

Guidelines for leading bushwalks



Background

The Central Australian Bushwalkers club began in 1982 as a group of bushwalkers exploring and enjoying the ranges around Alice Springs. It is an incorporated association and a member of Walking Federation of SA (Walking SA) with Public Liability insurance. The Club is the contact in the region for bushwalking information and issues; it recognises Aboriginal knowledge and respect of the lands and places where walks are arranged. These guidelines were developed to clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations.

Leaders

Although leaders are volunteers, they are responsible for ensuring walkers are properly informed about the walk, the role of the leader, and requirements for comfort and safety.

Minimum leader requirements

- Bushwalking, navigation and group management experience
- Local knowledge of tracks, terrain and weather

Ideal leader requirements

- Senior, Remote Area or Wilderness First Aid, including current CPR
- Accredited bushwalking leadership and navigation training
- Knowledge of local risk factors through previous experience on the walk

Leader mentoring

Informal mentoring can encourage and develop new leaders and ensure a minimum standard of leadership skills in the club. New leaders should attend walk planning meeting and a number of walks before leading a walk. On the first walks they lead, a mentor could be nominated to observe their leadership and provide feedback at the end of the walk.

From time to time the club may seek to provide more formalised training and mentoring, and club members are encouraged to attend these programs when offered.

Walk classifications

Leaders should provide a brief description of the walk on the club's walk schedule — enough information for intending walkers to make an informed decision about their preparedness/ability to undertake the walk.

Descriptions should include whether on- or off-track, type of terrain, length of walk, duration of walk, any difficulties or challenges that may be encountered (eg: some rock scrambling, exposed sections, some swimming required), maximum number of walkers, whether members only walk, 4wd required for access, any aspect unique to the walk. Descriptions can also include indicators such as "for experienced walkers only" or similar.

The Club is currently preparing guidelines for walk grades and applying them to walks that we regularly undertake.

Group sizes

Appropriate group sizes minimise social and environmental impact and assist group management. Group maximum should be noted on the walk schedule. Maximal group sizes depend on leader experience and comfort; presence and quality of tracks; difficulty of the walk; impact on tracks; and weather conditions. Victorian National Parks Association suggests the following:

- Maximum 20 for walks on tracks in stable areas
- Maximum 10 to 15 for walks off-track

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- Maximum 4 to 8 for overnight pack walks

To enable the group size to be restricted without discouraging people from walking, more than one walk can be scheduled. If there are more people interested on the day, suggest an alternative walk as noted above.

Maximum group sizes are at the discretion of the walk leader at all times.

Preparation

Leaders are responsible for:

- obtaining any permits from Parks & Wildlife (for overnight camps in national parks away from established Parks campsites). Permits forms are available from the Parks & Wildlife website (see CONTACTS LIST for the direct link). Allow at least one week for processing.
- obtaining any permits from Central Land Council (for walks on Aboriginal freehold land). Permits forms are available from www.clc.org.au . Allow at least one month for processing.
- obtaining permission from pastoral stations (for vehicle access to and walks on pastoral land). Refer to the Contacts List on the club's website for station phone numbers and common walks thereon.
- ensuring they have the club's emergency equipment (first aid kit, satellite phone and/or EPIRB, GPS) and relevant maps available for the walk. Collect the emergency equipment items from the nominated club member (refer to club website) who is storing this equipment.

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Pre-, on and post-walk information and requirements

Leaders should be satisfied that all participants are capable of safely completing the walk and provide enough information to ensure their comfort.

On the phone – inquiries and bookings

- Explain that bushwalking in Central Australia can be difficult, challenging and occasionally dangerous. Do not underestimate the toughness for inexperienced walkers. Ideally, people new to the club should undertake at least one club organised on-track walk before being considered for participation on an off-track walk. Walk leaders have the discretion to enforce this requirement if they do not feel comfortable with a person's ability to undertake a walk.
- Describe fitness required for the walk, and the right of the leader to decide whether or not people participate
- Explain that all walkers walk at their own risk, and leaders are not guides
- Describe route, terrain, walk duration and approximate length, expected return time
- Explain what to bring, including food, water (minimum 3 litres), hat and sunscreen, clothing and equipment, a whistle, basic first aid equipment and money for petrol. In winter, a space blanket, matches or lighter and headlight or torch should also be considered. Explain that the leader may check inside people's packs to ensure they have necessary items
- Find out if participants have any medical problems which may affect their ability to safely complete the walk, including allergies, asthma, heart problems, injuries. Leaders have the right to refuse participants if they feel the participant will be unable to complete the walk within the planned time frame.
- Offer alternatives to callers if you are not confident of their ability. These include well-known, marked walks such as Ormiston Pound Walk, Woodlands Trail at Simpsons Gap, Trepkina Gorge, and the Alice Springs Telegraph Station.
- Organise meeting time and vehicles
- Inform intending participants of walk fees and sharing petrol costs
- Record full names and contact details of all walkers

At the meeting place – before departure

- Reiterate information about challenges of walking in Central Australia, difficulty of the walk, requirements for food, water, sun protection, first aid, and equipment. Ensure that you as leader are confident that people will be able to complete the walk safely. The leader has the right to refuse a participant at the meeting place if they are not confident of the participant's physical fitness to undertake the walk, or they do not have the appropriate clothing, footwear and equipment.
- Remind people that as leader you have authority to alter the planned walk to suit the conditions (weather and/or terrain) and abilities of the group. Appoint a deputy leader.
- Ensure walkers are prepared, and review inside packs to ensure that everyone has appropriate equipment.
- Provide information and show maps of the walk, including landmarks and features, and time required
- Ensure you have all of the club's emergency equipment with you (satellite phone, EPIRB, first aid kit)
- Remind walkers to maintain contact with the group, especially when off trail; not to wander off, race ahead, drop behind; and let others know if they can't keep the person ahead in sight
- Ensure names of all participants are recorded
- Organise vehicles
- Nominate a person to be at the rear of the group
- For walks involving key and car swap, select a second leader familiar with the walk for the other group. Both leaders should carry communication equipment, have a plan for leaving or swapping keys, and an arrangement if the other group does not arrive at the agreed meeting point. Groups need to be able to walk independently

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On the walk

- Take regular breaks (e.g. 10 minutes for every hour or as suits the group) and ensure everyone is present and rested before resuming the walk. Take head counts at each break to ensure no-one is lagging behind.
- Carry list of participants, map, satellite phone, first aid kit; also GPS and compass if required
- Monitor the progress of the walk, to ensure you will be able to finish the walk within daylight hours. Monitor the wellbeing of participants to ensure nobody is struggling, and everyone will be able to complete the walk. The leader has the right to turn the group around should they believe they will be unable to complete the walk safely in daylight hours.
- Ensure the group remains together. If participants wander off in their own direction, or indicate they wish to undertake a route alternative to that planned by the leader, remind participants that they will follow the directives of the leader at all times during the walk.
- In the case of an emergency, the leader is to evaluate and construct a plan to ensure the safety of all walkers, and communicate this plan to all participants. Other walkers can be consulted to formulate a plan.
All participants are to comply with the plan, and act as directed by the leader or nominated deputy.

After the walk

- Collect petrol money (see below for rates) and reimburse drivers
- Collect walk fees from visitors and non-members (\$5 each)
- Ensure everyone has completed the walk before leaving
- Return club equipment; arrange for replacement of used first aid stores and batteries if needed.
- Write a brief report of the walk (template from the club website). This report includes details such as group size, weather, description of the walk, any difficulties encountered (ie: thick vegetation, water crossings, difficult terrain), a sketch map of the route taken, anything else the leader deems relevant.
- Lodge post-trip report and fees collected with the club Walks Coordinator.

Driver responsibilities

In terms of the potential of major injury or death, driving to and from the walk is probably the riskiest part of bushwalking. Drivers should put the safety of their passengers (their fellow bushwalkers) first. Stop or share the driving if tired or unwell.

Due to post-walk fatigue, drivers should be 'Sober Bob' and refrain from alcohol and other drugs.

As a passenger, please inform the driver to slow down or pull over if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Petrol money

To ensure walkers continue to agree to the use of their vehicles, costs are shared. Standard rules ensure predictability and fairness. The cost of petrol of the trip is estimated generously and divided among all the walkers. Money is pooled and shared equally among the drivers. Minimum petrol money is \$5-00/person. Any surplus monies (ie: a driver does not want to receive payment) are to be given to the club secretary (with the walk report) to be deposited into the club kitty.

To assist leaders, a chart of each passenger's petrol share for many of our walking destinations has been developed, and can be accessed [here](#).

Vehicle hire

If commercial vehicles are hired (typically a 4WD) then the cost should be shared among all walkers, including the leader.

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Contacts

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