the party, and that everyone knows the backmarker's function, i.e. to close gates and to ensure that no member of the party falls behind unseen. However, it is the leader's responsibility to ensure that contact is not lost with the rear of the party through a gap opening up in the middle.

## On the Walk

The party will soon become spread out. In many respects, this is preferable to having everyone bunched together, but try to avoid large gaps occurring by slowing down the pace and making frequent stops to allow those at the rear to catch up. Don't move on just as the back-markers appear, since their need

for a short rest will be, if anything, greater than those at the front. In addition, close up the party for complicated turnings, poor visibility or in woods.

In reasonable weather, lunch should not be rushed; for many, eating our-of-doors is one of the most enjoyable aspects of open-air recreation. 30 minutes should prove ample, but, in good weather, why not linger longer? Use the lunch break to give out information, such as details of future walks and events. Before leaving your lunch site, make sure all litter is cleared up and check that nothing has been left behind.

### After the Walk

Check that everyone is accounted for.

On your return home, inform the appropriate Walks Organiser of the number on your walk and the names of all participants.

## **3. Hazards**

### **3.1 Body Matters**

#### First Aid

All walkers should have a knowledge of basic **first aid**, particularly if you are walking in the uplands or travelling by yourself. A badly-strained ankle suffered in remote mountains can be a highly dangerous matter. It is advisable that at least one person in a party knows how to bandage an ankle or apply a splint to a broken limb, and hill walkers should be able to recognise the signs of hypothermia and how to respond. Every rucksack should contain a **first aid kit**. For casual, lowland walking, a few plasters and a small bandage may do, but those heading for the hills should consider taking plasters (various sizes), bandages (including triangular) and safety pin, aspirin, antiseptic wipes/cream, surgical tape and wound dressings. Ready-made first aid kits for walkers are available, including the popular Gregson Pack which comes with easy-to-follow instructions. Even more useful is a short course on basic first aid – contact your local St John Ambulance or Red Cross branch. *Remember – Fundamental to first aid is warmth, rest and reassurance.*

#### Emergencies

We should not rush to call out the Emergency Services for trivial matters. However, when a walker is seriously injured or becomes seriously ill, eg heart attack, diabetic coma, or the like, time is critical and you should act at once

and call for assistance. If a mobile phone is available and useable, the Emergency Services can often give advice as to the best actions to be taken.

**Note:** The Altrincham Rambling Club does not guarantee that there will be a qualified First Aider on any walk or club activity. It is therefore the responsibility of each member to ensure that first aid treatment of any kind accepted by them, or given to them, is to their requirements. If not, it **MUST** be refused.

### Temperature and Water

In cold weather the greatest danger is **hypothermia** or exposure; this occurs where the body temperature is chilled to a life-threatening level, and is aggravated by a wind chill. To avoid it make sure you have enough warm clothing and extra food and plenty of water.

In warm weather, the principal hazards are **sunburn, windburn** and **dehydration**. Sunhats, sun cream and water can prevent serious sunburn or heatstroke.

Do not under-estimate the amount of **water** you need. Doctors recommend drinking 1.5-2 litres of water a day even for an ordinarily active lifestyle, and you will need more if you are walking strenuously and/or the weather is hot. Do not wait until you are thirsty to drink. Still mineral or tap water is adequate; fizzy drinks are not recommended as they take longer to drink, a problem if you need to rehydrate quickly. Avoid drinking unboiled or unpurified water from streams, and when in the hills carry emergency water purification tablets.

### Blisters

Blisters are simply the result of friction but they can make a walk a miserable experience. To help prevent blisters:-

- Wear comfortable, good-fitting, worn-boots or shoes, especially on long walks.
- Wear good walking socks in the right size: consider wearing two pairs.
- Keep your toenails trim.
- Change your socks daily.
- Quickly remove any foreign bodies from your socks and boots.
- Ensure that the tongue and laces of your boots are arranged correctly and evenly.

- Check your feet carefully and regularly for any sign of rubbing and tenderness.
- Walk as much as possible in your boots so that hard skin develops at friction points.
- Act immediately you feel any friction or discomfort; blisters can form very quickly.

If you feel a blister developing, stop walking, take your boots and socks off and examine your feet. Consider applying some material cushioning or padding, or a breathable waterproof plaster, or possibly some strips of surgical tape.

There is some controversy over how to treat blisters when they do occur. Some walkers prefer to burst the blister carefully and immediately apply a sterile dressing. Others argue this runs the risk of infection, and instead recommend keeping the blistered area clean and protected. Chemists and outdoor shops now supply a wide range of foot care products, including blister kits with 'second skin' dressings providing cushioning from further friction. Use according to the manufacturer's instructions.

## Hygiene

Walkers should use proper toilets whenever possible. Otherwise, faeces should either be buried 15-20 (6-8 ins) deep and at least 100m from any watercourse or, if it is not possible to dig a hole of this depth, carried away in plastic bags. In hilly or coastal areas, where the soil layer is thin, this will often be the case. Soiled toilet paper should be burned or carried away; soiled tampons should always be carried away.

The same rules apply to dog waste, which can also be disposed of in clearly marked disposal bins often provided in parks and picnic areas. Allowing your dog to foul a footpath or a public open space may contravene local byelaws or the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996.

Animal faeces can carry potentially dangerous infections, such as E. coli 0157 which is now fairly common among cows, sheep and goats. The risk of infection to countryside visitors is fairly low, but someone could become infected if, for example, they touched animal droppings or infected mud, on the ground or a stile, then touched their mouth. There is more risk when camping or picnicking than normal walking. The surest way to protect against this type of infection is to wash your hands before eating, drinking or smoking, using soap, clean towels and preferably hot and running water, especially if you have placed your hands on the ground or touched mud or droppings.



## 3.2 Natural Hazards

### Dogs and Cattle

Treat untethered bulls and loose dogs with caution. Back away slowly, and report the incident to the police if you consider the situation unlawful as well as dangerous (see Basics of Footpath Law). Dogs can also be deterred by ultrasonic devices sometimes known as 'dog dazers'. (available from outdoor shops or from Dazer UK.)

Other livestock can often be deterred from following you too closely by turning to face them with both arms raised. Do not brandish a stick, as this may excite them, and use an ordinary speaking voice rather than shouting. Do not walk between a cow and her calf. If you are threatened by cattle when walking a dog, you should let the dog off the lead – it is better that they go after your dog than you.

### Insects

Insects can be a serious irritant, especially midges in Scotland in the summer. Consider carrying an insect repellent, and know how to treat bites and stings.

### Ticks and Lyme Disease

Ticks are tiny blood-sucking insects found in moist, coarse, permanent vegetation in woodland, heath and moorland, including bracken, leaf litter and decaying mats of grass and sedges, particularly in places where deer live, attaching themselves to passing animals and humans. Some ticks carry infections that can affect humans, the most serious of which is Lyme Disease. Although seldom fatal, lyme disease is a debilitating condition that can remain in the body for many years, affecting the nerves and occasionally even leading to chronic arthritis and heart conditions. Lyme disease is still very rare, though by no means unknown.

Ticks need to be attached to the body for at least 24-36 hours to transmit the disease and even if you come into contact with them, it should be possible to detect and remove them before any harm is done. The highest risk is in late spring and early summer when the tick is most active and feeding. If you walk through rough vegetation, especially during these months, consider taking the following precautions:-

- Wear close-weave long trousers and long-sleeved shirts, and keep cuffs fastened and trousers tucked into socks (light-coloured clothing make spotting ticks easier), shoes or boots rather than open sandals, or protect bare skin on arms and legs with insect repellent: DEET or permethrin can protect against ticks for several hours.
- If you find a tick, remove it immediately, preferably with tweezers. Grasp it firmly as close as possible to the skin, and pull firmly and steadily without jerking or twisting until it disengages itself – try not to squash since it could squirt blood. Wash your hands and the bite area afterwards, using disinfectant if available.
- Remember that dogs are also vulnerable to ticks: protect them with insect repellent or a tick collar.
- After your walk, carefully brush all clothing and examine your body carefully for ticks, including their favourite feeding places – the backs of knees, groin, under the arms and on the scalp.
- If part of the tick breaks off, or if you think any part of it may be left in your skin, consult your doctor immediately. If possible, take the tick with you, folded in sticky tape, so that it can be sent for analysis. If you think you have been bitten by a tick, seek medical advice straight away, indicating that you are concerned about the risk of Lyme Disease, since early treatment with antibiotics will normally prevent the illness developing any further.

Further information on Lyme Disease and ticks can be obtained from [NHS Direct](#) or from the charity [Lyme Disease Action](#) who have a range of free literature on the subject.

### Bracken

There is some evidence that exposure to large numbers of bracken spores can cause cancer in some animals, and people who spend a long time working in areas of bracken during hot weather, when spores are released, are advised to wear face masks. However, the risk to most people, including walkers, is probably so small as to be insignificant, and far outweighed by the health benefits of regular walking. For more information see the [Cancer Help](#) website.

## **3.3 General Safety Rules**

### Walking on Roads

When walking on roads, follow the advice in the Highway Code. Use the pavement if there is one and safe crossings wherever possible, help drivers to

see you and where there is no pavement walk on the Right, facing oncoming traffic, crossing to the other side before sharp right-hand bends. Take special care on country roads with no pavements where traffic may be moving very fast.

### Walking off-Road

Most club walks will involve walking on a variety of surfaces.

It is the personal responsibility of each walker to ensure that they are able to walk safely on all the types of footpaths, lanes and roads which may be encountered.

Walkers must be aware that the route to be used may, amongst other things, be:-

- Uneven
- Bolder strewn
- Steep
- Cross a steep hill or mountain side
- Have a loose surface
- Wet and slippy
- Muddy – sometimes deep mud

Or a combination of any or all the above plus, in the winter months, snow and ice. Walkers must therefore ensure that their footwear is suitable for the job, providing adequate support and plenty of tread. Walking poles or a walking stick should always be considered.

### Mountain Walking

In the most mountainous parts of Britain, in North Wales, the Lake District and, in particular, the Scottish Highlands, be prepared for more challenging weather, especially in winter. Conditions can vary dramatically from valley to mountain-top, and even in spring and summer, the Scottish Highlands can rapidly turn cold and windy. “Wind chill”, where the combined effects of high winds and cold air dramatically lower the body temperature, is dangerous and potentially fatal. It is therefore important to be properly equipped when walking high up on the mountains in bad weather.

Warm and waterproof clothing, a map, compass and good navigation skills are essential, and in addition to the standard equipment for country walks, you should also carry :-

- a **survival bag**: a heavy-duty bag for body insulation in an emergency, available from outdoor shops
- A **torch** and spare batteries
- **Additional warm clothing**, including hat and gloves
- **High energy rations** such as mint cake, chocolate, dried fruit
- **Water purification tablets**
- A **First Aid Kit**

If you are likely to meet heavy snow or ice, you should wear a pair of heavy-duty winter walking boots that can be fitted with **crampons**: these are metal spike attachments that give a better grip in icy conditions and not all boots are suitable for them. Also, you should carry and know how to use an **ice axe**. You will need to learn how to use axes and crampons properly: in the hands of a novice they can cause rather than prevent accidents.

### Crossing Rivers and Streams

A lot of Club walks will involve crossing rivers etc. On most occasions a suitable bridge will be available. This should always be used. However, where no bridge is available within a reasonable distance you may be forced to use a ford or simply wade across. Under these conditions:-

- Only cross if the river bed can be clearly seen, and you can accurately measure its depth. (A walking stick or pole is highly recommended when crossing a river in this manner.)
- If the river is in flood, fast-flowing, murky, or frozen over, or if the river bed is unknown, you should always find a different crossing point.

### Railway Crossings

Where possible, use a bridge. Never cross High Speed Tracks except by bridge, underpass or controlled crossing. Take special care when crossing railway lines using level crossings, especially “user controlled” crossings along footpaths where there are no automatic barriers or railway staff. Remember that it is much more difficult to stop a train than a car.

Always obey alarm warning signals and lights, keep children with you, and keep dogs on a lead. If there are no warnings or lights, **stop, look and listen**, then look again before you cross, remembering that trains travel faster than you think and that curving lines and overgrown vegetation can sometimes obscure the view. If it is safe, cross quickly, taking care not to trip on the rails.

On user controlled crossings, make sure you shut both sets of gates behind you.

When walking in a group, don't just follow the person in front. Everyone should take responsibility for their own safety and stop, look and listen before crossing.

For more information about safety on level crossings, contact [Network Rail](#).

### 3.4 Lightning

Lightning is one of the natural dangers that may be encountered from time to time whilst out walking.

The likelihood of being struck by lightning in Britain is quite low. However, if the weather forecast has predicted thunder and lightning, consider abandoning the walk or use a lower route.

#### If you are caught out!!

- Try to take shelter in a building.
- If your hair stands on end or nearby objects start to crackle and fizz, move quickly away as lightning may be about to strike. Fortunately lightning does not always follow!
- Do not shelter under trees.
- Avoid open spaces and exposed high points such as hill and mountain tops.
- Do not use an umbrella.
- Remove your walking pole from your rucksack. (Lightning loves pointy things.)
- Keep clear of metal items, ie farm machinery, metal railings and fences.

#### If no shelter is available

- Move to a place of lower elevation, ie a hollow or dry ditch.
- Crouch down with both feet together, tuck your head in and place your hands on your knees. **Do not lie down**

#### First Aid

**Get medical help at once.**

Also consider:-

- Place in the recovery position.
- Artificial respiration.
- Cardiac massage.
- Treatment of wounds.

**Note:** You cannot receive an electric shock from a struck person.

\* **Technical Information**

*If you place your feet wide apart or lie flat on the ground you will increase the difference in voltage across your body, so increasing the electrical charge you may receive from the radial ground currents if lightning strikes the ground nearby.*

Acknowledgements

The above is based on information from TORRO Lightning Impacts Division at [www.torro.org.uk](http://www.torro.org.uk)

#### **4. Walkers with Disabilities**

The same rules apply to a disabled walker as to all others wishing to take part in a club walk. They must be:-

- A club member.
- A prospective member.
- The guest of a member.

How easy it is for a person with a disability to join a walk will vary according to the walk and to the particular disability.

When people with special needs wish to take part in a walk, the following point must be borne in mind:-

- The Altrincham and District Rambling Club cannot accept any responsibilities with regard to medical or walking assistance. Carers must be in attendance.
- It is important that those with special needs and their Carers (if required) consult with the walk leader before the day of the walk to discuss all aspects of the planned route and walk timings.

## **5. Social Events and other non-walking events, including during coach trips.**

Only members, prospective members and their guests, and invited speakers, hoe-down callers or other visitors are permitted to attend these events. Participants are expected to behave responsibly at these events in order to minimise the risk of accidents. Excessive consumption of alcohol is not permitted.

*Issue Number 3 – 01.04.16*