

# 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
2	For review and comment	M. Page	J.Young/S.Ellis	Yes	Dec 2022

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION .....	3
2.	WALK LEADERS GUIDELINES.....	4
2.1	Prior to start of walk .....	4
2.2	Group Integrity .....	4
2.3	First Aid.....	6
3.	BUSH WALKERS REQUIREMENTS.....	6
4.	BUSH FIRES.....	8
4.1	Plan	
4.2	Act	
4.3	Survive	
5.	EMERGENCY EVACUATION .....	9
6.	GENERAL SAFETY TIPS .....	10
7.	REFERENCES .....	11
APPENDIX A	SUGGESTED FIRST AID KIT CONTENTS	12

## 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. It is recommended that, prior to a walk in the prescribed burning and bushfire seasons, leaders check the DBCA Parks and Wildlife Service website for "Today's Burns" and, as appropriate, the Emergency WA and DBCA Parks Alerts sites.

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.

### 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.
- **Tail Ender** -If the group numbers are more than six, ask one experienced member to remain at the end of the walking group to be a "Tail Ender" to monitor the progress of the group.
- **Head count** - A head count should be taken regularly by the Walk Leader and Tail Ender; 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, phone or personal GPS. Obtain help as soon as possible to organise a search (report loss to police); also advise the President of the incident.
- **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 (including arranging evacuation and medical aid) and have some knowledge of how to treat the following:

- Shock
- Ankle sprain
- Blisters on feet
- Bone fracture
- Symptoms suggesting the onset of hypothermia
- Asphyxiation and smoke inhalation
- Burns
- Snake bites
- Smoke and foreign matter in eyes

Attendance at an approved first aid course (e.g. St. John Ambulance Senior First Aid course; Red Cross first aid course) is recommended but not conditional for all walk leaders. Such training should be repeated periodically.

It is required that walkers should also carry their Emergency Contact and Medical Information Form on every walk.

Recommended contents for a portable first aid kit are shown in Appendix A.

## **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, walking poles
- **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 (above ankle height) 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 of the walkers immediately ahead and behind to reduce the risk of the group becoming split.

- **Safety Apps** – walk leaders and walkers are encouraged to have either or both of the Emergency Plus and St John Ambulance first responder apps on their mobile phones
- **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

Bushfires are dangerous and common in Western Australia. They can start without warning throughout the year and can spread rapidly on hot and windy days.

Advice on how to manage bushfires is available via links to the WA Parks and Wildlife Service (WAPWS) – (Are You Bushfire Ready? Prepare. Act. Survive)

Refer - <https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/news/alerts>

The summary below of how to manage a bushfire situation is based on WAPWS information at their website.

### 4.1 Prepare – Make a Plan

Plan a route within your capabilities:

- Where will you go?
- How far is it?
- How fast can you travel?
- Be certain you can reach your goal

### 4.2 Act – Don't Delay

Leave the trail if the Fire Danger Rating is Very High or above

If you see signs of a bushfire, assess your situation:

- How close is it?
- Is the wind blowing it towards you?

If the way is clear, escape to safer ground

If the way is not clear, prepare to shelter



### **4.3 Survive - Stay Alive**

#### **Escape**

Use existing tracks and roads

Move to clear or burnt ground

Do not try to outrun the fire or escape uphill

Avoid the tops of hills and densely vegetated gullies

#### **Shelter**

Stay low and seek shelter behind a log or rocky outcrop, on a beach, or in a sufficiently large body of water to fully submerge (including a running river but not a water tank)

Campsite buildings are not designed as a fire refuge, but it may be a safer place to stay than outside

Prepare your surroundings by removing leaves and branches

Cover yourself with wool or cotton; avoid synthetics

Once the main fire front has passed, move to burnt ground

## **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.)

- If emergency contact cannot be made with suitable authorities for assistance (e.g. due to lack of mobile phone coverage in the area), 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.
- After the emergency evacuation has been addressed, the Club President is to be notified and the Incident Report Form completed.

## **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 Ender 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 WA bush where kangaroos are present. In general, tick bites do not cause significant health issues in WA (unlike for example in NSW). However, a

small irritation, lasting several days, occurs at the site of the bite. Unfortunately, for a small percentage of our population, tick bites can cause more longer-lasting effects. Hence proactive avoidance of tick bites is strongly recommended.

A summary of tick management procedure is below:

- Wear long sleeved shirt, long trousers and a hat in tick prone areas, preferably treated with Permethrin; light-coloured clothing allows you to see ticks more easily
- Do not try to kill the tick with methylated spirits or any other chemicals or try to remove it with tweezers or the tick may inject more toxins
- The recommended approach to killing ticks that are attached to a person is with either *Medi-freeze Tick Off Spray* or *Lyclear Scabies Cream*; once dead, the tick can be removed with a pair of tweezers, ensuring that both the body and head are removed

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.

The link below to the Perth Bushwalkers Club Inc website provides a more comprehensive description of “Dealing with Ticks”.

<https://perthbushwalkers.asn.au/images/PDFs/Ticks-information-note-Mar2015.pdf>

## 7. REFERENCES

BOWA has used safety information from the organizations listed below in the compilation of this document in addition to its 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 it is 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.

Bushwalking Victoria

HikeWest – WA

WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES)

WA Parks and Wildlife Services (WAPWS)



## **APPENDIX A**

### **SUGGESTED FIRST AID KIT CONTENTS**

Band aids

Gauze swabs

Saline solution (eye drops)

Safety pins

Insect bite / itch gel

Antiseptic cream

Saline solution (oral hydrolite)

Non-stick wound dressings

Triangular bandages

Compression bandages (for snake bite treatment) – 2-3 with clips

Scissors

Metal tweezers

Thermo-shock blanket

Disposable gloves

Hand sanitizer

Note pad and pen / pencil

First aid booklet

Tick removal treatments (Medi-freeze Tick Off spray or Lyclear Scabies Cream)