

Guide for Leaders (2.2)

The *National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT)* has a program of events for members and guests published online and in the Bulletin. Leaders offer these events for the program and fulfil the role of leader as volunteers. The selection, acceptance and coordination of events is carried out by the *Outings Convenor* with the assistance of other experienced leaders.

Liabilities and insurance

The *NPA ACT* has *public liability insurance covering officials and leaders*. As long as officials and walk leaders *act "reasonably"*, the *public liability insurance* will cover *NPA ACT* events.

Preparation

1. **Walk plan.** Plan your walk. One way to do this is to pencil the proposed route on a map with expected times and compass bearings for key points. Another is to include this information on a planning sheet together with details of distances and climbs. Maps of popular areas are available on loan from the *Outings Convenor*. Walks descriptions prepared for the *Bulletin* should be realistic in describing the difficulty or additional difficulties that are likely to be encountered on the walk.
2. **Permissions.** Obtain all necessary permissions with regard to property access, check with the *Outings Convenor* who might be able to provide a contact name if the walk has been held previously.

Emergencies. Study the Emergencies section below. Leaders of outings in remote areas (by remote we mean no comprehensive mobile phone coverage) must carry a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). Consider carrying additional emergency supplies eg. a torch, waterproof matches, mobile phone, etc. Where practical pre-plan for a quick way back to the cars or to shelter if the weather deteriorates or the party is unexpectedly slow. Mobile phones have been found useful in emergency situations although coverage is not always reliable. Obtain and carry a list of useful phone numbers or download the mobile phone "Emergency+" App (<http://esa.act.gov.au/community-information/triple-zero-000/emergencyplus/>). Park service contacts (6207 2900 for all ACT parks), police (131 444), Access Canberra (13 22 81 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat, Sun 9am-5pm and public holiday). In life-threatening or serious medical situations contact 000 or use a PLB if phone contact is not possible.

3. **Weather.** Note the weather forecast on the morning of the walk. Leaders must cancel or consider alternative walks where Extreme or Catastrophic fire conditions, Total Fire Bans, Widespread Flooding or other Severe Weather conditions are declared by the BoM or appropriate authority for the relevant area of the walk. If in doubt, seek advice from an appropriate authority, e.g. rangers or police.
4. **Change of destination.** If it is necessary to change the programmed walk, e.g. because of floods or fires, the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* should be advised beforehand. If this is not possible, note the change clearly on the *Attendance Record and Risk Waiver Form*.
5. **PLB.** The *Alternate Check-in Officer* has a PLB available for loan to leaders. They are for use in life threatening situations or serious medical emergencies.

Immediately before the Walk

Ensure you have all the items you will need as a leader - *Attendance Record and Risk Waiver Form*, *Risk Waiver for a Child Form*, *Incident Report Form*, emergency phone numbers or "Emergency+" App, mobile phone (charged), PLB, GPS, first aid kit, maps, compass etc.

At the meeting Place

1. **Be at least 15 minutes early.** New members are usually early and appreciate a few words with the leader before the regulars arrive.
2. **Talk to new walkers.** To ascertain their walking experience, fitness and any medical

issues.

3. **Walkers.** As leader, you may exercise a **right not to accept persons** for any reason however you should clearly state that reason.
4. **Equipment.** Ask participants to confirm that they are suitably equipped e.g. adequate clothing and suitable footwear. On a hot day and/or a long or strenuous walk particularly, ask them to check that they have sufficient water and have sun protection.
5. **Modification or cancellation.** The leader may cancel, abort or modify, any walk either before or during the walk taking into consideration participants and conditions. If cancelled prior to departure date the leader should notify the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* to arrange notification of the cancellation on the NPA website and to arrange for someone to be at the meeting point in case people show up.
6. **Degree of difficulty.** Make sure walkers know the degree of difficulty of the walk as described in the outings program.
7. **Minimum number.** The minimum number of people on an *NPA ACT* walk depends on the nature and conditions of the walk. However unless there are identifiable mitigating circumstances (the walk is all on prepared public trail or mobile phone coverage is known to be available), this should be four. If fewer than four people are available for a walk and there are no identifiable mitigating circumstances, the walk can not proceed as an official activity. The leader may however take the walk privately at their own discretion.
8. **Signing on.** Make sure all walkers put their details on the *Attendance Record and Risk Waiver Form* and point out any additional hazards that may be encountered.
9. **Non-Members.** Non-members are allowed to go on a maximum of three walks per annum before becoming members.
10. **Introductions.** Ask walkers to form a circle and introduce themselves.
11. **Describe the walk briefly and indicate the route on the map.** Mention any expected hazards or difficult sections, the expected lunch location and time of return. Stops should be made approximately every hour or less, depending on the terrain, view points, etc.
12. **Count the number** in the party and check that the *Attendance Record and Risk Waiver Form* agrees.
13. **Car route.** Advise all drivers of the route and starting point of the walk.
14. **Passengers.** Encourage car sharing to reduce the number of cars.
15. **Count cars** and appoint a tail where there are several cars.
16. **Leave a message or text** in the case of last minute changes or cancellations for the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)*. The *Attendance Record and Risk Waiver Form*, should be left in a car at the starting point to provide a list of walkers in case of emergency. Preferably visible but face down with NPA written on the back.
17. **Start time.** Try to leave the meeting place within a few minutes of the published start time after allowing a reasonable time for latecomers.

On the walk

1. **Discuss 'lost walker' procedures.** If a walker becomes lost they should stop and listen. Then call out or, preferably, sound three blasts on a whistle, repeating about each minute. Do not stray intentionally off the track that was being followed.
2. **Back marker.** Depending on the size of the party and the nature of the walk, consider asking for a reliable volunteer to act as a back marker. Maintain contact with the tail and the head of the party and check on the condition of walkers, especially children and inexperienced walkers. Maintaining the group's integrity is one of the main responsibilities of the leader.

3. **Advise the party on progress** at intervals and encourage all in the party to take an interest in the route. This can help avoid inadvertently get off the route and meet unexpected scrub, steep slopes, etc.
4. **Unmarked routes and scrub.** If there is no marked track or if a track divides, or a patch of scrub is encountered, wait until all the party have caught up before you change direction. Discourage participants from undertaking private excursions such as looking for geocaches.
5. **Check numbers** after each stop before proceeding.
6. **Note times at key points.** These are useful for future reference and can prove invaluable for coping with unexpected problems.
7. **Be flexible.** If some members are not coping with the walk and slowing down the party, be prepared to modify the walk, provide more rests, etc. If someone is distressed, be prepared to abandon the walk and return to the cars. Do not allow a distressed person to return alone.

At the end of the walk

1. **Walkers finishing.** Do not leave until all walkers have returned.
2. **Encourage walkers to share a cup of tea or coffee** with others.
3. **Ensure that all cars get away from the parking area** and that all drivers can find their way back to the meeting point or their home.
4. **If any incidents have occurred** which may cause the authorities to become involved, or the walk has been so delayed that relatives may be worried, contact the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* with details as soon as possible.
5. **Update the Attendance Record and Risk Waiver Form and return it.** This is important for insurance purposes. Any comments, including details of any accidents, emergencies or unforeseen problems should be included.
6. **Record any injuries or illnesses on the incident Report form.** Including details of names of injured or ill person(s), time, place, nature of injury, witnesses etc. If in doubt about the extent of injury/illness, you should complete the form. The form is to be sent to the *Alternate Check-in Officer*.
7. **Return any borrowed club maps, PLB or other materials** with the *Attendance Record and Risk Waiver Form* which is needed for statistical and record keeping purposes.

Minimum Impact Bushwalking

The *NPA ACT* supports and encourages minimal impact bushwalking in line with its conservation values. Leaders should encourage all participants to do the same.

EMERGENCIES

It is not possible to write a procedure for every situation. The following are recommendations only. The leader will need to make judgements at the time, possibly with the assistance from other members of the group. Often the group will contain other *NPA ACT* leaders with relevant experience to assist you.

Lost walker

1. **Stop and plan:**
 - Check your position on the map with a GPS or by checking features;
 - Establish when and where the the lost walker was last seen;
 - Observe the daylight time available and the distance to get the rest of the party to the safety of a lunch site, campsite or cars;
 - Consider splitting the party and appointing a suitable deputy leader;
 - Agree on a time for an initial quick search;

- Agree on a course of action for the remaining party, including if the search party fails to return on time. This may include leading the remaining party out and notifying police and *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)*.
2. **Disuade** keen but inexperienced walkers from starting their own searches.
 3. **Quick search:**
 - **Retrace the route** to the point where the lost walker was last seen moving quietly but calling and listening at regular intervals;
 - Walkers are advised not to keep walking if separated from the party and to call out and listen. So lost walkers should be waiting on or close to the route;
 - If not found despite calling and listening, the walker is assumed well lost and a suitably organised and equipped search party is needed;
 - Return to the remaining party.
 4. **Time-limited search:**
 - If plenty of daylight is still available, assess whether a further time-limited search is feasible;
 - Record the grid reference of the area in which the person was last seen;
 - Study the terrain and map, and assess where a lost walker is likely to go and determine a suitable search strategy making use of high points and water courses;
 - Agree on a course of action for the remaining party, including if the search party fails to return on time. This may include leading the remaining party out and notifying police and *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)*.
 5. **Post search:**
 - If the group does not have the necessary resources, or cannot be split to mount a search party, or if the search party has been unsuccessful, take measures to arrange a search by a third party;
 - Return to the cars;
 - If the walker is still lost, notify Police Assistance on 131 444 and ring the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)*. **Do not dial 000 or use a PLB, as this is not yet a life-threatening incident.**

Immobilising injury

1. **Assess the situation:**
 - Administer first aid;
 - Record the map grid reference for the location of the injured walker;
 - Plan the rescue. Do not leave an injured person unattended. In the case of a death do not move the body. Estimate the time needed for help to arrive. Evaluate resources, food, water, clothing, shelter and equipment identify persons with first aid experience.
2. **Seek help:**
 - In the case of serious injury in a remote locality where mobile phone contact is unlikely nearby, the activation of a PLB may be warranted. This is a serious alert and will trigger a ground or helicopter search and rescue by police through Emergency Management Australia and an international satellite communications network. Otherwise;
 - In the case of a less serious injury a seek-help group of at least two, led by an experienced walker with a map of the area should be sent to find help by walking or driving back in to mobile telephone coverage or seeking access to a telephone.
3. **Call Police Assistance:**
 - As soon as possible the leader of the seek-help group must contact Police Assistance on 131 444;
 - Provide police with following information:

- The location of the injured person;
- The nature of the injury;
- The condition and weight of the person to be carried;
- One of the seek-help group may be asked to guide the search party to the remaining group.

4. **Notify the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* of the situation:**

As soon as practical the leader of the seek-help should notify the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* of the action taken and whether any other immediate action is required.

Mobile injury

- Keep the group together if possible. If the injured person is mobile or can be carried and the return can be completed before dark, keep the group together;
- If not, consider stopping, sheltering and splitting the group. See notes on assessing the situation and seeking help, under **Immobilising injury**;
- The leader of the seek-help group must contact *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* as soon as possible. The *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* may require a party to return to assist the delayed group. If so, one of the seek-help group will need to accompany the returning party.

Overdue group

- **Make contact.** The leader of a group returning later than expected, or both leaders if the party has been split, must contact the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* as soon as possible. The *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* can then notify those who have made contact to prevent an unnecessary call to the police.

Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer) Actions

1. **Record details** on being advised that a walker or group is overdue, record the caller's telephone number, name and whether any overdue person (or persons) has a medical problem.
2. **Assess possible causes** of a late return from the caller or from other references.
3. **Reassure the caller** as best you can. Indicating that causes for late returns include vehicle breakdowns or stopping for a meal on the way home as well as delays due to minor injuries, or lost group member. If one member of the group is lost or injured there may be a split group walking out to obtain assistance. The leader should be trying to contact the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)*.
4. **Emergency situations.** After contact with the party, the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* should contact the other to see if they know there is an emergency or to advise them that there is one and assess the situation.
5. **If the overdue walker has a medical problem**, or if a split group has advised of an emergency, immediately telephone Police Assistance on 131 444.
 - The police will need to know:
 - the starting point;
 - the number thought to be in the group;
 - the expected route,
 - the experience of the group;
 - the expected time of return;
 - whether, to your knowledge, any of the group has a health problem; and
 - whether the group has already contacted police.
 - The leader should leave a list of walkers in one of the cars at the start point. Preferably

visible but face down with NPA written on the back. From this, searchers can determine the size, composition and membership of the missing group and whether there were any changes, to the route before the party started walking.

6. **Non-emergency situations.** If an overdue walker or party has no known medical problem and weather conditions are benign, allow a reasonable time for the overdue group to return. Reasonable time, has to be assessed by the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)* from the type and length of the walk and the drive back to the meeting point. If in doubt, assume a worst case situation and notify Police Assistance on 131 444.
7. **Stay in contact.** Once contacted, stay by the telephone until the situation is resolved. Contact and delegate a member with experience of the walk to be available to advise police, accepting that police and emergency services do not always seek such advice.

Check-in/Emergency contact Officer

In late 2020 it came to our attention that the NPA(ACT) does not have an Emergency contact. Other walking clubs have an emergency number for initial contact by worried family members in the case of the late return of the walking party. This is something that we have decided to rectify.

Since all outings will either be within mobile phone range and/or the leader at least will be carrying an emergency beacon (PLB), it is expected any enquiries to the emergency contact officer will be a rare event. The main function would appear to be to allay the fears of any family members of walkers in instances of late returns and to monitor the situation (i.e. if necessary inform the police).

It is also a good idea for the leader at the end of an outing in a remote area to check-in with the *Check-in Officer (or Alternate Check-in Officer)*. This allows us to monitor these remote area activities in case of a delayed return of a group and, depending on the circumstances, the possibility of informing the police.

At the moment the *Alternate Check-in Officer* collects statistics of attendances for each outing. Leaders generally send him a copy of the attendance form sometime after the walk. Perhaps the easiest way to implement a check-in system would be to ask leaders to send the attendance form to the *Check-in Officer and Alternate Check-in Officer* as soon as possible after the walk. This could be done by taking a photo of the form with a mobile phone and emailing it to the *Check-in Officer and Alternate Check-in Officer*. Alternatively a text message, to the *Check-in Officer*, that the walk has completed safely would suffice with the attendance form sent to the *Alternate Check-in Officer* at a later time.

In order to streamline the process for checking-in I suggest the following:

- Leaders of outings conducted in areas with good mobile phone coverage **do not** need to check-in at the completion of the outing. They still should send the attendance form to the *Alternate Check-in Officer* at a convenient time.
- leaders of outings conducted in remote areas (in this context by “remote” I mean no comprehensive phone coverage), **should check-in** as soon as practicable at the completion of the walk.
- leaders of outings in remote areas must carry a PLB or equivalent emergency beacon. The NPA has a PLB available for loan (contact Brian Slee).
- checking in could simply be a text message to the *Check-in Officer* (attendance form sent at a later time) or, as soon as practicable, be done by emailing the attendance sheet to both the *Check-in Officer and Alternate Check-in Officer* with a note that the walk has been completed.
- the *Check-in Officer* may contact you if you forget to check-in. In cases of emergency the assumption will be that the leader will activate the PLB.

- if your outing is cancelled for any reason, please inform the *Check-in Officer and Alternate Check-in Officer*
- Before the start of outings in remote areas, please include the *Check-in Officer* in the email to participants with the final details. This means that the *Check-in Officer* knows the meeting point, travel arrangements and the participants.

The Check-in/Emergency contact details are updated on the website under the “Contact Us” tab. As of March 2021 the details are:

Check-in/emergency contact officer: Mike Bremers 0428 923408, mcbremers@gmail.com, outings@npaact.org.au

Alternative check-in/emergency contact officer: Brian Slee, 6281 0719, brianslee@iprimus.com.au

NPA PLB: Brian Slee, 6281 0719, brianslee@iprimus.com.au