

Guidelines for leading OVA walks (v4 2025)

Introduction

Walk Leaders are the lifeblood of the OVA's Programme of Walks. We value the enthusiasm, experience and expertise that you bring to a walk, as well as your desire to share your passion for the 'great outdoors'.

A skillful leader can meet the various needs of members of the group, and leave them happy, tired and stimulated, having enjoyed a satisfying outdoor experience. This is your reward for all the hard work.

Planning and Preparation

First decide on the route you think is suitable for your walk, taking into account the length in time and distance, difficulty of the terrain and points of historic and environmental interest. Themed walks are always popular. Then choose a date that suits you. Remember that conditions, views and difficulty will vary according to the season. You may have to be flexible with dates as your walk must fit in with the overall programme avoiding too many walks within a given period or in the same area. Your suggestions for a walk can be submitted to the Walks Team via e-mail to walks@ova.org.uk at any time and the sooner the better.

1. Walk Programme Schedule

The Walk Programme Schedule is published in the quarterly OVA Newsletter - the Walks Team will send an e-mail request to walk leaders for proposed walks for the appropriate months in time to meet the publishing deadlines.

The Walks Team can add more details about walks and/or add walks to the programme after the Newsletter publication deadline via the OVA website, The Walks WhatsApp group and Facebook. The website listing is the definitive version of the programme and can be amended at any time by sending a message to the Walks Team by e-mail at walks@ova.org.uk.

A successful walk can be repeated as many times as you are prepared to lead it. You will know best when it is time to withdraw a walk from the Programme, either because interest from walkers has waned or perhaps you feel that the route needs 'refreshing' and you are no longer as strongly motivated to walk the route. You might consider walking the route in the opposite direction or changing the date to a different season. Assuming you retain your enthusiasm, it can be a difficult decision

to make, since for some members a familiar walk that they enjoy, with a leader they know, is exactly what attracts them to a particular walk. Additionally, recent arrivals to the area might well be attracted to, what is for them, a new walk.

2. Walk Programme Contents

We need to know your proposed date, day of the week, start time and start point with a map reference (optional postcode and/or What3Words), the length in miles (and kilometres if you wish), the duration (based on an estimated 2 miles per hour and including stops), a brief description of the route and places of interest, and something about the terrain. Include travel directions, especially if there is a bus option, and encourage car-sharing if possible, especially for more distant starting points. A convenient meeting point for car sharing is the Newton Poppleford Recreation Ground car park, but we have been asked not to use it at weekends, when the car park off School Lane behind St. Luke's church is a good substitute. Remember that Bus Passes can only be used after 9.30am on weekdays, so if an early start is needed it might be better to plan the walk for a Saturday. If you are promoting a special interest, then make that clear, together with any additional equipment walkers should bring along. Finally, inform people if they should bring coffee, lunch or tea, or whether there is an option to purchase refreshments during and/or at the conclusion of the walk.

3. Additional Factors

Of course the more familiar you are with the route, the more confident you will be and better able to give your attention to managing the Group. Certainly, a final recce not more than a couple of weeks and preferably closer to the day of the walk, will provide the best safeguard that you will not be surprised by that bridge that has been swept away! However, even the best-planned walks occasionally need to be adapted to accommodate exceptional and/or unforeseen circumstances.

When planning the route, you must observe the Country Code and use only Public Rights of Way and Permissive Paths (ref. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000). The O.S. map indicates Access Land, which allows the public 'freedom to roam' with the responsibility to observe the lambing and bird nesting season.

4. Walk Cancellation

It is very rare that a walk must be cancelled but if you are forced to take such a reluctant decision before the day, please inform the Walks Team by e-mail at walks@ova.org.uk. If we cannot find a replacement walk leader, then we will ask the Webmaster to cancel the walk. Cancelling a walk on the day is even more unusual but in both circumstances, please be sure to be present at the advertised start point of your walk to explain to any potential walkers. Don't forget that our walks are also advertised to non-members. For distant walks (the start point is more than 30 minutes driving time from your home), you have the option to say "booking required" which gives you a means of contacting all participants and relieves you of the need to go to the start point.

Safety

So long as you have taken all reasonable steps to ensure the route is safe, have warned participants of potential hazards and prevented reckless behaviour that might endanger others, then it remains for adults to manage their own risk. Please continue to choose to make your walks challenging, since for many they provide the most satisfying experience.

It is rare, but you should be prepared for illness or injury to one of our members that preclude them from continuing, even with support. In those circumstances you may decide to phone 999 or 112 for the emergency services, or perhaps a friend or family member of the injured, who will provide assistance, and of course you will need to give your exact location. You are provided with a Basic First Aid Kit to enable you to deal with minor injuries such as cuts, stings and strains. Please carry the kit, which is light and compact, at all times, keep it stocked and return it to the Walk Team should you cease to lead walks for the OVA. There is no expectation that you will proffer first aid treatment beyond your level of competence, and of course there is always the option to call the Emergency Services. Carry out what first aid you can, but do not administer medication, although you may assist the patient to take their own medication; make the patient as comfortable as possible and leave them in the company of two responsible people, while you continue to lead your group to a safe location, in what might be wild country.

If, in the unlikely event of an accident requiring treatment from you, it would be sensible to keep a written note of the accident, recording the name of the person, date, time, location, type of injury and the action taken.

In the unlikely event that a member is going to sue the OVA for injury incurred on a walk, you should be reassured to know that the OVA is covered for Personal Accident of "Club Officials, Employees and Members (occupational activities only, non-sporting accidents)". Limits of Personal Indemnity are "£5,000 for Death, Loss of eye, Loss of limb, Permanent Total Disablement, Loss of eye or limb by paralysis". "The age limit in respect of Personal Accident is extended up to and including members aged 80. The member and leaders aged 80 to 85 will be covered only under the Personal Accident Extension on the Policy, however this excludes Permanent Total Disablement". Walk Leaders and OVA members have Public Liability cover up to £5,000,000.

Leading the Walk

Carry your map, route plan, first aid kit and fully charged mobile phone.

Arrive in good time, introduce yourself, start getting to know your group and ensure everyone is appropriately clothed and shod. Provide a brief overview of the route and suggestions for refreshment stops. Mention that the Walks Team is always pleased to receive photos and reflections on a walk from one of the group; the text can be entertaining, informative and of any length. All are published on the website

and some in the Newsletter. They form an interesting record and may entice others to come next time.

Count (and remember) the number of walkers. Appoint a 'Back Marker', preferably someone you know, and who also has a map and knows the route, and will help to keep the group together. Try not to lose anyone! With a very large group, in rough country or on busy road sections, it may be advisable for the Leader and Back Marker to wear 'high-visibility' jackets, which the Walks Team can provide beforehand. You should of course have each other's mobile number. Remember to start up your GPS device, if you are carrying one, and remind others in the group to do so.

Don't allow individuals or small groups to get so far ahead that they cannot see or hear you. Include frequent opportunities to allow the group to close up and allow sufficient time for stragglers to recover before moving on; invite them to set the pace at the front.

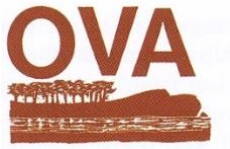
Always have an 'escape route/plan B' prepared, in case the ability or fitness of the walkers, extreme weather or difficult and remote terrain force you to alter your plans. Carry phone numbers for taxi firms local to the walk, in case of emergency, or if the planned public transport does not materialise.

At the end of the walk, take a moment to gather the group together and invite feedback. Encourage any non-members to join the OVA by giving them membership application forms. Check whether anyone is intending to submit photos and/or an account of the walk. If not, consider doing it yourself. Thank everyone and welcome them to the next walk. Do you know when and where the next walk is?

After the Walk

As soon as you can, please let the Walks Team know your thoughts, the number of participants and length of the walk by e-mail to walks@ova.co.uk. Also, pass on any feedback from the participants to the Walks Team.

OVA Walks Team January 2025



Leader's Contact Details and Walk Proposal

Name: _____

Address: _____

Town: _____

Postcode: _____

Tel. number: _____

Mobile number: _____

Email address: _____

Suggested Walks: (Title of walk, potential dates, start point, map ref. & OS map number, what3words, start time, length, duration, geographical area, terrain, car parking and/or public transport access, car-sharing arrangements, refreshment plan, e.g., "bring a picnic lunch" or "pub lunch available", plus anything else of interest.) Please continue over the page if you need more space.

Please send completed form to:
Walks Team at walks@ova.org.uk