

2014

Route Development Manual



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Introduction

The route development work covered in this manual is part of a broader Ramblers project called Ramblers Routes. The project aims to support the sharing of routes between members and in the process create one of Britain's biggest and best online collection of high-quality walking routes.

The project is a legacy of the successful "Get Walking, Keep Walking" initiative, with an online route development tool being developed to support the design of good quality routes that encouraged people to walk independently rather than relying on an indefinite programme of led walks. Off the success of this programme, a demand was identified for route cards of the thousands of routes currently being walked every year by Ramblers members. This demand comes primarily from those that prefer self-led walks or informal group walks that would occur outside of the 'traditional' Ramblers' led walks. However there is also a demand from the more traditional group walker, such as walk leaders, that enjoys designing and sharing routes.

The Ramblers Routes site presents users with a practical and user-friendly interface and the pre-requisite set of tools to develop high quality route cards. Strict quality control procedures have also been designed within the site to ensure that all developed routes go through a process of checking and editing before being authorized for publication.

All routes developed in the Ramblers Routes site, unless requested otherwise, will be published for inclusion in the Ramblers Routes library and made available to members, within the Ramblers website.

This manual is intended to support route developers and checkers in planning and developing their routes for inclusion in the Ramblers Routes library. It includes much that is useful, practical and helpful, but it's not the last word on the subject and it will continue to be revised and expanded in the light of experience. So, if there's something you think could be improved or done in a better way, or something you think has been left out or doesn't belong here, then please let us know.

SECTION 1: Planning & Designing your Route

1. Identify your target audience;

The key to developing a good route is to identify your target group, to understand their specific needs and interests, and to then design a route that meets those needs. Trying to develop a route that meets everyone's needs will inevitably result in a route of lower appeal to either group. The requirements, for example, of those walkers that are interested in urban, cultural-themed walks would be very different to those that seek challenging, long-distance walks in the Brecon Beacons.

Once you have identified your target audience, keep them in mind on every step of the process of developing your route and stay focused on their specific requirements.

2. Planning the Route;

A first draft of a route will often come from a combination of your local knowledge and from studying maps: OS 1:50,000 Landranger maps will give an overview with the 1:25,000 Explorer maps allowing more detailed planning.

You may already have a general idea of the area in which you wish to plan the route. Otherwise, there are several sources of ideas for routes that have been planned by others, and which can be amended if necessary to suit your own requirements. Such routes can help you to gain experience and confidence before going on to create your own routes. Do not be ashamed to admit that your route has been taken or adapted from some other source – even experienced route developers sometimes do this. Such sources include:

- a. www.ramblersroutes.org ;
- b. Books & Magazines: Walk magazine and many Ramblers areas/groups produce their own guide books;

For your first attempt at planning a route, try to pick an area with which you are familiar. Do not be alarmed by the wide choice of possibilities, and remember that you cannot include all the suggestions given in this manual – at least not on one route!

3. Length & Walking Time;

When deciding upon a proposed length for your walk you need to consider the environment through which you will be walking. Walking speeds vary from person to person, but a reasonably fit walker can expect to cover anything from 4 -7km (3-4miles) per hour when traversing good ground with a range of moderate climbs and downhill.

Remember to always keep in mind the intended target of your route-card and consider the pace that you would expect this group to walk at.

You can plan the distance of the route from a map in several ways:

- Use a marked piece of string or mark off each straight section of the route along the edge of a piece of paper, then measure the result from the scale. Low-tech but gives a reasonable result.
- Use a map measuring device, electronic or manual. You simply run it along the line of the route on the map, do any necessary calculations with the scale and read off the result.
- Draw your proposed route in www.ramblersroutes.org which will automatically calculate the distance for you.

Tips

- Using a map with grid squares, check the distance covered by each grid square: this is often a convenient division of a km, for example 500m. You'll soon get a rough idea of how long a route is by looking at how many squares it crosses and trying mentally to "straighten out" the curves and kinks within one square. However this is unlikely to be accurate enough for a finished route and you may need to check it in other ways.
- Even if you're good at estimating how long you yourself have walked, developing a route invariably takes much longer than walking the finished route, as you explore alternative paths, look for access points, change your mind and retrace your steps and so on. But

once you've settled on the route, timing yourself as you walk it again in one go should give you an idea of length.

- You can also measure walking distances on the ground using the more sophisticated pedometers. Since these measure steps, you will need to spend some time setting the device to match your own length of pace. But the reliability of pedometers varies enormously, and they're not of much help at the development stage where you're often retracing your steps.

4. Interesting & Attractive Routes

It may seem obvious, but the most successful routes are those that take people to places they are likely to want to go. Make your route as interesting as possible by including points of interest such as churches, photogenic villages, historic buildings, ancient monuments, stately homes, country parks, nature reserves etc. The area may be associated with a historical event, or with a theme such as a medieval industry.

When planning the route, assess the potential quality of the views. Whilst many good viewpoints are often marked on OS maps, interpretation of the contours is usually a better guide for walkers. If possible, avoid designing routes that only cover flat terrain but rather include a variety of landscapes and do not stay too long in woodland where views are restricted or absent. Routes of contrasting scenery and full of incident (widening, narrowing, turning to frame arresting views etc) are particularly appealing with, for example, a mix of open spaces and woodland, or new houses and old buildings.

The opportunity to walk beside water is popular and, if possible, includes a coastal, lakeside or riverside path, or a canal towpath. Further enjoyment can be added if some activity is likely, such as at a canal lock, steam railway station, a working windmill or waterwheel.

Although attractiveness is subjective and varies from person to person, many people do prefer to walk in "natural", green environments away from heavy traffic. Streets can also be attractive, provided they feel safe, are relatively quiet and/or are interesting in their own right, for example with intriguing buildings or heritage features. Avoid designing routes that include excessive walking along busy roads.

Unless a special interest is the theme of your route, do not overdo the interest stops but, if it doesn't take too long, do consider including at least one visit to a place of interest. Some provide welcome facilities such as refreshments and toilets but do mention if an admission fee is payable. If the facility is run by an organisation whose members qualify for free admission (e.g. English Heritage, Historic Scotland, Welsh Historical Monuments, National Trust, National Trust for Scotland) this should be mentioned, so that walkers know to take along their membership cards.

If planning a route in a particularly hilly area, try to keep the steeper climbs in the middle of the route when the walkers have warmed up but before they get too tired. Always keep your target group in mind when deciding upon the right amount of steepness and climbing for your route.

Aim to design routes that are easily accessible and follow clear, well-marked & well-maintained paths. Consider potential escape routes and shortening possibilities in case of need.

Circular or linear routes are preferable to out-and back routes. When public transport is used, both options are equally practical, though it would be better to opt for a linear route as this allows a wider coverage of the area. If access to the start point of the route is only really feasibly possible by car, then a circular route tends to be the more satisfactory option.

It is also important to consider the nature of the terrain for certain times of the year and to highlight this within the route description. Some paths may become impassable or dangerous during winter as a result of ice or strong winds.

When planning your route, try to avoid any unnecessary conflict with conservation interests, or other recreational users, or land management interests. Equally important, though, is the need to uphold the traditional uses and rights that have been secured by walkers over many years.

5. Safety;

The safety of walkers must be borne in mind at all stages of the design of your route. Walking is perceived as a 'safe' activity and, though minor injuries (blisters and bruises) are common, a major injury resulting directly from participation could have serious implications. Walking, particularly in remote areas, will always carry some risk. As in other outdoor activities, walkers must necessarily take primary responsibility for their own safety whilst out on a walk. Nevertheless, you should take reasonable steps to identify and address foreseeable risks associated with the route.

After the initial planning stage and when an outline route has been decided, review the route from the point of view of safety. Ideally you should carry out a risk assessment by identifying hazards and deciding how best to mitigate them. When evaluating a risk, both the frequency of occurrence and the severity of the consequences should be borne in mind. Often, a note in the route description drawing attention to the hazards will be adequate.

Types of hazard that could be identified and highlighted in route descriptions or avoided altogether include:

- busy road crossings
- rough or dangerous sections, particularly rocky
- area of difficult navigation or remote
- cliffs, quarries
- Dangerous stiles, bridges, etc.

6. Accessing your Route;

It is Ramblers policy to encourage the use of public transport to reach walking areas, though it is appreciated that this is often impractical in some parts of the country. On Sundays in particular, some rural bus and train services do not operate, and some intermediate railway stations may be closed.

When designing your route, give consideration to the means through which walkers will get to and from the start (and end) point of your route. If public transport is available, check on schedules and research such aspects as: nearest stops, first and last bus/train times & expected ticket prices.

If car is the better option for accessing the route, then gather information on suitable parking facilities at the starting point. This should if possible be an official car park – if a charge is made, include this on the route card. Avoid places that cause inconvenience to residents or businesses.

7. Reconnoitre & Recording your Route

Once you have an idea of:

- Places you'd like to link
- Paths you'd like to use

You can start to assemble them into practical routes.

1. Locate the places you'd like to link and the paths you'd like to use on a photocopy map or from a print-out of the appropriate map-section from the Ramblers Routes. Using your existing local knowledge and making judgements from the map, rough out some routes linking some of these places that fit the criteria outlined in previous chapters and the needs of the project.
2. Go out armed with a hard copy of your draft route map, a pencil, a rubber, a notebook or voice recorder and possibly a camera, and attempt to walk your routes. Unless you know the area extremely well, you will almost certainly find yourself making changes when you see the situation on the ground. You will find off-road short cuts that aren't shown on the map, some options that looked attractive on the map will turn out to be less attractive on the ground and vice versa. Where there are alternative routes you should explore both and decide on the best one. At this stage, try to make enough notes to allow you to write up a simple description of the route, including warnings of any particular difficulties identified.

SECTION 2: Transcribing your Route

Transcribing your routes has now never been easier with the Ramblers new route development tool, www.ramblersroutes.org.

Intended to harness the enthusiasm and knowledge of Ramblers members in developing routes, the Ramblers Routes website is a route development tool designed for the development of route cards for inclusion in the Ramblers Routes library.

The site presents users with a practical and user-friendly interface and the pre-requisite set of tools to develop high quality route cards. Strict quality control procedures have also been designed within the site to ensure that all developed routes go through a process of checking and editing before being authorized for publication.

Before you are able to access the tools and to start developing your routes, you will need to set up a Ramblers Routes account. Please refer to the accompanying “Ramblers Routes Training Manual 2012” for specific details on how to set up you account and use the respective tools.

1. Plotting your Route

a. Map Layer;

The site offers a range of map layers upon which to plot your route, so ensure that the layer you select is most suited for the type of route that you are plotting. For example, when plotting routes in the countryside it is preferable to utilise OS Landranger/Explorer maps and for routes through towns or cities we would recommend Open Street Map. The following map layers are available:

- i. Bing Road Maps;
- ii. Bing Aerial Photos;
- iii. Bing Hybrid;
- iv. Ordnance Survey;
- v. Open Street Map.

b. Waypoints;

A waypoint is a reference point in physical space used for purposes of navigation and help to define the route path. Adding regular waypoints helps to break your route up into manageable bite-size sections will make it easier for walkers to follow your directions.

When selecting your waypoints try to utilise distinctive features on the ground that will be easily identified by the walker. Typical waypoints could include unique buildings, monuments, road junctions, stiles, etc.

Nowadays many walkers carry a GPS device and it is good practice, if you are able, to provide GPS coordinates for the above identified waypoints.

Try to avoid adding too many waypoints as this may break up the flow of your route description.

c. Points of Interest;

Be selective on the points of interest that you include on your route. It is very easy to get carried away in your research and to litter your route with everything that you have learnt. Ideally the points of interest should complement your route theme and serve as further points by which walkers can navigate.

Ramblers Routes will designate each of your points of interest a letter according to the order that it appears on the route path. The interpretation of these respective points of interest is covered under the section *Route Description*.

d. Alternative Route.

In the course of your research you may identify sections of the route path that are inaccessible during certain times of the year, prove difficult for persons with disabilities or limited walking experience, or you may have even identified a detour that would be of interest to certain walker types. In this case you should add an alternative route for which you will provide a description/reason within the route description.

Whilst it is recommended to provide alternative routes when needed, try not to have too many as this can become very confusing to the walker.

2. Describing your Route

Descriptions of routes are vital, particularly for those who find map reading difficult. The aim here is to be clear, concise, consistent, accurate and easy to understand, so that your readers can feel confident they will not get lost when following your route.

a. Title;

The title is invariably the first piece of information that will draw the user's attention when searching for a route in the database. It is important therefore that the title you use for your route gives the reader a sense of its theme and location and ideally draws them in to learn more about the route.

Route titles such as "A Walk through Time" or "A Roman Reminder" are catchy and give a sense of the routes theme but give very little indication of the routes location. Likewise, titles such as "Norham" or "Doddington" give a sense of the location of the route but very little idea as to what the route will involve.

A popular style for titling routes is to give the start-point and end-point of the route, for example "East Hoathly to Gun Hill" or "Banner's Gate to Aston Hall". However, if your route is centred on a specific theme you may wish to expand upon this.

Ramblers Routes gives you a limit of 66 characters and we recommend that you try to be creative and develop a title that is both catchy and informative, for example: "Where Falcons Fly – Symonds Yat", "Six Dales around Thixendale", Six Tons and a Ham – The Langtons of Leicestershire".

b. Summary;

This is the next bit of information that users will read about your route and it will also feature in the listing of the routes on the Ramblers website, so it needs to sell the best features. If the user likes what they read they are more likely to open the route card. The route summary is intended to:

- Let people know roughly where the route runs
- Help people judge quickly if the route will be suitable for their needs and/or interesting.
- Help people identify, and get to and from, the start and end of a walk.

The summary could also go into more detail about the location, themes, features and difficulty of the route, or any points of interest that the route passes by. The summary should be no longer than 255 characters.

c. Route Description;

It's important to make the distinction between directions and interpretation.

- Directions are the practical instructions for following the route: for example, "Turn into Green Street on the left, go through the gate into the park, follow the path ahead and go right at the fork."
- Interpretation is additional information about the surroundings, typically about heritage, wildlife and interesting features to look out for. For example, "The church was built in 1750 in Romanesque style"; "The trees are a mixture of oak and birch".

Interpretation can be very important – a sense of discovery is one of things that motivate people to walk. But keeping interpretation clearly separated from directions will make the description easier to follow. In our standard format, you can include very brief (single sentence) interpretations *in italics* among the directions, if they are drawing attention to minor but interesting features along the way, for example, *Look for the blue plaque commemorating guitarist Jimi Hendrix on the house on the left*. More detailed information is best left as an appendix to a description. For more on interpretation, see below.

i. Writing directions

- Use simple, everyday, consistent language, short sentences and short paragraphs. Practicality and intelligibility is more important than literary style. Remember readers may not be confident at following complicated directions, and English may not be their first language.
- Try to think about how someone new to the route will see things – what's obvious to you might not be obvious to them, especially if you're very familiar with the route.
- Divide the route into shorter "legs" between significant points – a transport interchange, a facility or landmark (for example a park, a school, a well-known building), a junction of paths. Give each of these points a name – it's helpful to mark these off in bold type. Start a new numbered paragraph where you start a new leg. In an urban area where there are lots of features and routes are often complex, legs can be relatively short – about every 500m on average.
- Use landmarks – "take the second on the left into Church Street", "keep ahead until you pass a children's playground".
- Make sure your landmarks are unmistakeable and that as many readers as possible will understand your descriptions of them. "Turn right by the large red brick building" is fine so long as there isn't another large red brick building before you reach the right one. But don't assume, for example, that everyone will understand "turn right at the patch of birch trees".

- If you pass a really prominent landmark such as a large and distinctive building, mention it, otherwise the reader may wonder why you haven't and worry that they're in the wrong place!
- Avoid using distance measurements – for example “keep ahead for 300 metres”. These are usually meaningless to inexperienced walkers. But do use less precise indications of distance, like “turn left then almost immediately right”.
- Mention signs, for example “Turn right at the next junction, following the sign to the station” – but take care if you think signs could be changed or vandalised. Street name boards and traffic signs are usually fine as these are regularly replaced, while pedestrian and promoted route signing may be less reliable.
- Don't be afraid to give multiple clues: “Turn left along the lakeside, with the water on your right”.
- If the route runs for a long distance without turning, reassure the reader. For example “Follow the main path for quite a long time, passing some buildings and a sports field, until you reach the road at Beech Avenue.”
- If a junction is complicated, take some time to describe it in detail.
- Along all but the quietest roads, be clear about which crossings to use and which side of the road to walk along.
- Think in particular about how you describe the very start. You'll need to orient people: “With your back to the station”, “Leaving the front door of the community centre”. Be aware of snares like multiple exits to stations.
- Avoid jargon, codes and abbreviations.
- Always try to be concise. A long text gives the impression of a long walk and the instructions may look too complicated. A 5km walk should take no more than 2 A4 sides of description when typed at 12pt.
- If the directions over a short distance are becoming too long and complicated, you might want to consider simplifying the route itself.

Some examples of how to describe action at junctions:

- “Turn/go left” – implies a turn of around 90°.
- “Fork left” – implies the path ahead branches at an angle of less than 90°.
- “Follow the main path as it curves left” – implies there is a bend in the path but no junction, or possibly a junction with a path that is obviously much narrower or less important.
- “Keep ahead and slightly to the left” – implies that the path continues at the same width but with a slight bend to the left, or a “staggered junction” where the path continuing ahead is clearly visible but shifted slightly to the left.
- “Cross at the crossing on the left and continue ahead along Church Street” – implies that Church Street is ahead in line of sight when you reach the junction, but that you have to walk a little to the left to a safe crossing and a little to the right on the other side to resume your course. Fine if the way ahead is obvious, but in case of doubt use more detail. “At the junction turn left, cross High Street at the crossing, turn right on the other side and then left to continue along Church Street.”
- “Go/keep ahead” – best reserved for when the path really is more-or-less directly ahead and there is no need to “stagger” round a junction.

- An example of a more complicated junction: “You reach a complicated junction of five paths: take the second path on your left, towards the church tower.” This is better than distinguishing different kinds of left – half-left, sharp left etc.

ii. Interpretation

Interpretation, as mentioned above, is additional information about the surroundings along the way, typically about heritage, wildlife and interesting features to look out for.

Interpretation is a good way to motivate people to get out and walk in order to explore their local area at close hand.

However writing interpretation can require considerable specialist knowledge and expertise. The background information you could provide about any particular walk is practically limitless, so interpretation involves deciding which information is most interesting. And of course what’s interesting to one person may not be interesting to another. Traditionally, interpretation on walks has focused most on subjects like old buildings, “book” history and wildlife – but users may also be interested in and motivated by such things as modern architecture, shopping facilities, places and events of significance to the local community (perhaps a community group was founded in a particular building along your route) and links to popular culture such as music, films and TV.

Not everyone who is good at devising routes and writing clear route descriptions is able or willing to become an expert at interpreting the surroundings as well. But some simple principles are always worth following:

- Make a note of any existing interpretation along the way: blue plaques and other inscriptions identifying buildings, information boards in parks and nature reserves etc.
- Make a note of any interesting facts about places along the way that you already know.
- Where you’re using part of an existing route that already has a leaflet or description, there’s no harm in taking key facts from the interpretation, so long as you don’t copy whole sentences and paragraphs.
- Make a note of sources of further information. For example, where your walk passes a museum or visitor attraction, note its phone number and website.

If you’re interested in researching interpretative information further, here are some sources:

- Books on local history and culture – most libraries have local studies sections which are a treasure trove of information.
- The internet. Searching on Google can often produce results on the most seemingly obscure local features, and www.wikipedia.org also has an overwhelming amount of information. Websites run by councils and local organisations can help too.
- Local organisations. Many places have a local civic society or history society whose members have a great breadth of knowledge about the area. You can find out about such organisations from libraries.
- The local community. Talk to walk leaders and walking ambassadors who are using your routes with local people – they may well pick up information that nobody has recorded, but could be of great interest.

One idea if you don't yourself feel qualified to write interpretation is to work with someone else that has the interest and knowledge, or is prepared to research it. Ask other volunteers, or people involved with other local organisations.

d. Themes & Features;

When users come to search for a route on the Ramblers Routes library, they will be able to narrow down their searches according to specific themes and features. Therefore, to optimise the potential for your route to appear in the search results, it is highly recommended that you look through the option of themes and features available in Ramblers Routes and select those that specifically apply to your route.

The following is a list of the available themes:

- Adventure walks
- All weather walks
- Architectural walks
- Arts / Cultural walks
- Child-friendly walks
- Dog-friendly walks
- Group walks
- History / Heritage walks
- Local interest walks
- Night/evening walks
- Pushchair friendly walks
- Walks for individuals
- Wheelchair friendly walks
- Wildlife / Nature walks

The following is a list of the available features:

- AONBs (Area(s) of Natural Beauty)
- Baby changing facilities
- Campsite
- Circular
- City
- Coastal
- Countryside
- Farmland
- Flat ground
- Hills
- Lakes/Ponds/Reservoirs
- Linear
- Mountains
- National Park
- National Trail
- Open access land
- Parking available

- Parks
- Public transport accessible
- Pubs/Bars
- Refreshments available
- Rivers/Streams/Canals
- SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest)
- Toilets available
- Town
- Village
- Woodland/Forest

e. Route Grading.

Grading a route is a very subjective exercise and often depends on the standards of the person setting the grade. When deciding upon the grade to set for your route remembers to keep your intended target in mind. What could be a leisurely route for you could quite likely be a strenuous route to another walker.

In an effort to limit the subjectivity of the grading system, the Ramblers have devised a system that gives consideration of the following key factors:

- Terrain;
- Height gain;
- Distance;
- Required Navigation Skills;
- Equipment required;
- Potential exposure.

It is important to familiarise yourself with the grading system and be as objective as possible in the grading of your route.

- **Easy Access** routes for everyone, including people with conventional wheelchairs and pushchairs, using easy access paths. Comfortable shoes or trainers can be worn. Assistance may be needed to push wheelchairs on some sections.
- **Easy** routes for anyone of a reasonable fitness level who does not have a mobility difficulty. Suitable for pushchairs if they can be lifted over occasional obstructions. Comfortable shoes or trainers can be worn. Paths are clearly identifiable on the ground.
- **Leisurely** routes for reasonably fit people. May include unsurfaced paths. Walking shoes or boots and warm, waterproof clothing are recommended. Paths can be identified on the ground or through following clear landmarks.
- **Moderate** routes for people with a good level of fitness and at least a little country walking experience. May include some steep paths and open country. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are recommended. Most paths are clearly defined but map reading skills are recommended.
- **Strenuous** routes for experienced walkers, with a high level of fitness. May involve some pathless sections across wild valleys, rough country, open moorland or mountains tops. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are necessary. Paths may be unclear on the ground so map and compass skills are essential.

- **Technical** routes for very experienced walkers, with a high level of fitness and competence. May involve some pathless sections across wild valleys, rough country, open moorland, or mountains tops. May also involve some scrambling or exposed sections. Walking boots and warm, waterproof clothing are necessary. Paths may be unclear on the ground so good map and compass skills are essential.

f. Photographs

A picture is worth a thousand words and this is no more so than with a route card. A selection of good photographs will not only give the user an idea of what to expect but will also go a long way to encouraging someone to go on the walk.

There is no optimal amount in terms of number of photos that should be added to your route card but you should aim to add at least five good photographs. What constitutes a good photograph is highly subjective but the following guidelines should be considered:

- **Is there a clear centre of interest?** In a strong photo, the viewer can immediately identify the subject and should dominate the image and form the viewer's first impression.
- **Is the image well composed?** In a strong photo, there should be a sense of overall organization. While entire books are written on composition, at the most basic level, composition is the process of establishing a sense of order for the elements within an image.
- **Is the image focused and correctly exposed?** The centre of focus should be on the centre of interest of the subject. The sharpest point of the picture should pinpoint what the photographer sees as the most important aspect of the image. Avoid adding photos that are either over- or under-exposed.
- **Does the image compliment the route?** Perhaps goes without saying but the photos should be relevant to the respective route.

SECTION 3: Route Checking

Even if they have been checked by the person who developed them, routes also need to be checked thoroughly and risk assessed by a different person before they can be publicised and used.

Route descriptions contain complex information and you might make simple mistakes. But it's easy to miss your own mistakes, particularly if you know the route well. And if you know the route, following it on the ground might seem obvious to you, but perhaps not to others. You may well miss or forget to mention some features of importance, safety issues and so on. And finally it's always good to get a fresh eye on something.

1. Carrying out the route check

To check the route, take the route description and map provided by the route developer and attempt to walk the route. At the same time:

- Check the clarity and accuracy of the route description;
- Assess the practicality and attractiveness of the route;
- Carry out a simple risk assessment of the route.

It should be possible to do all three on a single pass of the route, but occasionally you may feel you need to walk a route twice. If a description is written in both directions, then it also needs to be checked in both directions.

You should take with you:

- The route description and map
- Ideally, a voice recorder –easier than having to stop and make notes
- A pencil and notebook
- A copy of these notes
- A street atlas and/or Explorer map of the area, so you can find your way if you get lost, or if you want to look for alternative routes.

Before you start, make a note of the route you're walking, your starting place, the date and time, and the weather as this might have a bearing on your assessment of the walk.

After the walk, make a note of your finishing place and time. The finishing time may be helpful to give you an idea of the actual length of the walk.

1. Check the clarity and accuracy of the route description

- Is the description clear, consistent and easy to follow? Is it concise? Is it in simple English? Does it meet the guidelines above? If not, where are the particular problems and how might it be improved?
- Is the description accurate? It's surprisingly easy to write "turn left" when you mean "turn right". Usually an experienced navigator will quickly spot such a mistake, particularly if they are also following a map, but part of your job is getting lost so other

people don't have to! Don't forget to check all the other details including things like transport information, opening times, locations of start and finish points.

- If there are places where the description is difficult to follow, are these because the route itself is too complicated? Could it be simplified?
- Is the route the length it claims to be? While there's no need to measure the length with a GPS, you may still feel you want to ask for the stated length to be checked again, particularly if the route feels **longer** than it claims to be. Bear in mind whether you walk faster than the average person, and also if you spent more time on the route in order to check it more thoroughly.

2. Assess the practicality and attractiveness of the route

- Does the route meet the criteria for its difficulty classification and any special features (child friendly, dog friendly)? If not, is there a way to change the route, or is it easier to change the classification? For example, a route claims it is easy access but turns out to have a short section of uneven path that would be difficult for wheelchair users. You might see an easy way to divert the route to avoid this section, or you might recommend the classification is changed to "Easy access except for a short section of uneven path that may be difficult for wheelchair users". If the problem was more extensive, you might recommend a change from "Easy access" to "Easy".
- Is the route as attractive as it could be, referring to the guidelines above? Bear in mind the limitations of the environment and the remarks about balance – sometimes unattractive sections are unavoidable, but they may not undermine the whole route. If there are problems, can you see obvious ways to improve the route?

3. Carry out a simple risk assessment of the route

Walking, especially on easy routes in urban areas, is a relatively low risk activity, and it's important to avoid worrying too much about the minor risks that you forget about the major benefits. However it's good practice to be able to show we have acted responsibly in taking account of risks to the personal safety of users of our routes. It's also very useful for staff and volunteers taking groups of walkers on our routes to be alert to any particular risks and deal with them accordingly.

Risk assessments might sound forbiddingly technical but in fact it's mainly straightforward common sense. A risk assessment involves producing a written document that shows you have taken time to think about potential risks to personal safety along the route. As well as being of practical use when taking groups on walks, such documents are very useful in the unlikely event that someone pursues a claim against us following an incident on a walk.

As you walk the route, look out for potential hazards, and for each make a note of:

- **Location.** This doesn't have to be a grid reference – you could use a written note – "By Green Park lake", "Junction of Farmers Hill and Church Street" – or key to points on a map.
- **Hazard.** For example: lake, road crossing, busy road, play equipment.
- **Effect.** For example: falling in/getting wet, traffic accident, falling off.
- **Who might be harmed?** This is often "all walkers" but you should also note where there are particular hazards for more vulnerable users. For example: "All walkers, particularly those with health problems", "Young children".

- **Measures to minimise.** These are your recommendations to a walk leader for reducing the risk. For example: “Advise caution”, “Take special care”.

Note that here we are assessing the environment of the route, and identifying localised hazards. There are some more general hazards associated with walking – for example the weather causing chills or sunburn – but such hazards will be addressed in other ways, such as general advice to a group before a led walk, or walking advice on websites and leaflets.

2. Acting on the route check report

If there are no problems with the route, then you can simply submit the route card without making any amendments. Please indicate under the comments tab that you are happy with the route and did not need to make any amendments.

If the problems are only minor errors or you’ve made small amendments to the description or grading without changing the route then please list these amendments in your comments and submit.

If the route itself needs amending or you feel that this route is not suitable for publication, then please do not submit and contact Ramblers Routes support to discuss. Ramblers will then look at returning the route to the developer so that they can make the necessary amendments.