

Kendal Fellwalkers: Safety on the Hills

- money, incl. coins for public telephone

These recommendations apply to all members, but some particularly concern leaders. They provide:

1. Suggestions regarding clothing and equipment for mountain walking.
2. Safety guidelines and procedures for dealing with accidents and emergencies.

1. CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

1.1 **Clothing.** Hill walking will be both faster and more enjoyable if you carry a light load and are not overdressed. However weather forecasts are not infallible, and the party can be delayed if an accident occurs. So there are some items that should be carried at all times, even if not actually being worn to allow for such possibilities.

- waterproof jacket and overtrousers
- warm hat, balaclava or cap
- fleece, soft shell jacket or pullover
- gloves or mitts

1.2 **Footwear.** Strong mountain boots with a deep tread are recommended. In some weathers running or approach shoes are satisfactory but they are not permitted on club walks in snow and ice.

1.3 **Walking (or trekking) poles.** These are quite popular – but not yet obligatory! They can reduce the strain on your knees and provide support and stability when fording streams or crossing rough terrain. If poles are not in active use they should be carried with the points directed downwards or forwards to avoid injuring other walkers.

1.4 **Winter gear.** Snow and ice on the hills make fellwalking challenging and potentially dangerous. Before deciding what to wear, consult a mountain weather forecast (see links on the club website). On walks that go above the snowline you need to have an ice axe and crampons (or 'Microspikes' on relatively easy walks). It is sensible to bring winter gear if there is any possibility that you will need it. When buying crampons, seek advice from a good shop or an experienced club member about which type will suit your boots and the activities you intend to pursue. Ice axes also differ in 'technicality' and advice on the kind to buy should be obtained.

The club rules state that a leader may decline to allow members or guests to participate in any walk if they are not judged to be suitably equipped for the prevailing conditions (or sufficiently competent). This rule applies chiefly to 'A' and 'B' walks in winter; leaders of 'C' walks will normally plan their routes, and if necessary modify them, to avoid the need for special gear. (Microspikes may still prove very useful on these less demanding walks.)

1.5. **Other rucksack contents.** The items listed below should always be taken on day outings:

- food, including some for emergencies
- drinks – at least a litre (more in summer)
- 1:25,000 map, preferably waterproof
- compass, whistle and first aid kit
- head torch, with spare batteries

At least one member should carry a fully charged mobile phone, a GPS (with spare batteries) and a first aid kit. Some kind of survival equipment is desirable but shelters and bothy bags tend to be heavy, bulky and expensive. Foil survival bags are very cheap (from Amazon) and are sufficiently light and compact to be kept in the rucksack at all times.

2. SAFETY GUIDELINES

Before looking at safety issues in detail we need to remind ourselves of some general points:

(a) On joining the club we each undertook to be responsible for our own actions and safety.

(b) As a voluntary, non-commercial organisation the club does not have the same obligations to its members as holiday and tour organisers have to their customers.

(c) Our leaders are all experienced fellwalkers but have differing levels of skill, and only a few have received formal mountain leadership training. They will do their best to advise and help you but you must not expect them to safeguard you from all hazards and difficulties.

These considerations make it vital that members should always co-operate fully with leaders and try to be helpful to fellow walkers. The following are important guidelines:

2.1 Don't race ahead – try to stay in visual contact with the leader and the group. If you find yourself a long way in front of the rest, pause and let them catch up, and in any case halt for regrouping at prominent features such as summits, cols, path junctions and stiles. This is a matter of both safety and good manners.

2.2 When you are leading a walk, aim to keep the group as compact as is practicable. Don't always be at the front, take care of the slower ones, and check at intervals that everybody in the initial headcount is still present. Unless the group is small (not more than six) you should designate an experienced member as the 'back marker'. These points are especially important in bad weather or when darkness is approaching.

2.3 If an optional scramble is offered, we may ask the leader to find a co-leader so that one can lead the scramble and one can lead the non-scramble. Where no 'non-scrambling' option is realistically available, then suitably worded warnings will appear on the programme

2.4 Be very careful on rocky or icy terrain, where the consequences of a slip are likely to be serious.

2.5 If you see somebody in difficulty or being left behind, do something about it – alert the leader or another member, and if you find yourself in the same position, shout! This is better than letting anyone in the group become anxious or exhausted and perhaps in need of help or rescue later.

2.6 Tell the leader or the back marker if for any reason you wish to leave the group or you need to stop for more than a short time.

2.7 Have a private word with the leader (for information only) if you have a medical condition that could affect you while out walking. It is up to you to bring any medication or remedies you may need.

3. EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

3.1 If a member of the group goes **missing**, especially in difficult or worsening conditions, it may be necessary for the leader to form a **search party**. The following procedures are recommended:

3.1.1 The party should if possible include at least four members in case the missing person turns out to be injured or immobile and has to be evacuated (see accident procedures below).

3.1.2 The equipment taken on the search should include: mobile phone (see 3.2.1 below); torches; whistle; GPS; first aid kit; survival bag or shelter; spare clothing; food and hot drinks.

3.1.3 As carrying out anything more than a cursory search is likely to take a long time, all people not actively involved should be sent down as a group under a designated sub-leader, with an agreed route and action plan. Some members of the group may be cold, tired or distressed, so the sub-leader must take great care that everybody keeps close together and stays safe. *A second injured or missing person is simply not an option.*

3.1.4 It is seldom advisable for club members to undertake an extensive search in mist or darkness. This is best left to Mountain Search and Rescue Teams, who have the necessary skills, equipment and back-up. The leader of any club search party will be responsible for judging whether Mountain Rescue should be called in (see 3.2.1 below).

3.2 In the event of an **accident** the leader must decide if it is feasible simply to render first aid to the casualty and then help him or her down. This is usually the quickest and best course, provided it does not risk the welfare and safety of the casualty or of other members of the group. If this risk is felt to be too great, proceed as follows:

3.2.1 If there is mobile phone service, ring 999 or 112. With either number ask for *Police*, and only when you are put through to them ask for *Mountain Rescue*. Report the facts and state your grid reference. Both numbers may be used to call emergency services even if your mobile has run out of credit. Also, if there is no signal for your network a mobile will try to connect you to the number via any available network. There is a helpful document on 'who to call' in the Forms section of our website – in particular the use of SMS.

Some people must stay with the casualty to keep him or her warm and give any treatment that is considered advisable while the rest go down (see

para 3.1.3). Remember that it may take some hours for help to arrive.

3.2.2 If there is no mobile phone service, a team of at least two people must go to get help. Ensure that there is an agreed plan and that the grid reference of the incident is noted, plus an initial assessment of the casualty's condition. The team should take a mobile phone and keep trying it to see if reception improves. In case it doesn't they will need to have coins or a bank card for a public telephone.

3.3 After a serious incident or prolonged delay it may be best for the party to abandon any attempt to reach the intended finishing point but instead to head for the nearest road and then, if necessary, ring people likely to be sympathetic – spouses, partners or friends – for help with transport.

4. OTHER ACTIVITIES

On occasion members of the club will undertake walks which include some more challenging activities (such as Grade 2 scrambles / winter snow gullies etc.). These will be shown in the program with specific warnings. Updates will be provided concerning conditions as necessary (especially in winter) and the leader will make sure on the day that everyone is competent to complete the planned route (or alternative where available). Our leaders are not professionally qualified; they are fellow members who offer to lead for the benefit of the club. So it's important that anyone taking part in these harder routes understands they are doing so at their own risk; and are totally responsible for their own actions. No liability whatsoever shall be construed against the leader, any other participant, organiser, or committee member for actions (or lack of actions) undertaken in good faith

5. IN CONCLUSION

Please don't let any of the above put you off going out walking with us, especially if you are a new or inexperienced member. Our outings are normally entirely trouble-free and enjoyable – even if wet!

In particular, don't be worried by talk of emergencies. Serious incidents are very infrequent and even if one does occur you will never be expected to contribute more than your experience allows. Also, if you are a walk leader the club's insurance policy covers you in the event of damages being awarded in any legal action for negligence (except those in Section 4 above).

Above all, the message of these notes is: *Try to minimise danger by taking care and thinking ahead, and always be supportive of your leader and your fellow walkers.*

Members who want to improve their general mountain skills may like to consult "Hill Walking" by Steve Long (MLT UK, 2004).

Note: These recommendations should be read in conjunction with the document "Conduct of Club Walks", which has a different purpose but contains some of the same material.