



# **Guidelines for Walk Leaders**

**Updated January 2024**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Galway Walking Club is grateful to all members who volunteer their time and expertise to lead walks for the enjoyment of other club members.

This *Guidelines for Walk Leaders* document should not be regarded as exhaustive, but should be used as a resource to aid leaders in planning, preparing and leading club walks.

## 2. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- 2.1 Ensure that you are fit enough to lead the walk proposed.
- 2.2 Ensure you have the necessary experience and navigation skills for the walk proposed. Hillwalk leaders should be able to navigate by using a map and compass and recognise terrain/landscape features. Use navigation apps (e.g. Outdoor Active or Hiiker) or hand-held GPS devices as a backup only. Following digital tracks as the only means of route-finding is unacceptable. Leaders should avail of opportunities facilitated by GWC to upskill where necessary, through the Mountaineering Ireland Mountain Skills programme, Remote Emergency Care (First Aid) training or other courses.
- 2.3 In the case of hillwalks, the accumulated ascent for the walk should fall within the walk category guidelines: A hillwalks 800 – 1400 m, B hillwalks 600 – 900 m, C hillwalks up to 650 m. Consult the relevant Walk Coordinator for advice in relation to walk suitability, especially in the case of new walks.
- 2.4 Once the walk has been planned, carry out a reconnaissance of the route. Identify curtailed versions or escape routes for bad weather or emergency scenarios. Familiarise yourself with all potential hazards on the route. The walk start time and duration should be such that the walk is complete at least two hours before darkness.
- 2.5 Minimise time spent walking on public roads, particularly heavily-trafficked ones.
- 2.6 In advance of the walk, forward the details to the Walk Coordinator, including a description of the route or names of the hill(s) traversed, estimated distance and duration. Provide level of difficulty and accumulated elevation gain for hillwalks, not just the maximum elevation.
- 2.7 If a bus/minibus is needed, book and arrange payment in conjunction with the Walk Coordinator.

- 2.8 Source the group first aid kit (and storm shelter for hillwalks) before the walk.
- 2.9 The maximum numbers of participants recommended on walks are as follows: 15 on A and B hillwalks, 20 on C hillwalks and 40 on rambles/short walks, for safety and environmental reasons. In the event of greater numbers registered on the WhatsApp poll, extra leader(s) should be enlisted and the group should be split into two groups for the purposes of two distinct independently-led walks.
- 2.10 Check the weather forecast in the days prior to a walk. In the event of a Met Éireann Red or Orange Weather Warning, the walk must be cancelled. Use discretion in the event of a Yellow Weather Warning. Dangerous road conditions alone form a valid basis for cancellation. Cancellations should be made in consultation with the Walk Coordinator, and as early as possible.

### 3. ON THE WALK

- 3.1 Ensure that all walkers sign the Walk Book, thereby acknowledging the risks associated with walking and accepting personal responsibility. Photograph the relevant page and WhatsApp to the co-leader, sweeper or buddy.
- 3.2 For safety reasons, the minimum number of participants on any club walk shall be **five**.
- 3.3 Out of respect for the environment and landowners, minimise the number of vehicles travelling to the start point and oversee car parking to avoid obstructing access for locals/farmers.
- 3.4 Conduct a pre-hike briefing covering the route, expected weather conditions, safety procedures, and any specific guidelines for the day.
- 3.5 Exchange mobile phone numbers and agreed communication signals with co-leaders, walk sweeper, or walk buddy.
- 3.6 Set the pace for the walk appropriate to the walk category and the terrain, and to suit the main body of walkers in the group.
- 3.7 Walk on the right hand side of the road, in groups of less than 15. There should be adequate space between groups to facilitate the passage of vehicles.
- 3.8 Periodically count the number of walkers in the group.
- 3.9 Arrange breaks as appropriate, at, for example, the far side of any stiles/gates, when leaving a road, after crossing a stream/river, or at the end of a steep ascent.

- 3.10 Mentor novice leaders and facilitate any interest shown by others in maps/navigation and landscape features on the walk.
- 3.11 Exercise the authority to extend or curtail a route for the enjoyment of the group or in response to weather/wind conditions and failing daylight.
- 3.12 In poor visibility, ensure that the group walks in close formation and uses whistles and hi-vis vests to maintain audible and visible contact with each other.
- 3.13 If a walker deliberately strays from the group, invite them to sign out from the walk.
- 3.14 If it is necessary during any walk to facilitate the return of any walker(s) to the start/finish, the Walk Leader should arrange for 3 experienced and competent walkers to accompany the returnee(s), where possible. Telephone contact should be made with the leader when the party has arrived safely at their destination.
- 3.15 In the event of an accident or emergency, the Walk Leader should seek the assistance of any trained first aiders in the group. Mountain Rescue (999 or 112) can be called for assistance, to put them on standby, or for advice.
- 3.16 The Walk Leader should not leave the finish point until all walkers are accounted for.

#### **4. AFTER THE WALK**

- 4.1 At end of walk, the Walk Leader should record any incident or accident on the sign-in book and inform the Walk Coordinator.
- 4.2 The Walk Leader should nominate a suitable debrief point, ideally close to the location of the walk.
- 4.3 The Walk Leader should provide a brief summary of the walk to the Walk Coordinator, for forwarding to the GWC Secretary for inclusion in the minutes.