



HANDBOOK FOR WALKERS

This handbook contains information for participants in Darwin Bushwalking Club activities, who are expected to be familiar with the material. The Club regards the Handbook as an introduction to some of the basics of enjoyable bushwalking, and in no way suggests that it is the ultimate guide. It strongly recommends anyone interested in bushwalking fully educate themselves about the risks involved.

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1 GENERAL INFORMATION

The Darwin Bushwalking Club is a recreational club, run on a voluntary basis by an elected committee for the benefit of its members. The club organises one-day or weekend walks throughout the year as well as occasional longer walks. Most walks are around Darwin or in Top End parks. The club also meets socially, and occasionally runs other outdoor recreation trips such as calm water canoeing and bike riding.

The objects of the club, as specified in the Constitution, are to:

1. promote bushwalking and allied activities;
2. foster appreciation and conservation of the Australian countryside, bushlands, flora and fauna and encourage field studies;
3. compile bushwalking information;
4. cooperate with organisations and persons having similar interests and objectives; and
5. support the establishment and maintenance of national parks and wilderness areas.

Club meetings are held monthly, and meeting dates and venues are advertised by email or on the club's website <http://www.bushwalking.org.au/dbc/>

There are two classes of membership - associate membership for new members, and full membership. All walkers must be members (or pay a visitors' fee¹) for insurance reasons.

Associate members are entitled to participate in all club walks and activities, and receive newsletters, but may not vote at club meetings.

Full members have all the rights of associate members, and the right to vote. The annual membership fee is \$40.

To become a full member, you must –

- (a) participate in at least one day-walk and one overnight or base-camp walk; and
- (b) be nominated by a full member and have the nomination accepted by the club committee;
- (c) or be otherwise accepted by the committee.

Walks are organised by volunteer trip leaders, who have the discretion to include or exclude a potential participant based on his/her assessment of the grade of the walk and the applicant's level of fitness, acclimatisation to the tropics and other factors.

2 ACCEPTANCE OF RISK

Bushwalking involves risks - including but not limited to personal injury and consequential loss of income.

¹ Currently \$10 for up to 2 walks within 2 months.

Neither the Darwin Bushwalking Club Inc. nor the leader of any club activity will accept liability for any loss or personal injury sustained by a participant in a club activity, whether or not attributable to negligence of the club or the activity leader.

All persons joining in any club activity do so as volunteers in all respects and accept sole responsibility for any injury incurred - and the club, its officers and leaders are absolved from any liability in respect of any injury suffered whilst engaging in any such activity. Children are the responsibility of their parent(s) or guardians.

Walk participants will need to sign a risk acceptance form before commencement.

3 INSURANCE

The club has Public Liability Insurance and Group Personal Accident Insurance through its affiliation with the Walking Federation of South Australia Inc. A summary can be found on the club website.

As these insurances will only partially defray costs in the event of an accident, walkers should consider their personal circumstances, the risk of loss of income and medical expenses, and their possible need for -

- Personal Injury Insurance
- Loss of Income Insurance
- Ambulance Cover Insurance
- Travel Insurance

4 REGULATIONS

For an activity to be a club sanctioned, it must –

- be advertised by club newsletter, club website, group email, and/or presented at a club meeting; and
- have a minimum of 3 (but preferably at least 4) participants.

All participants must be club members, or must apply for membership before the activity commences, or be registered visitors. It is the responsibility of the leader to ensure that this is done and to ensure that participants have access to a copy and are aware of this **Handbook for Walkers** before the activity begins. Pets and firearms are not permitted.

5 WALK GRADES

The following grades are a guide only. The difficulty of a walk will depend on the weather, individual fitness and other factors which should be discussed with the walk leader.

An **easy** walk involves -

- short distances (less than 10 km per day);
- no need to carry more than 2 litres of water; and
- flat undulating terrain with little climbing and generally good walking surfaces.

A **moderate** walk involves any one of the following -

- pack-hauling distances of 10 - 20 km per day;
- a need to carry between 2 and 4 litres of water;
- lengthy climbs, for example 100 m ascent; or
- significant rock-hopping, walking on sand, gravel, swamp or through heavy scrub/grass or clambering over boulders.

A walk may be graded as **difficult** if it involves –

- any two of the criteria listed under the moderate grading;
- a need to carry more than 4 litres of water;
- large amounts of climbing; or
- extended periods of walking over difficult terrain.

An **exploratory** walk means the route and/or destination have not been visited by the trip leader, walking conditions are unknown and only experienced walkers should participate.

Family and Social Walks

This is not strictly a grade description, but for these activities –

- young people of varying ages may be involved;
- family groups may travel in their own vehicles;
- depending on age range, distances will not be great (less than 5 km); and
- generally these do not count as qualifying walks for full membership.

6 SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW MEMBERS

If you have never been bushwalking in the sub-tropics before, begin with an easy day walk, as overnight walks require more experience and fitness than day walks of equivalent grade.

Grading is a judgement which cannot take into account all possible factors, so if you are uncertain of the grade or the terrain or your level of fitness and experience, ask the leader for advice. If the leader doesn't know you and is unable to determine your fitness over the phone, please don't be offended if he/she recommends that you try an easier grade first.

While each participant is responsible for his/her own safety, the leader needs to make or facilitate decisions that are best for the group as a whole. It is the leader's prerogative to reject any applicant for a walk. By going on a few easy walks first, you will have a better understanding of your own level of fitness and of which grades may suit you better. Eventually you will discover which leaders or groups of other walkers also walk at the same speed as you.

If you do not have any equipment, do not buy major or expensive items. Beg or borrow the basics for your first trip and evaluate what gear others use first. Let people know that you haven't been walking before and ask to look at their gear. Most walkers love to discuss gear and are more than willing to explain the reasons for their choices. Read everything in this Handbook before beginning and direct questions to your leader, but you need to be reasonably self reliant.

7 EQUIPMENT GUIDELINES

7.1 General

For an overnight walk you will need the following.

1. A pack big enough to fit most things inside (50/70 litres). In general it is recommended that the weight you carry (including water) should not exceed 25% of your body weight. It is possible (and recommended) to keep the weight well below this with careful choice of equipment and food. Your pack, including water, need usually never weigh more than 15 kg. A well fitted pack, adjusted to your back length, with a comfortable hip belt to carry the load, is vital for comfortable walking.
2. Something to sleep on: such as a closed cell mat, thermarest or *lightweight* air bed.
3. Something to sleep in: sheet in warm weather, sleeping bag during the Dry Season.
4. Something to sleep under: mosquito net during the Dry Season, tent or fly and mossie net during the Wet. Do not go without something to protect yourself from mosquitoes.
5. Water bottles: 3-4 litres capacity, carried in at least 2 separate robust containers, is recommended – though this depends on the area, intended route and time of year. The trip leader will advise what is required. Carrying sufficient water in our climate is absolutely essential. Note that in the rare case when you may have to sterilise water, this can be done with Betadine (a recommended item in your First Aid Kit). Add 2 to 3 drops per litre of water and wait 30 minutes.
6. Personal First Aid Kit (see below).
7. Sun screen 30+.
8. Food (see below).
9. Small torch with spare batteries and globe.

Optional items can include –

1. Cooking equipment such as stove, fuel and small billy. Most walkers choose to be self-sufficient in this area, but some arrange to share.
2. Mug with handle.
3. Map and compass. It is recommended that you use these to learn to navigate.
4. Insect repellent containing DEET.
5. Matches in resealable bag.

6. Garden trowel (plastic) and toilet paper. (Other toiletries are not necessary. If you bring any, keep to a bare minimum and don't bring items such as soap and shampoo.)
7. Knife (owners of Swiss Army knives swear by them).

Note that the walk leader can reject a person from a walk if they are not adequately equipped.

7.2 Clothing

1. Footwear - in many cases runners are adequate unless you have foot problems, weak ankles, pronation, etc when you may need better support. Good, comfortable, roomy shoes are important - blistered feet can be very painful.
2. Sock protectors or gaiters although not essential are recommended. Gaiters can save you from badly scratched legs if you wear shorts and both will save your socks when the grass is seeding.
3. Hat - absolutely essential. Straw ones are cooler, but felt, leather and cotton hats are more durable. Your leader will not allow you to walk without one.
4. Long sleeved shirt with collar is recommended. The choice of shorts or long pants is a personal one, but beware of sunburn.
5. One change of clothes. Some walkers do not consider this necessary particularly in warm weather when simply a sarong is sufficient for the evenings. (You also might like to leave a clean change of clothes in your vehicle for returning to town.)
6. Small towel or sarong - not necessary, but a sarong is a versatile item and can be used as a towel, a wrap in cooler weather, a hat if you've forgotten or lost one, a sheet or as evening camp wear.
7. Swimming togs are optional.

7.3 Food

The food you take should be light in weight, have high energy value, be easy and fast to prepare, not fragile, not bulky and not spoil in hot weather.

Consider the weight of your pack. Fresh food and tinned food is heavy, though tinned food is worthwhile for dry campsites. It is possible to eat well with only dehydrated and dried foods. Take only what you will need and package individual meals in plastic bags.

The secret is to eat small amounts often. Keep topping up your energy intake and adopt the same principle for drinking water.

Breakfast: options include fruit, muesli, cereal and milk powder, porridge, baked beans, tea/coffee. If you do not have a billy, someone will give you some boiling water for tea/coffee, soup, etc.

Lunch: options include crackers, salami, packaged fish/meats, baked beans, cheese (processed or hard cheese off the block, not pre-packaged), cheese spreads, fruit, or prepared sandwiches for the first day.

Nibbles: nuts, dried fruits, muesli bars, barley sugar. Chocolate does not carry well.

Evening meal: Can be something which does not require cooking - tinned fish, salads (some of these may need to be carried in a container), or sweet biscuits. If cooking: options are rice, noodles, lentils or pasta-based dishes. There are now many tasty dehydrated or freeze-dried packaged meals in the camping shops and supermarkets or you can make up your own using dehydrated vegetables.

8 FIRST AID

It is recommended but not essential that all persons going bushwalking complete a recognised First Aid course such as the St. John Ambulance.

8.1 First Aid Kit

The make-up of your personal First Aid kit assumes that a group of 3 persons could provide sufficient bandages to immobilise one person who suffers a major injury (broken leg, shattered knee, etc.) or wound (punctured leg) or snake bite.

Essential:

- One waterproof container
- Pain killing tablets
- Two 5cm x 2m heavy duty crepe bandages
- One 8cm x 10cm waterproof island dressing (e.g. Cutilin Plus)
- Triangular bandage

Optional (but recommended):

- Bandaid elastic fabric strips or patches to cover minor cuts, abrasions
- Antiseptic (e.g. Betadine) to sterilise wounds or treat water (chlorine based water purification tablets are not sufficient to eliminate Giardia cysts)
- Safety pins
- One 5cm x 7cm non-adherent wound dressing (e.g. Telfa)
- Strong slant tweezers S/S or gold tipped for splinter removal
- 2.5cm x 5m tape (e.g. strapping tape) for fixing bandages, blister prevention or covering holes in water bottles
- Strong needle and thread (dental floss is one of the strongest threads)
- Scissors

Other items to consider are antihistamine tablets, Stingose spray for bites and stings, Ti-tree oil, electrolyte replacement salts (Staminade), emergency reflective blanket.

8.2 Blisters

1. Before setting off on a walk, cover the spots on your feet normally prone to blisters with a thin, smooth tape such as Leucoplast.

2. Once the walk has started, as soon as you feel a hot spot, tape it immediately to reduce abrasion and prevent it turning into a blister. Don't use Band-aids.
3. If a blister has already developed, use corn pads to reduce the pressure at that point or use a blister kit from a chemist (though these are expensive). The blister can be pricked by going in from the side under the unstretched skin.
4. Leave the Leucoplast or tape on until the walk is finished.

8.3 Snake Bite

Prevention

- Leave snakes alone.
- Don't walk in bare feet.
- Look carefully when walking in long grass.
- Use a torch at night.
- Take particular care if collecting firewood.

Signs and Symptoms

Signs of snake bite may not appear for up to 2 hours after a bite. The person may experience headache, drowsiness, nausea and vomiting, tightness in the chest, swelling of the bitten area, sweating and problems with breathing.

First Aid for Snake Bites

- Lie the person down and do not move them unless unavoidable.
- Do NOT wash the area of the bite. Do NOT use a tourniquet.
- Completely immobilise the affected part and apply a firm bandage (as firm as you would put on a sprained ankle) over a folded pad over the bitten area. The bandage should be applied immediately, starting at the bitten area and then extending from the periphery towards more central parts of the body.
- Immobility is best attained by application of a splint, reassurance and immobilisation e.g. putting the patient on a stretcher.
- Send for help. At least one person who can administer emergency resuscitation should stay with the victim.

9 WATER AND DEHYDRATION

Because you sweat more in the subtropics, you will need to drink more water - at least 4 litres a day. If you are doing a hard walk in hot humid weather, you will need 1 litre/hour, which means you could require as much as 8 litres in a day.

- Drink plenty of water.
- Don't wait until you are thirsty - drink early in the morning before you start, often during the day - at least every half hour, and before sleeping at night.
- Recognise symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke - headache, irritability, dizziness, lack of coordination, weakness, pale cool clammy skin, profuse sweating, or feeling sick.
- With any of these symptoms, lie down in a cool shaded area, wet your clothing, have somebody fan you, and drink water until you feel better.

10 TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS AND OTHER COSTS

The leader will coordinate transport to minimise costs and walkers are required to reimburse those generous enough to take their vehicles. The rates/km are published on the website, the total for all vehicles being divided equally among the total number of persons (including drivers). This cost is designed to cover fuel, vehicle repair and maintenance. Abnormal transport expenses such as broken windscreens, flat tyres, etc are the responsibility of the vehicle owner.

The vehicle owner/driver's obligations include ensuring that the vehicle is roadworthy, adequately equipped with spare wheel, tools, etc is adequately fuelled, and complies with traffic regulations.

Leaders contribute to transport costs but are entitled to charge the party a trip administration fee at their discretion according to the following:

- Up to \$10 for a trip where land access or permits are not arranged.
- Up to \$20 for a trip where land access or permits must be arranged.

Leaders may require a non-refundable booking deposit if the trip involves booking transport such as a hire vehicle. They also have the option of using defaulted booking deposits to cover administration costs.

The trip leader will obtain any necessary permits, but for some campsites a camping fee may need to be paid by individual participants.

11 MINIMAL IMPACT BUSHWALKING

Low impact bushwalking requires a walker to move through country ideally leaving no trace of their passage, either in the physical sense or in terms of alteration to the ecological balance. Inevitably, bushwalking will have some impact but with care and common sense the consequences of this can be minimised. The attractions of walking in the Top End include natural beauty, diverse landscapes and habitats, freedom from bush flies and pure unpolluted water to drink. Let's keep it that way.

Rubbish

Carry out all rubbish including organic material which takes a long time to break down such as orange peel. Food scraps can be burnt or carried out, and should not be thrown into the bush or into water. Do not bury rubbish. Do not try to burn off empty packaging cartons as these usually contain aluminium foil which does not burn completely. Check that your campsite is clean before leaving.

Hygiene

Go to the toilet at least 100m away from your campsite and 100m from water. Dig a hole at least 15 cm deep. Only bury under rocks if it is absolutely necessary and then go as far away as possible, making sure that the direction you choose is clear of the bearing for the next day's walk. Sanitary pads and tampons can be burnt or carried out. Do not bury them - they will only be dug up by animals.

Weeds

Learn to recognise weeds and take care not to carry seeds into weed-free areas. Check clothing and socks for seeds and burn or put with your rubbish. Check all your gear carefully when you return home.

Washing

There is no need to use either soaps or detergents – sand can be quite effective.

Campsites

Avoid damaging vegetation. Your leader should locate a clear area to accommodate the number of campers without the need to clear surrounding vegetation.

Fire and Fire Places

- Be careful with fire.
- Keep fires small and do not build a circle of rocks around them – they are unsightly and can explode on heating.
- Use a site at least 2m away from vegetation and in an area where it's easy to remove evidence of the fireplace. If camping in a well used area or a designated campsite, use the same fire places.
- Use only dead and fallen wood.
- Make sure the fire is completely out when you leave and scatter or bury all traces including ash, charcoal and unused collected firewood.
- Do not light fires in rock shelters or caves.
- Your leader may request you use a fuel stove if firewood is scarce or there is abnormal risk – for example, it is not advisable to have a fire in monsoon rainforests.
- Some permits may ban open fires.

Heritage sites

Many of the areas through which you walk contain registered sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage, but also remember that all landscape is a living cultural landscape, significantly more than the landforms and scenery.

Any rock art, stone tools or shelters should be left undisturbed. Traditional owners have requested that bushwalkers refrain from actively seeking out art sites. Respect areas of restricted access with Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority markers.

12 SAFETY IN THE BUSH

Crocodiles inhabit Territory seas and many rivers. Walkers should not swim or wade in waters that may harbour salt-water crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*). Crocodiles leave rivers and may walk considerable distances from water in search of prey.

Other life threatening species which may be encountered during walks include but are not limited to buffalo, snakes, spiders, feral animals such as pigs, venomous sea creatures, ticks, mites (Litchfield) and disease-bearing mosquitoes. Keep your distance. Walkers should take all reasonable precautions to avoid such hazards.

Never go off on your own - stay with your group. If you do need to go off, tell the leader or the people walking in front and behind you.

Let your leader know if you feel ill, have a headache or may have been bitten by a snake.

Each walker ideally should carry a topographic map and compass. If you don't have your own map, keep checking the route with your trip leader and have a general idea of your route back or to the nearest water. Many walks follow natural features such as creek lines, ridges and escarpments and are navigable without maps.

If you get lost or cannot locate the rest of your group -

- stop and think calmly;
- find a shady spot and wait for your group to find you;
- stay in the one place, but make sure you have enough water to drink; and
- put out patterns of three - three yells, three Cooee's, three blasts on a whistle. Any pattern of three is a standard distress signal.

In general, follow the directions of your trip leader. However, you have the right to challenge the conduct of a walk if you think you are being led into danger.

13 YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Respect the environment and its serenity. Uphold the public image and reputation of the club and respect the club's handbooks, guidelines and rules. They are common sense and can only enhance your and other's enjoyment. If in the rare instance a major transgression occurs, such as disobeying Park rules or a landowner's requirements, the trip leader may need to refer the incident to the committee for further action.

14 TRAINING

The club periodically arranges training activities. All members are advised to attend as many as possible, particularly if you wish to become a trip leader. For information on obtaining external qualifications, contact the Outdoor Recreation Council of Australia (ORCA) or talk to qualified members of the club.

15 TRIP LEADERS

Trip leaders are essential to the club. Probably the most important attributes of a trip leader are experience, competence, empathy, communication skills and a wish and ability to use these for the benefit of others. Trip leaders are not tour guides and do not get paid, and members must respect their voluntary participation.

If you are interested in becoming a leader, download from the club website a copy of the ***Handbook for Leaders*** which includes more information on walk permits, club procedures, search and rescue and other emergency procedures