



## GUIDE 12

## PLANNING AND DELIVERING A GUIDED WALK

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### Introduction

If you are a member of a local archaeological or historical society, it's a fair bet that you are passionate about the historic environment of your locality. Naturally you will want to share that passion with others. You will want to get them to see how the past has shaped your community. There are many ways to do this. You could write a book or an article on the internet, for example. You could give a talk at one of your organisation's regular meetings, or perhaps you might persuade a local broadcaster to let you have a slot in his/her radio show.

However useful these approaches may be in getting the public's attention there will come a time when they actually want to see things for themselves. The obvious thing to do is to conduct a guided walk around those features about which you are so proud. You do need to be careful though. No matter how

well you know the locality, it's not the easy option it might seem at first glance. These guidance notes will help you to consider some of the issues which you will need to deal with if you are planning a guided walk.

### Be confident of your facts first

The fact that you are considering leading an archaeological/ historical walk around your community suggests that you already know a lot about its past, however, it is always wise to check your facts. For example, many communities had a history written around the turn of the 1900s. Such books can be a wonderful source of information, but you must remember that other work is likely to have been done since then. Make sure that your information is accurate and up-to-date. A visit to your local studies library may help with this. Alternatively, you may wish to consider a visit to the Historic

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Environment Record housed in our offices in Wakefield. This contains information on all known archaeological sites and findspots in West Yorkshire, together with data on listed buildings and other historic structures, battlefields, parks and gardens. We also have access to a large number of historic maps and aerial photographs and a large library. The facility is open and free for consultation by the public but it is necessary to make an appointment to do so as space is limited. For further details please contact the Historic Environment Officer on 01924 306697 or e-mail us at [wyher@wyjs.org.uk](mailto:wyher@wyjs.org.uk)

## Sorting through your material

The chances are that, once you have gathered all your material together, you will have far more than you need. Look at it carefully. Decide which are the most important elements of the story. It's these you should concentrate on. If you were leading a guided walk in Ilkley, for example, you would have many choices of what to talk about. You would need to decide whether you wanted to focus on the Roman town, or Ilkley as a Spa resort. Alternatively, you might want to take people up onto the moor to look at the prehistoric remains. Clearly it would be impossible to do all of these things in one walk. Decide which element of the past you will present on this occasion and concentrate on the material relevant to it.

## Access

The next point you need to consider is access. If the features which you want to celebrate are not visible from public rights of way, you must make sure that you have permission to visit them. Do not be tempted to trespass. Should a difficulty arise, it could be embarrassing for you and the organisation to which you belong. In the worst case scenario, it could even lead to legal action.

On a more positive note, gaining access to otherwise private places is something which a local group can often achieve, because it knows the right people to ask. West Yorkshire has many ancient monuments tucked away on private land. Many listed buildings are private houses or places of work. Knowing the right people could gain access to such sites and could give the walk a focal point which might attract people from localities other than your own.

## Walk the route

No matter how familiar you are with the terrain, walk the route well in advance of the day on which you plan to lead your guided walk. If possible, walk it the day before as well. There are several reasons for this:

- *Deciding what you will say when.* You have already gathered a substantial amount of information about the area over which you will be walking. The problem is, not only pacing the walk, but also visualising where you will stand to tell which part of the story. Remember, the whole purpose of your guided walk is to inform and to enthuse the public. It is not a training circuit being carried out solely for the benefit of physical fitness. Talking will have to be fitted to walking so that the event makes a balanced whole. Take the time to think what you will say at each point. If you only think of this in terms of walking the distance, you will drastically underestimate the length of time which the walk will take.
- *Thinking about the physical difficulties of the walk.* Can these be minimised in any way? Could you, for instance, go up a longer, gentler slope and come down the steeper one? Is there the need to scramble over rocks when a slightly longer footpath might avoid the obstacle altogether?

- *Health and Safety.* This issue is covered in more detail in another Guidance leaflet. For present purposes, it is sufficient to say that you will need to be aware of those parts of your walk which may be muddy or offer potential trip hazards so that you can warn participants of potential problems in advance. This is why it is advisable to walk the route immediately before the day of the guided walk. You might find that the footpath which was a little muddy but otherwise easily passable in February, is clogged with nettles in June. Doing the rounds the day before might allow you to find an alternative route. You will also need to think about avoiding busy roads, knowing safe crossing points and ensuring that there is adequate space where you plan to stop and talk. Your party should be kept off the road but still needs to be able to see the thing you are talking about. Think about getting third-party insurance if you are intending to levy a charge or to take people onto private property.

## Enlist help

Don't be afraid of asking other members of the group to share in the preparation. This can have several benefits:

- *Having someone to 'bounce ideas off'.* Having a second person to talk to during the planning stage can give a guide as to how well you are explaining things. Many of us who are deeply committed to our own specialist subject tend to slip into jargon almost unconsciously.
- *Giving someone the confidence to lead the walk themselves.* This could be quite important in case of illness, for example. Having someone else who knows the walk could save it from being cancelled in the event that you are ill. It also means that, if the walk proves popular, it won't be the same person who leads it on every occasion.

- *It helps to gauge the difficulty of the walk.* Perhaps you selected this route because it's one of your favourite walks. You will be used to its difficulties but your friend might not be. S/he will soon tell you if the climb is too steep or if you're walking too fast. These are things you must make allowances for. Remember that a party of walkers can only go at the pace of the slowest. There is no point in attempting a long or strenuous walk with people who are not used to it. Also, if you anticipate that more than twenty people will attend, you should have another member of your organisation to act as 'tail end Charlie'. This will make sure that no-one gets lost. This is key if your preparation is not to be wasted.

## Publicity

Once you have sorted out the route, you need to decide a date for the walk and circulate the details well in advance. You can use whatever method you find most appropriate – a poster in local shops, press releases, notices on your web site or even information on 'My Space' or 'Facebook' will all help. Aim to use a number of different sources and don't forget to tell your members to tell their friends and acquaintances. Whichever medium you choose, there are certain points which you must make to ensure that you get the maximum benefit out of the publicity. These include:

- *Date of event and start time.* The reason for this is self evident. If you don't tell people when and where, no-one will turn up.
- *Place from which the walk will start.* Give as much information as you can. If the place is difficult to find, you may need to provide a map or supply National Grid References. Get someone to check your directions (and indeed the rest of the text) before you finally broadcast them. It's far too easy to say turn right when people actually need to turn left.

- *Where you intend to go.* List the attractions of the walk. After all, you think it's worth doing. Try to convince others of the same thing.
- *Approximate duration of the walk.* People nowadays lead busy lives. Some people might be willing to come for a walk which lasts for only a couple of hours, but not for one which lasts for four. Giving an approximate duration also enables people to judge how much physical effort is necessary.
- *Difficulty.* Remember what your friend told you about the steep hill when you were preparing the walk? You need to mention potential problems like that so that people can judge for themselves whether this walk is suitable for them. Once you are out in the countryside, people cannot just be abandoned. People who have 'bitten off more than they can chew', can slow up a party drastically, which in turn may lead to more serious problems. Try to include a phrase such as 'An easy walk along back streets and on park footpaths' or 'A strenuous route with some steep uphill walking'.
- *Appropriate clothing.* If your walk is going to take you out into the open country, stress the need for appropriate clothing: stout shoes and outdoor clothing must be worn.
- *Important additional information.* Can pet owners bring their dogs on the walk? If so, must they be on a lead at all times? Is the walk suitable for people with pushchairs or mobility scooters?
- *Cost and how they should pay.* Are you going to charge a fee? Is it necessary to pay in advance, or can people just turn up on the day? If the money is to be paid in advance, you will also need to include the contact details of the person or organisation to which the money has to be paid. If the walk is free, say so on your publicity.
- *Who is organising the walk?* Remember that your group needs members. You have organised this walk to draw people's attention to some aspect of the history or archaeology of your community. You probably want to protect and preserve it. You can't do this on your own. Use the walk as a vehicle for recruiting. Make sure that your logo appears prominently in your publicity. Make sure that there's a phrase such as 'This walk is being organised by the XYZ society as part of its regular programme of events and meetings. For further details see our web site at...' so that people can ask questions or book a place. Booking in advance will be necessary if you anticipate that more than twenty people will attend and there is only one of you to lead the walk.

## On the day

Hopefully when the day arrives, your walk will go successfully, however, there are still things to think about:

- *Make sure that you take everything you may need with you.* You have put in a lot of preparation by this time. It would be a pity if that were to be spoiled by forgetting a basic piece of equipment. Remember to bring a copy of your risk assessment with you. If there was an incident, the authorities might want to see it. You will also need a first aid kit suitable for the anticipated number of walkers.
- *Arrive in good time.* It is always best to get to the starting point before the public start arriving. Aim to be there at least 10 minutes before the advertised start time. It gives you a chance to greet people as they turn up. It also offers you the opportunity to find out what they are hoping to get out of the walk and any particular interests that they may have. If for some reason you are going to be late, contact another member of your group and ask him/her to pass the message on. Otherwise people will think the walk has been cancelled and will wander off.

- *Identification.* Identifying the walk leader isn't usually a problem. Members of the public tend to form a nucleus of walkers that is easily identifiable. In popular locations such as, for example Ilkley Moor, more than one walk may be taking place at the same time. In such circumstances you might want to think about wearing a badge or sweatshirt with the name of your organisation to make yourself a little more visible.
- *Tell people about the walk.* Once everyone has gathered together, tell them what you will be doing. People will need to know how difficult the walk may be and how long it will last. This gives people the opportunity to judge whether the walk is for them or not. If they want to back out, this is the best time to do it. Someone who decides that the walk is too much for them on open moorland can be a danger to the party as well as to themselves.
- *Do not be afraid to turn people away.* Not only are the walkers making a commitment to you, you are making a commitment to them. If you feel that you cannot accept someone on a walk, you must make this clear at the outset. It is better to have a fuss at this point, than to have a real problem later. Possible reasons for turning people away might include:
  - *Unsuitable clothes/footwear.* People should not, for example walk across open moorland in sandals. Remember, if there's an accident, it may be considered to be your fault as you allowed the participant to continue.
  - *Attempting to bring buggies and pushchairs over unsuitable terrain.* Make sure that people understand the nature of the terrain. If necessary spell it out for them: 'I'm afraid that this walk isn't really suitable for pushchairs because....'
  - *Number of participants.* How many people can you manage safely? Remember that as walk leader you will be responsible for everyone from the moment the walk starts to the moment

you arrive back at the starting point. How many people can you watch at once? Remember also that the larger the party, the longer it will take to complete the walk. The group will stretch out. You will have to wait longer for the slower ones to catch up before you can begin to tell them about the next item. Crossing stiles can cause problems for large groups too. Ten people might be able to cross a stile in 5 minutes, but 30 people could take 15 minutes.

- *Use the event to publicise your organisation and its aims.* Part of your introduction should include 'This walk has been organised by XYZ...' So, also should your remarks at the end of the walk. You could mention other events which your group is organising. If your walkers have enjoyed this one, they may come to another. They might eventually become members.

## On the walk

Aim to set off just over 5 minutes after the advertised start time to allow stragglers to arrive without inconveniencing others who have turned up on time.

There are a number of subjects to avoid on a guided walk. It is best to avoid making any political comments or impolite comments about landowners or local authorities. Be factual about what people can see and avoid speculation unless you label your comments clearly as such. Tailor your talk to your audience. At all times make sure that everyone can hear you properly. There is nothing worse when going on a guided walk to be at the back not being able to see clearly and hearing nothing but a mumble from the front. At the end of the walk remember to thank your audience for attending and repeat any funding or key messages (such as recruitment or telling people about your next planned activity).

## After the walk

Congratulations. Your walk was a roaring success. Unfortunately it's not quite time for you to rest on your laurels yet. There are two final points which you need to consider before the whole event could be said to be over and done with.

- *Was there room for improvement?* Think about what you did and how the day went. Were there aspects of the walk which could have been better? If so, note them down - especially if this is something to do with risk assessments. In that way you'll have an even more successful event next time.
- *Is there any further publicity which can be gained from the event?* Remember, the very reason that you organised the walk in the first place was to draw attention to the local heritage and to the aims of the organisation. Think of ways in which the event can be reported to generate more interest. An article for your organisation's magazine or web site would be useful here. So would an article in your local community's web pages - many of these will take reader-generated copy. Remember, you may have only had a couple of dozen people on the walk but if it was good, then everybody else needs to be told about it.