Guidance for Leaders of Friends of the South Downs Walks

Individuals who walk with the Friends are responsible for their own personal safety. However, there are some basic safety precautions that leaders should take which may help to avoid problems on walks.

As at September 2025 prior booking is required for most walks. *Please note that Trustees have decided, for security and safety reasons, that any walk requires two additional participants to be present in addition to the leader.*

Basic Safety Advice

- When compiling the brief walk description for the programme always include the distance and consider including the ascent.
- Leaders are recommended to walk out the route beforehand. A risk assessment, using the attached form, is required for all walks. On the day, point out any potential risks and hazards.
- Make a note you have done so and file when you get home. It is only significant risks and hazards which need to be pointed out. As an example, on nearly every walk in the countryside, walkers will encounter tree roots, so it is only exceptional, extensive areas of tree routes which need to be flagged up.
- Consider whether significant risks or hazards can be avoided altogether by rerouting the relevant part of the walk or rescheduling for another time of year.
- Introduce the walk briefly e.g. distance, terrain, timing and interesting points.
- Advise walkers that they are responsible for their own safety, particularly when crossing and walking along roads, but endeavour to lead the walk in accordance with the Highway Code, which can be obtained from the office or visit https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-for-pedestrians-1-to-35
- Carry a map and only use rights of way, permissive paths and access land.
- In larger groups, have a backmarker, ideally with route map and whistle/phone.
- In normal circumstances, avoid exceeding the given mileage by more than a mile.
- Be aware of the effect of extremes of weather.
- Carry a fully charged mobile phone (and charger if you have one) or ask if another walker has one. You can include an 'ICE' (In Case of Emergency) contact on your phone. Always carry an information card with your name, emergency contact details, and any medical conditions as appropriate.
- When filling in for another leader at the last minute, point out that a walk out has not been completed, so unsafe areas have not been identified.
- Make it clear that anyone who leaves the walk must inform you.
- Dogs may be accepted on a walk at the leader's discretion unless otherwise stated. Responsibility lies with the owners and dogs must be kept under strict control.
- Where practicable, go at the pace of the slowest walker. Be vigilant where there are new or non-members. Look for any walker who is having particular difficulty.
- In exceptional circumstances, the leader may cancel a walk, giving as much notice as is possible to the relevant walks co-ordinator.
- Be prepared to be adaptable. Accidents happen, pubs close, and weather worsens.

General Suggestions

- Be at the start point in good time and welcome any new walkers. Ask if they have seen 'Guidance for Participants' and if not, mention it is available on our website and from the office.
- Count the number walking and check during the day.
- Follow the Countryside Code (available from the office or visit https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code

- Check pub lunch numbers and maybe ring pub. Lunch stop with a pub/cafe is usually around an hour. Potential shelter/seats for picnickers are a bonus if possible.
- Have rest stops as terrain and weather suggest.
- Walkers may be offered a guiding hand over stiles or other hazards where appropriate.
- At the end, check everyone gets away safely e.g.all cars, including yours, start OK.
- Report any path obstructions encountered on a walk or walk-out to the relevant highway authority or, in the case of the South Downs Way, the SDNPA
- https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/leisure-tourism/discover-east-sussex/rights-of-way/problems-on-rights-of-way/report
- https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/land-waste-and-housing/public-paths-and-the-countryside/public-rights-of-way/report-a-problem-with-a-right-of-way
- https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryside/get-in-touch/report-issue
- info@southdowns.gov.uk
- Serious accidents are rare, but experience has shown that awareness of potential hazards and risks may help to reduce them.

In case of serious accident

- Dial 999 as soon as possible. Alternatively you can dial 112.
- Be ready to give details of: the location, the grid reference, landmarks, what3words, nearest road and a suitable access point if calling for help also the casualty's medical condition.
- Take advice from the paramedics, especially about moving the patient.
- If the rest of the group continues walking, ensure appropriate leadership both for this group and for supervision of the patient's care. Keep in touch by phone.
- Report serious accidents to the office using the attached form. Also copy to the relevant walks co-ordinator. **Leaders should carry copies of the Serious Accidents Report Form on their walk** to help them ensure accurate information is gathered at the time of the incident, or as soon as possible afterwards.

Where an accident is not considered to be serious you may wish to still use the form and keep this as a personal record should this information be required at a later time.

In case of an incident or problem

The duty of the leader is to provide, as far as they can, an enjoyable and safe walk, which causes no injury or damage. If a landowner makes a complaint to a leader, in most cases, the leader should politely ask them to contact the office. The leader should be as helpful and polite as possible (e.g. by providing them with the telephone number and address), and after the walk, alert the office to the likely complaint and include any useful information (e.g. an account of what happened, names and contact details of anyone who was involved). There would be some common sense exceptions - e.g. where a walker was causing criminal damage, then the leader should advise the walker to stop!

Note

If a leader finds that they are unable to lead a walk in the first place, they should try to find a substitute leader and update the relevant co-ordinator and anyone who has booked on the walk .If the walk has to be cancelled, the walk leader will inform people who have booked. In addition, if no booking is required, it is the responsibility of the walk leader that, either the leader, or someone else goes to the start to explain the cancellation.

Lastly

Tell the relevant walks co-ordinator afterwards how many people, including leader(s), were on the walk.

Friends of the SOUTH DOWNS
Protecting the beauty of the Downs for over 100 years

_____ – Risk Assessment

Use this risk assessment to help you understand the risks and any steps you need to take to stay safe before leading a walk

Please retain a copy for one year after the date of the walk.

Name of Walk Leader		**Date of Walk**	
Date of Risk Assessment		**Date of Walkout**	

Possible hazards	Ways to control the risk	Action taken? (click on the box to tick)
Severe weather (including extreme temperatures)	Check the weather forecast and consider possibly shortening the walk or cancelling it if thunderstorms are forecast.	☐
Busy roads	Minimise walking along busy roads and make sure crossing points are not dangerous.	☐
Steep, slippery, or muddy sections	Check for muddy/slippery/steep sections and consider adapting the route.	☐
Livestock	Check for fields with livestock and act appropriately on the day (keeping the group together, etc.). Be prepared to divert if necessary. Ensure all gates are closed after use.	☐
Fallen branches	Assess whether everyone in group will be able to climb over or walk round. If not, look for alternative route	☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐

Notes:

1. This template is a tool to help you plan and lead group walks safely. You must do a risk assessment for each walk.
2. Use the template to help identify the risks particular to your walk and then manage those risks.
3. Ways to control the risks are suggestions – **you do not need to tick every box.** The important thing is to identify the potential hazards and note the actions you have taken or will take on the day to reduce risks.
4. Think about different types of hazards and risks. Common examples are included but think carefully about the walk in case anything needs to be added.

SERIOUS ACCIDENTS REPORT FORM
To be carried by Leader on walks

Please report serious accidents as soon as possible by telephoning the office.01798 875073. In addition, this form should be completed by the walk leader and sent to the Friends of the South Downs at 3 Swan Court, Station Road, Pulborough RH20 1RL, **enquiries@friendsofthesouthdowns.org.uk**. Please aim to return it within 4 days of the incident.	
Title of walk given in the programme:	
Date of walk:	Leader:
Address:	
Landline:	Mobile:
Email address:	
Name of injured person:	
Address/tel of injured person, if known:	
FSD member?	
Were there any injuries? If so, please list their nature:	
Was medical attention given by a paramedic?	
Was medical attention given by a fellow walker? If yes, what treatment was received and for how long, and who administered the treatment?	
Time of incident:	Emergency services called?
Grid reference: What3 Words	Description of location:
What happened? Give as much information as possible - what action was taken, whether the casualty continued on the walk/went to hospital/other - use a continuation sheet if necessary	
Witness name:	Member?
Witness contact details:	
Names of others on the walk:	