

# WALKING THE EXTRA MILE

## HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING AND LEADING COUNTRY WALKS



These guidelines have been put together using U3A Head Office Guide Lines published by Neil Meek, Walk Advisor 2011 and U3A Guidelines used by the Settle District and Cardigan District.

### Introduction

These notes are a collection of general information concerning Health and Safety on walks and are intended for the leaders of U3A walking groups. Some of this information may be considered to be common sense by experienced walks leaders but others will find some helpful hints.

Any specific safety concerns should be addressed to the U3A National Office or the U3A Walking Network Adviser for guidance. Where the U3A have issued specific advice on Health and Safety aspects these are highlighted in these notes.

The implementation of any safety procedures is at the discretion of the walking group leaders.

### General Information

General safety information, which could be made available to walkers by U3A group leaders maybe similar to the following:-

*“The person responsible for their safety and happiness on a walk is the individual. The U3A leader will lead the walk and will probably carry a basic first aid kit but they may not have specific medical training. The walk leaders will show their group the way on the walk but it is up to the individual to be careful in following them and to know their own capabilities and limitations.”*

**Walks organised by U3A groups automatically have public liability insurance cover, provided the walkers are U3A members. However, this is not a personal accident insurance and all members must be aware they walk at their own risk.**

Members are requested to walk behind the leader and to stay with the group at all times.

Should any member have any underlying health problems that may affect them during a walk or any medication that they may need, they should ensure that the medication is brought with them and that either the walk leader or a trusted companion knows what to do in the event of any problem.

Members are asked, if possible, to carry with them a contact name and telephone number which could be used should the need arise. This may be stored on a mobile phone under the name ICE (In Case of Emergency). The U3A do provide “In Case of Emergency” (credit card sized) cards for the use by its members.

It is important to carry adequate drinks, especially in the warmer weather, to replenish body fluids as it is easy to become dehydrated without realising it.

Despite all the above the objective of a U3A walking group is to enjoy the walking.

## Preparation

The U3A have recently issued a **risk assessment guide** entitled '**WALK LEADER CHECKLIST**' which includes a list of information for prospective walkers. Items required by walks' leaders are food/drink/compass/map/whistle/mobile phone. Additional items a basic first aid kit and survival bag.

A first aid kit suitable for walkers should include:-

- 10 plasters in various sizes
- 2 large sterile dressings for management of severe bleeding
- 1 medium sterile dressing for care of larger wounds
- 4 triangular bandages to support suspected broken bones, dislocation or sprains
- 1 eye pad in case of a cut to the eye
- 4 safety pins to secure dressings
- Disposable gloves to implement good hygiene

Ready-made first aid kits for walkers are available from outdoor shops and St. John Ambulance have a kit especially for walkers as do the British Red Cross.

**U3A walking groups are not required to have trained first aiders and the insurance advice is to contact the emergency services immediately in the event of a serious accident, even if there happens to be a member present who has attended a first aid course.**

Before setting out, it's also wise to find out if any of your companions are taking any medications and/or have any long standing illnesses such as diabetes or asthma. It's important that everyone understands what will be encountered during the day and is confident that this is within his/her abilities. Warn your members about possible hazards on a walk, e.g. stiles and if walking by water, a river or canal, should be aware of narrow/uneven footpaths, towpath mooring posts etc.

ICE (In case of emergency) recommend that your members carry either a U3A ICE card or if they carry a mobile (and made sure that anyone can access the relevant screen) they have entered the phone number of a person to who they would wish to be contacted should they have an accident on a walk. Emergency numbers will also be held by the walk leader.

## General Safety Rules

Walking in Britain should present no serious problems provided:-

- You're aware of your capabilities and don't overreach yourself
- You know where you're going and what to expect
- You can find your way
- You are properly equipped for the walk planned – i.e. proper walking boots, poles if required
- Take a sensible approach to the weather – i.e. bring wet weather gear
- Make sure all members of the group are aware of potential hazards such as stiles, busy road/rail crossings etc and the length of the walk
- For groups of large numbers (more than 20 walkers) nominate a back-marker equipped with a mobile phone and/or whistle to obtain assistance if necessary (though a back-marker is probably sensible for any size group)

## Planning

When selecting a route think carefully about the following:-

- The availability of paths or open country as road traffic can post a hazard
- Are the start and finish points safe for a group to congregate?

- The length of the walk should never be so much to tax unduly the capability and experience of your group
- Plan for alternative and escape routes should the weather conditions deteriorate
- Preferably recce the route with a colleague (someone who could act as the back marker on the actual walk).
- The day before the walk check and assess weather forecast, reviewing alternative routes if necessary
- Check personal gear, first aid kit, and mobile phone

Check your mobile phone is operative within the area of the walk and its battery is fully charged on the day of the walk. Encourage your members to carry their mobile phones (fully charged) on your walks (useful should they become separated from the group) and have a record of their phone numbers in your contact book.

Carry a camera or mobile phone/camera to record (and report) any unexpected hazard or obstacle along a footpath.

### **Provide a programme of walks to members that includes the following:-**

- Give distances in miles
- State the areas where the walks will be held
- Give an idea of what type of path, track, bridleway or road will be used
- Give some idea about stiles and hills
- Circular walks are best but linear walks can be arranged using public transport in the area
- State whether dogs allowed (*The Extra Mile group does not include dogs*)
- Choose a specific week and day in the month
- Have a specific start time and nominate an assembly point
- Publish the programme of walks in your U3A newsletter and on the website
- If your U3A has a regular monthly meeting then you could set up a "poll-station" to meet your members, give them the full details of the next walk in the programme and ask members to register their interest for the walk or else contact them by email giving the same information

### **Joining the Walk**

- Ask people to let you know if they are joining the walk
- Have a meeting place arranged that people can get to either by public transport or by car
- Try and car share
- People, if initially have said they are walking and then change their mind must let the walk leader know. Make sure people have the walk leaders mobile phone number
- Ask for other members who would be willing to lead walks.

### **On the day of the walk**

- Arrive at start early so as to welcome people, especially newcomers
- Check walkers on a list
- Appoint a back-marker
- Give walk details, estimated return time, points of special interest
- Set a reasonable pace, watch for stragglers
- Concentrate on navigation
- Manage flow of party over stiles, through gates, rest stops
- At end make sure everyone has returned to their cars

## Incident Management

Even a relatively small incident can be exacerbated by other factors or trigger other events. As the leader of the group, you will need to make decisions about the most appropriate course of action. You will need to balance the range of risks for all concerned – sometime a daunting task. The first priority is to move everyone away from immediate danger. Next, you must assess the state of the injured person applying standard first aid practice.

Clearing a blocked airway is probably the most important life-saving action a first-aider can take. Most blocked airways can be cleared by following simple, basic manoeuvres. The three common techniques (tipping the head back, chin lift and jaw thrust) are best learnt on a practical training course.

The U3A have an **ADVICE SHEET** which covers **FIRST AID** and a copy is available from the U3A National Office or The U3A Walking Network Adviser.

The essential advice is as follows:-

- In the event of an accident or a U3A member being taken seriously ill, regardless of whether there is a member present with a current first aid qualification, you are advised to contact the emergency service immediately (999/112). You must state the location where you are including:
  - o The address and postcode – if relevant
  - Or
  - The map reference (if you are familiar with the Ordnance Survey Grid Reference System and are confident that you can give an accurate number
  - Or
  - As precise a description as you can
- Your phone number or the phone number you are calling from and as clearly and concisely as you can, what has happened.

First aid treatment should only be administered under their direction, unless you are facing an emergency i.e. the casualty is struggling to breathe normally or is unconscious or has severe bleeding. If a trained first aider is present then that person should be the one to make the emergency call and follow any instructions. In the event of a fall, keep the person warm and dry – DO NOT attempt to move the person unless they are in immediate danger.

## Conclusion

Walking with the U3A is the most popular, enjoyable and safest form of physical exercise. However in view of the age group of our walkers, the walk leaders should be aware of possible Health and Safety issues and how to deal with accidents

***These guidelines have been adopted by  
the Extra Mile Walking group in the Gosport U3A***

With thanks to:-

Neil Meek, U3A Walk Advisor, November 2011 for main points

Settle district and Cardigan U3A for extra pointers