

## Dalmeny Narooma Bushwalkers Inc. Walk Leader Training Manual

### Welcome

Thank you for your interest in becoming a walk leader for Dalmeny Narooma Bushwalkers. As a leader, you are an important and crucial part of the success of the club. Your involvement as a volunteer leader is greatly appreciated.

### Role of a volunteer walk leader

A good walk leader is

- enthusiastic about bushwalking;
- happy to lead others on a bushwalk;
- observant of peoples' well-being; and
- aware of duty of care and other procedures that help keep us safe in the bush.

### Club activities

When a walk is proposed, nine pieces of information are needed. This information is required for the walks organiser to add your activity to the program.

1. **Title** - identifying the specific location and the locality, eg. "*Battery Track, Gulaga National Park*"
2. **Brief description** to enhance the title, eg. "*following bush & bike tracks down to a beautiful creek, and returning on a shaded fire trail*"
3. **Extra descriptors** to highlight more challenging sections (if relevant), eg. "*3 kms off track*", "*1 very steep uphill section*", or "*rock scrambling around headland requiring good balance*"
4. **Grade**: the overall grade of the walk, eg. Medium
5. **Distance of the walk**, rounded up, eg. 11 kms
6. **Time**: total walk time stated in hours, including morning tea, lunch and other breaks but not including car travelling time, eg. 5 Hrs
7. **Departure time & meeting place**: typically 9 am. However, you have discretion on when to meet, especially if weather is warmer or the drive is longer. The two main meeting places are listed on the program. Some walks have a 2nd meeting place and time. You may choose another meeting place.
8. **Driver donation** for car pooling. You provide the driving distance (in kms) between the initial meeting place and the car parking place at the start of the walk. The walks organiser then calculates the driver donation for the return drive.
9. **Your name** and contact phone number

Club walk records: the new method for storing walk records needs your information to be typed on to a new Google or Word document, and then converted to a PDF. Later, together with an overview map (jpeg file) and any other digital data (eg. a gpx file), your PDF will be stored in a Google folder. This will be stored in the club's google cloud account and accessible from the website. Your information will assist future leaders select walks to lead. Note: if, after completion, you learn any additional information about your walk (for example, not suitable for a hot day; needs an outgoing tide and low swell for beach section), this information should be added to your walk record.

### Other issues

Additional procedures help to keep us safe when bushwalking. Note that

- no child under 18 years is allowed on a club bushwalk;
- no dogs are allowed;
- visitors are welcome if they are prepared for your bushwalk. All visitors are considered 'temporary' members and sign the risk waiver acknowledgement (walk attendance form);
- no walks are conducted on days of Total Fire Ban or if there is any risk of a fire, including controlled burns, coming close to the walk locality. Consult the FiresNearMe App (NSW Rural Fire Service) and discuss with the walks organiser if unsure;

- you can cancel or change a walk detail (eg. your start time) for your activity at any time. Walks are also cancelled if the weather or fire threat is considered too risky. If you need to cancel, you need to post a clear, short message on the club's Facebook page. For example: "WALK CANCELLED for Thursday 18 March – Camel Rock". You do not need to provide a reason. You should also ring the Walks Organiser to let them know of the cancellation. If you can't post a notice on Facebook, contact one of the committee to do it for you.
- any government, national park or state forest regulation will be followed if they apply to your walk. When you are planning a walk, check the authority's website for any matter that might affect your walk;
- if your walk crosses private property, you will need appropriate permission to be on that land; and
- no outside fund raising is allowed at any club activity.

### **How to choose a walk to lead**

It is always best to lead a walk in an area in which you are familiar, especially for your initial walks. Walks are graded Easy, Easy-Medium, Medium, Medium-Hard, and Hard. Any grade of walk is welcome. The easy or medium grades often prove the most popular with members so offering an easier walk is a good starting point for new walk leaders. Further information on walk grading is below.

If you are unsure on where to walk, look through the Google Folders of walk records, which is searchable by location (the title of the folder). There is a link to the data via the club's website at the bottom of the Governance page, in the members area. This may give you some ideas for reoffering a walk, or you might make a variation of a walk previously undertaken. Alternately, you can discuss any ideas with other walk leaders. All ideas are welcome.

Once you become a walk leader, it is hoped that you will try to offer one walk for every program.

### **Reconnaissance**

A reconnaissance walk (a reccie) of a prospective route should be undertaken in advance. This is helpful for many reasons, not least of which is to decide if your walk is suitable. A reccie should never be conducted alone. Always take at least one other person with you and tell a third person where you are going.

It is recommended that you 'authorise' the walk by emailing the secretary with brief details of (a) where you are going – try to be precise (b) when you plan to do this reccie, and (c) who else is going with you. If any person is not a club member, you will need to fill in an attendance form. Email your notice of intent in advance of your reccie. Authorisation means that your reccie is covered by the club's insurance. The secretary will save your walk notice until it is no longer required.

A preliminary walk allows the leader to do several important things, including

- finding a good car parking spot at the start, and identify if there needs to be a car limit;
- deciding if the walk will be a circuit or an out-back walk, or if it will require a car shuttle;
- noting the distance of the walk and how long it takes to complete with breaks;
- checking mobile phone coverage during the walk, noting where coverage can't be found (important in case the personal locator beacon needs to be carried);
- identifying any hazards or more challenging sections that will affect the walk's grade or need to be included as descriptors (eg. very steep fire trails; off-track bush bashing; creek walking);
- finding any sections of the route that might need to be avoided;
- checking if tide times or time of year (exposure to sun) will affect when the walk can be offered;
- identifying suitable rest stops (usually morning tea and lunch); and
- noting the location of any useful facilities, such as public toilets or water taps.

### **Duty of care**

When undertaking an activity such as a bushwalk, the club has a duty to make certain that all reasonable steps are undertaken to ensure the safety and well-being of participants.

As walk leader, your duty of care extends to circumstances that are reasonably foreseeable. Therefore, if you are unsure of any issue that may arise on your walk, such as a rock scrambling section, you are encouraged to talk over your concerns with other walk leaders. A collaborative approach to everything, including a walk's preparation, helps make this club successful.

You have the discretion to limit the number of people on your walk and also to set the standard of fitness and experience required.

### **Risk identification and grading a walk**

Bushwalking has inherent risks that differ from walking on flat pavement. A leader identifies any extra potential risks or challenging situations on their walk so potential walkers can make an informed choice. Overall, the club offers a diverse range of bushwalks for different abilities and interests. Your walk does not need to cater for all.

Our bushwalks are graded and described on the program and website as:

1. Easy means gentle grades and mainly good surfaces
2. Medium includes rough and steep sections and could require some climbing over natural obstacles
3. Hard are more strenuous walks involving steep ascents or descents over rougher terrain, and/or longer distances than normal. Suited only to fit and experienced bushwalkers

It is common for walk leaders to use an 'in-between' grading, such as Easy-Medium or Medium-Hard. This is to signal that the walk is more difficult than the lower grading in one or two sections, but not hard enough overall to be labelled as the next grade. If you are unsure of the grading, err on the side of caution, describing a walk as harder than it might be.

### **Proviso to gradings**

Because walk gradings are subjective, the club states this proviso on the walks program. This is to ensure that walkers have every opportunity to ask more questions and inform themselves and to be prepared.

### **Descriptive phrases of unusual or more challenging sections**

Brief descriptive phrases provide additional information and are important for risk management. For example, a walk might also be described as "*off track for some of the walk, recommend wear long pants, long sleeves & gloves*". Another example might be "*coastal bush tracks and beach walking, with short sections of uneven rock platform walking, requiring good balance and scrambling*". These descriptors provide useful additional information about what to expect. Try to provide as much useful information about your walk as possible.

If there is an exposed section on your walk or a place requiring clambering up or down a near-vertical section of rock, it is essential to inform potential participants. Other examples include the likelihood of wet feet or slippery surfaces, such as those found on rock platforms or along creeks.

### **Changes to your walk – how to notify walkers**

You may find on a later reccie that your walk has become more challenging since it was published. For example, newly fallen trees now require a long diversion or more off-track bush bashing; or heavy rainfall now makes your creek walking section more challenging. If this is the case, write the additional information in succinct language and post this information on the club's Facebook page. Ensure that the date and title of walk are prominent in the notice. For example: "Thursday 18 March 2024 – Camel Rock loop: recent rains have made track muddy and slippery. Recommend carry a walking pole and have spare shoes in car."

### **'Normal' distance**

There is no normal distance but generally a club walk is between 8 kms and 14 kms. A longer than normal walk is over 15 kms. Long walks are rated as hard or medium-hard (depending on the terrain) because they require a higher level of fitness to complete. It is also possible to offer just a morning or afternoon walk covering a much shorter distance. Any walk is a good walk.

### **Acknowledgement of risks and obligations – Activity Attendance Form**

Our members are asked to be fully prepared and to accept responsibility for their preparedness and behaviour. This includes wearing appropriate clothing and footwear, having adequate food and water, and carrying a personal first aid kit with their emergency contact and medical information. All walkers sign this acknowledgement of risks and obligations on the Walk Attendance Form before commencement of a walk:

*In voluntarily participating in the above activity, I am aware that I am risking injury, illness and death, and loss of or damage to my property. Typical risks may include but are not limited to hyperthermia, hypothermia, slipping on loose or icy surfaces, slipping on rocks, falling rocks, exposure, snake bite, bee stings and other insect attacks, burns, drownings, stepping into unseen holes, accidents during vehicle travel to walks, navigation errors and becoming lost. To minimise risks, I will*

- inform myself of the nature of the activity and ensure that it is within my capabilities;*
- carry food, water, medication, clothing and equipment appropriate for the activity;*
- advise the leader of any physical or other limitation, or any dependence on medication, that may require urgent attention during the activity;*
- make every effort to remain with the rest of the party during the activity;*
- advise the leader of any concerns I am having; and*
- comply with all reasonable instructions of the leader.*

As walk leader, you provide the Activity Attendance Form. It is available to download and print off the website. If home printing is not possible, let the walks organiser or president know in advance. You are to ensure all walkers sign the Attendance Form, which acknowledges their risks and obligations. After everyone has signed, carry this form with you on your walk. You may need this information if there is an incident.

### **Personal Locator Beacon**

Depending on your assessment of mobile phone coverage or the difficulty of your walk, you may need to carry the club's personal locator beacon (PLB). Bushwalks that require the PLB to be carried are explained in the PLB procedure document. The walks organiser will answer any questions you might have about the PLB and make the final decision on the need to carry the PLB.

### **Leading a bushwalk**

As leader, you have several responsibilities on the day. You can delegate duties to other walkers if this helps, but you are the leader and have overall responsibility.

#### **A. On the day of your bushwalk**

1. Have with you any appropriate topographical maps or a GPS or a navigation app on your phone.
2. If you have a mobile phone, have the 'Emergency+' App and the 'First Aid' (St Johns Ambulance Australia) App downloaded, and the phone charged.
3. Ensure that you have the Activity Attendance Form and the Checklist for Serious Incidents with you, and carry both (hardcopy or digital). They are available to download from our website.
4. Be at the advertised meeting place 20 minutes before the group is due to depart.
5. Welcome walkers as they arrive and ensure they sign the Activity Attendance Form.
6. Check everyone is prepared for your walk.
7. Organise cars going to the trailhead. Ensure drivers follow you or know where they are going. State the driver donation for the day. Check drivers have your mobile phone number (or someone's in your car if you don't have a mobile phone).
8. Once at the trailhead parking place, check all cars have arrived.

9. Conduct the ring around to ensure all walkers are signed on. This is sometimes done at the main meeting place. However, if there is a 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting place, complete the Attendance Form and do the ring around at the trailhead.
10. Give a walk briefing to ensure walkers know what to expect.
11. Appoint a back marker (a 'tail-end Charlie') to stay at the back of your walk. Ensure that the back marker is an experienced walk leader.

## **B. During your bushwalk**

1. Walk at a pace suitable for your group and the terrain.
2. Stop for regular water breaks.
3. Check if any walker is having difficulty and adjust accordingly. Your back marker is a valuable resource.
4. Assist walkers with any tricky sections.
5. Do occasional head counts, especially at any meal break.
6. Ensure meal break stops have enough room for all walkers to be comfortable.
7. If a walker does not wish to continue with the walk, ensure that they are not alone if they want to return to their car.
8. Be prepared to change, shorten, or even stop the walk because of any on-the-day issue that arises.

## **C. After your bushwalk**

1. Do a final head count.
2. Gather walkers for announcements on future walks.
3. Give your Attendance Form to the club's secretary or any committee member.
4. Make sure all cars get away safely before you leave.

### **What happens if things go wrong?**

Even with the best planning, mishaps (incidents) can occur. Fortunately, most will be minor and easily resolved. However, if someone has suffered a personal injury or illness on a walk, there are safety procedures to follow.

The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone. Experienced walkers will be with you, helping you to make the best possible decisions at this unfortunate time. This is especially the case if the walks organiser, president or other committee members are on your walk, which is likely.

As leader, you should carry the Checklist for Serious Incidents and also be familiar with the safety procedures. Documents are available to read or download from the club's website. These procedures are a guide if things go wrong. Different incidents have different procedures, depending on their seriousness. The Checklist is a memory jogger on what to do if a serious incident occurs while on a bushwalk. The 'First Aid' (St Johns Ambulance Australia) App might be helpful too. It is user friendly, with step-by-step instructions and clear pictures.

### **Incident report forms – when to use**

The club has three incident report forms for serious incidents that might occur on a club activity. These forms are part of our duty of care. As leader, you are required to have the first (initial) Incident report form in your car. If this is not possible, make a note of what is to be included on the report so it can be completed later that day or as soon as is practicable.

It is difficult to define what incident might require an incident report being submitted. Stopping to put a bandage on a scratched arm is not an incident to report. A suspected broken ankle is an incident to report. Again, remember that you are not alone in making this decision. In the unlikely event of a serious incident occurring, other leaders will assist and help you. We are stronger together and we all help each other.

**Information and forms**

Below are the documents with which a walk leader needs to be familiar. All are available on the “Forms” page (in Members area) on the website.

- Activity attendance form
- Checklist serious incidents
- Serious accident procedure
- Personal locator beacon procedure
- Incident and insurance procedures
- Incident Report Form
- Follow up on incident form
- Committee review of incident form

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