

Bushwalkers of Western Australia Inc

Club Bushwalking Safety Procedure

REV	DESCRIPTION	COMPILED BY	CHECKED BY	COMMITTEE APPROVAL	DATE
A	Committee review issue	D. Coulter			July 2005
0	Issued for Club Use	D. Coulter	J. Steele	D. Coulter	Feb 2006
1	For review and comment	D. Coulter	J. Young		Mar 2018

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document describes the safety features in place for bushwalking activities conducted and organised by Bushwalkers of Western Australia Incorporated (BOWA). All members and visitors should acquaint themselves with its content and make every endeavour to comply with the requirements for participation. This procedure applies to all walks undertaken by BOWA whether they are part or full day excursions or extended away trips. This document is available on the club's website.

The following sections are designed to provide members with safety guidance and to also alert them to their own responsibilities. This document does not provide advice for every safety incident that may arise, and accordingly the club committee welcomes constructive comment and suggestions from members which may lead to the improvement of this publication.

The walk leader, when referred to as 'he' or 'him', applies to both male and female leaders.

Caveat Emptor

The purpose of this procedure is to educate all BOWA members about bush walking safety. It has been produced in good faith for the benefit of all members.

BOWA does not take any responsibility or hold itself liable for any safety incident arising on any of the club's walks or social activities.

2. WALK LEADERS GUIDELINES

When the walk is first planned, the walk leader should consider the location, degree of difficulty and likely duration of the walk. He should have the correct maps and navigational equipment and should pre-walk the route, with another member, a week or two earlier if the walk is either new to him or if he hasn't walked it for a long period. A check with the Western Australian Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) for prescribed burn-offs in the area planned for the walk is recommended (<https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/fire/prescribed-burning/burns>) or phone their general enquires no. 08 9219 8000.

On the day, the walk leader shall make every effort to follow the safety guidelines contained within this document. Safety includes guiding everyone in the group, not getting lost or losing any member of the group. The walk leader should warn members of hazards and avoid them where possible e.g. cliff edges, slippery tracks, rocks, dangerous trees, extreme weather and the nature of the terrain to be travelled over.

The walk leader should inform a reliable person of the proposed bushwalk route and intended return time. It is not unusual to be late back from a walk. It is unusual to stay out after dark and extremely unusual to stay out overnight. The walk leader should check back with the person on the completion of the walk.

2.1 Prior to start of walk (at the meeting point)

The walk leader should be satisfied that every member and visitor is adequately equipped and is capable of safe participation on the walk by making the following pre-walk assessment:

Water/Clothing/Equipment – That every member has a minimum of 1 litre and preferably 1.5 to 2 litres of water, appropriate clothing, footwear and food.

Fitness – By enquiring of all participants to confirm that they think that they are fit enough to complete the grade of walk. The leader should refuse to take anyone whom they consider is unfit to complete the walk.

Health – To enquire if any member or visitor has a medical condition which may require medication e.g. Asthma (should carry Ventolin), heart condition, is susceptible to epileptic seizures or any condition which may be unsuitable for bush walking. This should be done in the case of visitors when they first enquire about joining the walk. It is the responsibility of club members to make their condition known to the walk leader and to pre-warn him of what attention is required should the need arise.

The walk leader reserves the right to reject participation of any member or visitor whom he considers does not meet with the above criteria.

2.2 Group Integrity

The following should be applied:

- **Leader in front** -The walk leader usually walks in front. Do not overtake the leader unless specifically permitted.
- **Group size minimum** – This should be four (except for a pre-walk) but this is at the walk leaders' discretion. If a walker becomes injured or sudden illness strikes, two of the group may need to get help leaving the injured person with support and reassurance.
- **Back marker** -If the group numbers are more than six, ask one experienced member at the end to be a "Tail end Charlie" to monitor the progress of the group.
- **Head count** - A head count should be taken regularly; track junctions and open spaces are ideal for this purpose.
- **Walker missing** - If a walker is missing, check with the group to determine at what point and when the walker was last seen. To locate the walker, retrace your steps to that point checking any alternative routes he may have taken. If the walker is not found in a reasonable time, leave markers at the point last seen and note the location on the map or personal GPS. Obtain help as soon as possible to organise a search (report loss to police).
- **Slower members** - The group must not go faster than the slowest person who must never be left behind. If a member is persistently slow, the walk leader must wait at frequent intervals or organise a safe alternative arrangement.
- **Stress** – People in your group should be watched for symptoms of stress. If anyone shows these signs, such as feeling faint, anxiety or breathing difficulties, stop and rest until they recover then continue at a slower pace. Remember that most people are embarrassed at the prospect of them holding up the group and consequently are unlikely to say anything until their condition is far worse. If in doubt, **STOP**
- **Splitting the group** – It is generally advisable not to split the group at any time. It is safer to stay together. This only exception should be in the case of emergency evacuation due to illness or injury.

- **Shortening the walk** – it is acceptable to shorten the walk should weather conditions deteriorate or when sudden illness occurs. In this event, the walk leader will make clear to all his decision and that will prevail.

2.3 First Aid

Walk leaders should always carry a first aid kit and make every effort to know what to do in the event of a safety incident and have some knowledge of how to treat the following:

- Shock
- Ankle sprain
- Bone fracture
- Symptoms suggesting the onset of hypothermia
- Asphyxiation and smoke inhalation
- Burns
- Snake bites
- Smoke and foreign matter in eyes
- Arrange evacuation and medical aid

The St. John's Ambulance Senior First Aid course is recommended but not conditional for all walk leaders.

3. BUSH WALKERS REQUIREMENTS

Please remember that walk leaders and social event organisers give their time freely.

When a walk leader advertises a walk, considerable work may have gone into the planning, start and completion times of that walk. The walk is based on the leaders past experience and knowledge. The walk leader will have also usually pre-walked the route. Please remember that the walk leader is neither a chemist nor an equipment shop. Do not expect the walk leader or anybody else on your walk to supply equipment and consumables because you didn't bring them with you.

Below is a list of walker's requirements:

- **Fitness** – Be fit enough for the grade of walk

- **Punctuality** – We leave at the designated time
- **First Aid** – Carry a small First Aid kit, including an elastic bandage
- **Water** – Carry at least 1 to 1.5 litres of water, more in warmer months
- **Walking Speeds** – We endeavour to walk at a speed that caters for the slowest person in the group, in some cases this may change because of approaching darkness. One does not want to be caught out in the dark at the end of a long day walk because the walking speed was too slow. The slower walker may be asked to speed up under those circumstances. If the pace is too fast and the going hard, you may have chosen a walk above your fitness level. However, if at any time you find the speed of the walk is too fast, discuss your concerns immediately with the walk leader.
- **Bush Walkers code** – The club supports a policy of minimal impact bush walking. Take only photographs and leave only footprints!
- **Equipment** – Sun hat and sunscreen are essential, even in winter. The following additional equipment items may also be considered: a lighter or waterproof matches, pen knife, identification, money, survival bag, spare boot laces, gaiters, mobile phone (turn off or to silent mode whilst on bushwalk), compass, GPS, sun glasses, whistle, torch
- **Clothing** – Dress appropriately for the walk, locality and weather conditions. Prepare for emergencies, carry a waterproof and or windproof jacket, warm top, have a change of clothing in your backpack that can be worn as additional layers to keep you warm if the temperature drops. The club does not recommend the wearing of denim jeans on bushwalks as when wet, they do not dry quickly with resulting discomfort and possible hypothermic risk in cold conditions. Take a beanie/woolly hat to keep your head warm and reduce heat loss, most of which is through the head. Wool is natural insulator, even when wet.
- **Food** – As well as your usual provisions for morning and afternoon tea and lunch, carry a couple of extra fruit bars, chocolate or packets of fruit and nuts in your pack as emergency food supply. If you don't use them they won't go to waste. The other bush walkers will always help you get rid of them!
- **Footwear** – Most bush walking requires boots with an aggressive tread as they support your ankles and can stop you slipping. They may also keep your feet dry. Walking shoes designed for the streets are of little use in the bush and will result in you slipping with the potential for injury.
- **Observe** - Each member of the group should keep in sight the walkers immediately ahead and behind to reduce the risk of the group becoming split.

- **Do Not** rely on others for your welfare. Bring the correct equipment, clothing, food and water so that you are prepared for your activity.

4. BUSH FIRES

4.1 What to do if caught in a bushfire whilst walking in remote areas

Sue Davies, a regional officer of the Bush Fire Service of WA, had this to say about bush fires in November 1998:

Bushfires are a real and an immediate threat to life. Your survival when caught in the open depends on sound judgement and taking appropriate actions. Survival in the open when confronted by an intense fire is not easy. The threats to life come from three sources:

- Radiant heat, so intense as to induce heat stroke.
- Smoke and hot gases, able to induce asphyxiation.
- Flames, which induce actual burns.

4.2 What will the fire do?

The fire behaviour is influenced by three main factors: the fuel, the weather and the topography.

Fuel

The type of fuel, the amount of fuel, its moisture content, and the arrangement of the fuel, determine the intensity and rate of spread of a fire. For example, in forest land the fire burns with high intensity, but moves slowly, whereas in grassland the fire is less intense, but moves quickly.

Weather

Fires will be more intense on hot dry days than on cool humid days. Fires move more quickly when it is windy and wind changes affect fire behaviour dramatically.

Topography

The lie of the land has considerable effect on the way the fire travels. A preheating effect causes the fire to move more quickly up hill.

The key to surviving a bushfire is to understand these factors, predict how they will interact, and take appropriate actions.

Schedule your walk to remote forest areas to avoid the time of year when bushfires are likely to be most intense and/or occur most often (avoid the hottest summer months and days of Very High or Extreme fire danger). During summer, a walk on the beach may be a pleasant alternative!

Register that you are walking with the appropriate authorities.

Give them details; including numbers of people walking, your intended route and estimated time of arrival. Don't forget to de-register when you complete the walk.

In planning your walk, note features shown on the map which may offer some refuge (bodies of water, rocky outcrops etc).

Carry clothes, which offer protection from radiant heat. When threatened by bushfire, it is important to remove all synthetic clothing, as these can melt and burn skin severely. Cotton long trousers, long sleeved shirts' and leather boots should be a part of your walking gear (maybe even woollen jumpers).

Carry plenty of water.

While walking, maintain your navigation, so that you know where you are at all times. This makes the decision making process easier.

Keep a lookout for smoke.

4.3 Anticipate and Plan

Anticipate the fire's behaviour and plan the best course of action.

- Move to a low fuel area.
- Don't try to outrun the fire - move across the front of the fire to the flanks (sides).
- Move downhill - the most intense fire will be at the top of hills. Don't try to run through the flames unless you can clearly see behind them. This means flames less than 1m high and less than 3m deep. Move towards the flanks or back of the fire, and look for lulls in the fire to find flames of less intensity.
- Remain calm and avoid exhaustion - plan your actions.

4.4 Avoid Direct Flame

Find an area that won't burn - the bigger the better. You need to avoid direct flame contact by getting to an area devoid of bushfire fuel. Some examples include:

- Water bodies such as lakes, dams or creeks.
- Avoid areas of swampy vegetation such as Melaleuca, which can burn intensely.

- Avoid elevated water tanks. Water above the ground in elevated tanks heats up very quickly during a fire. A body immersed in lukewarm water cannot sweat or lose heat, and at 44 degrees Celsius, a state of collapse is reached in about three minutes.
- Rocky outcrops (such as granite monadnocks) a road or firebreak.
- A paddock area heavily grazed or trampled by stock.
- An area of previously burnt ground.
- Any other area with no combustible material.

4.5 Protect yourself from Radiant Heat

This is not easy in the open. Wear your cotton/woollen clothing. Lie down on the ground and cover yourself as far as possible. Anything that will deflect or absorb the radiant heat should be used.

- Move into a building or vehicle.
- A tree trunk or large rock between you and the fire.
- A wheel rut or depression in the ground.

4.6 Protect your Airways

Smoke and hot gases can cause asphyxiation and even burn the inside of the airway:

- Keep low, breathing into the ground, to avoid smoke and hot gases.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a wet cloth.

5. EMERGENCY EVACUATION

Should an incident occur where a member is unable to walk due to accident or sudden illness, assisted evacuation of that person is required. The walk leader is responsible for deciding what course of action is the most appropriate and remains responsible for ensuring the following guidelines are applied:

- Move the injured person away from the danger or the danger away from the injured person. If it is likely that the injured person has sustained broken bones, immobilise the casualty and do not move him/her unless the danger is life threatening.

- Rest and constantly reassure the injured person.
- Keep the injured person warm, under the body as well as on top.
- Apply first aid.
- Determine exact location (GPS coordinates, grid line coordinates, distances from road, known feature etc.)
- Send at least two members to summon help ensuring that they know whom to telephone (emergency number 000 for ambulance), the location of the injured person, the likely injury sustained, the time of the incident and specify if a 4 wheel drive vehicle is required. Also, agree what the two members leaving to summon emergency assistance will do after arranging with the emergency services e.g. go home, wait somewhere, show the way back to the casualty's location.
- Await calmly the arrival of the emergency services.
- Cancel the remaining walk unless adequate time before nightfall remains to complete it after the injured person is safely in the hands of the emergency services or the incident happens near to the end.
- If very isolated, it may be necessary to move the injured person to a point where access by emergency services can be made. In the case of a leg bone fracture, a splint made from tree branches and bound with string, a scarf, or items of clothing to hold it together should be applied before attempting movement. The patient should be assisted in moving to the planned rescue location.
- Consider the safety of the whole group. If it is late in the day, delegate a competent person to lead the remaining members back to their cars. At least three people should stay with the patient until help arrives.

6. GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

If you are not sure where the rest of the group is, stop and shout. If no answer, give three blasts on your whistle and listen for a response. Either, stay where you are or move a short distance to an obvious clearing. Don't wander further into the unknown.

Toilet stops occur naturally, but do not drop back behind the tail end Charlie without advising him of your intention to leave the group.

Watch out for snakes especially in warm weather. Adequate protection (long trousers or gaiters) is recommended. If a snake is seen, advise all members of the group immediately.

Ticks are often found in bush where kangaroos are present. It is a good idea to check yourself at the end of the day to see if you have picked any up during your walk. A tic is fairly easy to remove by firstly killing it with either surgical spirit or vaseline, then carefully extracting it with a pair of tweezers. Make sure that you remove the head with the body.

7. REFERENCES

BOWA has used safety information from the organizations listed below in the compilation of this document in addition to it's own composition. BOWA is neither responsible nor holds any group or individual responsible for any inaccuracies in this document or liable for any incident that may arise from advice contained in this document. BOWA has not sought permission for extracts published here and as far as they are aware, there is no breach of copyright. Bush walking safety guidance is in the interest of all walking organizations and we welcome, without prejudice, any organization to use what has been written herein.

Mountain Devils Walking Club – Victoria

Perth Bushwalkers – WA

Bush Fire Service of WA