

10.7.3 – BUSHWALKING – CHIEF COMMISSIONER’S DIRECTIVE & STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Acknowledgements

Nil

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1 Purpose

Bushwalking is a core skill in the Outdoor Adventure Skills (OAS) and it is expected that youth members of all sections will undertake this activity as a key part of the Scout Program. Bushwalking is also a popular activity in the community more broadly and is enjoyed by people from all walks of life. Scouts ACT is fortunate in having easy access to superb bushwalking areas both within the Australian Capital Territory and in New South Wales.

While bushwalking activities are highly suitable for youth members of all ages and present diverse skill development opportunities, there are material risks due to the preparedness of participants, weather, navigational challenges and wildlife that require good risk management and activity planning.

2 Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) provides direction on bushwalking activities by members of Scouts ACT during Scouting activities. It should be read in conjunction with Scouts ACT Policy 10.7 – Adventurous Activities.

This SOP covers bushwalking in non-urban environments such as national parks, state forests and reserves and private property (where permitted by the land owner).

This SOP does not cover walks in Canberra’s urban parks and gardens. These are not adventurous activities.

The higher-level Scouts ACT Policy for outdoor activities, including bushwalking, can be found in the Policy and Procedures Section of this website (<https://www.scoutsact.com.au/policies-and-procedures.html>), with policies 10.1 to 10.11 being particularly relevant. At a more operational level, the Guidance Notes at <https://www.scoutsact.com.au/auth/aa---guidance-notes.html>, risk management plans at <https://www.scoutsact.com.au/auth/aa---risk-managemnt-plans.html>, and the National Adventurous Activities Framework (NAAF) at <https://www.scoutsact.com.au/auth/aa---training.html> provide further guidance.

You can also ask for help by emailing the Adventurous Activities Commissioner: aa@scoutsact.com.au.

Note: Within Scouts ACT, SOPs are co-named as Chief Commissioner’s Directives. This administrative arrangement supports an appropriate delegation and approval process for such documents.

3 Definitions

- Alpine:** an area of mountainous or high country in which significant snow or blizzard conditions exist or can be reasonably expected to exist any time of the year. Generally, this is likely to be the case in the ACT, NSW and Victoria at altitudes of more than 1200 metres in winter (June-October) and 1500 metres in summer (November-May).
- Bushwalk:** A walk in a non-urban environment in controlled, intermediate or uncontrolled terrain.
- Leader** a person holding a Certificate of Adult Appointment who is willing and able to be responsible for bushwalking activities during a Scouts ACT activity.

Scout Appointed Guide

a person holding a Certificate of Adult Appointment and a Guide or Instructor appointment at the level appropriate for the bushwalking activity.

Controlled Bushwalks:

Are in terrain with significant human modification to the environment. Tracks will be well signposted, have low to moderate gradients, can have easy water crossings and some hazards such as slopes and slippery surfaces. Under the Australian Standard for Bushwalks, such tracks will be classed from 1 to 3. In the OAS,

bushwalking stages 1-3 will usually be done in controlled environments. Generally, they will be in mobile telephone coverage and external emergency assistance can be obtained within two hours.

Intermediate Bushwalks:

Are in terrain with limited human modification to the environment. Tracks will have limited signposting, can be more remote and will require good navigation skills. Intermediate tracks will be classed between 4 and 5. In the OAS, bushwalking stages 4-6 will usually be in intermediate environments. Hikers will need to be self-reliant as external emergency assistance may take some time to arrive. Mobile telephone coverage may not be available.

Uncontrolled Bushwalks:

Are in terrain with little or no human modification. High levels of proficiency in navigation and bushwalking skills will be required as will high levels of self-reliance. Uncontrolled tracks are classed as 6 and the OAS stages are 7-9.

4 Approved methods

Within Scouts ACT activities, bushwalking should be conducted to meet one or more of the bushwalking stages described in the OAS. The bushwalk should support skills acquisition, knowledge development and experiences to support youth member stage progression. This will include consideration of Planning the bushwalk, Doing the bushwalk and Reviewing the Bushwalk.

Minimal environmental impact is to be considered throughout every bushwalking activity; this should include carrying out all rubbish, using existing campsites and fire places where possible, staying on the trail and other measures needed to limit impact on the environment.

Scouts ACT has adopted the Australian Adventurous Activities Standards for the conduct of adventurous activities. The Bushwalking Good Practice Guide provide guidance on the planning and conduct of bushwalks, noting that Scouts ACT policies may set a higher standard than that in the Good Practice Guide. The Guide can be accessed here: <https://australianaas.org.au/>.

5 Procedure outline

Scouts ACT parties conducting bushwalks will comply with the following:

- The Leader will obtain approval for the activity using the Adventurous Activities approval form. This must include an itinerary and names of participants with a person who is responsible to contact relevant authorities in the event the party is overdue; as required by the Policy Statement 10.1 - Approval of Activities.
- The Leader must ensure the youth members are adequately prepared and equipped for the intended activity and, particularly for the younger sections, have alternatives available for youth members who find they are not able to continue with the activity.
- The minimum party size for the safety of youth members is four except in Alpine areas where it is five.

- Where required (see Competencies section below), a Scout Appointed Guide is a part of the activity. In most instances for activities in intermediate or uncontrolled terrain, the Guide must be present.
- Other than bushwalks in controlled terrain, the party will include a person with a recognised First Aid qualification; who will carry a first aid kit, and a competent navigator; who will carry a map of the area and a Personal Locator Beacon (SPOT Beacons may be carried but do not replace the need for a PLB). CB radios may be useful on many activities.
- On overnight hikes, the party will carry tents to accommodate all of its members. Reliance on huts or snow shelters of any kind is unacceptable.
- The party will carry fuel stoves for all of their cooking. Use of wood fires (except in established fire-places in huts or picnic areas) is unacceptable.
- Each individual will carry clothing suitable to the weather conditions, and in Alpine areas: a raincoat with a hood made of a waterproof/breathable fabric, and warm wear including a beanie (or similar), gloves, a jumper (preferably woollen, fleece, or equivalent), overpants that are showerproof as a minimum, and suitable footwear. The layering principle of clothing is recommended.
- Each individual will use appropriate sun protection measures.

6 Competencies and Approvals

The following competencies/qualifications apply to bushwalking activities:

- **Controlled terrain: Bushwalking Level 1 (Safe Participant from late 2020).** Leaders with this qualification do not need to involve a Scout Appointed Guide (Controlled or higher). Scout and Venturer leaders who completed their basic Wood Badge training prior to 2013 are deemed to hold this qualification provided they have continued to undertake bushwalks since that date. Existing Joey and Cub leaders are encouraged to complete the Level 1 Bushwalking qualification. New leaders may complete the Level 1 qualification as part of the Scouting Adventure course. It is desirable that a member of the party holds a first aid certificate.
- **Intermediate terrain: Bushwalking Level 2 (Trained Participant from late 2020) and, if significant river crossings will be encountered, the River Crossing competency.** A Scout Appointed Guide - Intermediate Bushwalking or higher must be involved in the planning and approval processes and, depending on experience and skill levels of the leaders, may need to participate in the activity. A member of the party needs to hold a first aid certificate.
- **Uncontrolled terrain: Bushwalking Level 3 (Activity Specialist from late 2020).** A Scout Appointed Guide - Uncontrolled Bushwalking must be involved in the planning and approval processes and, depending on experience and skill levels of the leaders, may need to participate in the activity. A member of the party must hold a first aid certificate and, for extended hikes in remote areas, it is desirable that a member of the party holds the Wilderness First Aid skill set.

- Alpine terrain: requires the Leader or other adult to be a Scout Appointed Guide Bushwalking (Uncontrolled).

For reference, the current list of Scouts ACT Scout Appointed Guides can be found in the Qualified Leaders List: <https://www.scoutsact.com.au/aa---qualified-leaders.html>

The Adventurous Activities approval process must be used for bushwalking activities in non-urban environments.

Participants may be excluded or removed from an activity (or an activity may be modified) at any time prior to departure at the Leader's discretion. This may also be done during the activity if safe to do so.

Participants may be excluded for reasons that include (but are not limited to) being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (including prescription drugs which may affect performance), being unable or unwilling to follow instructions, lacking suitable equipment, having an inadequate level of fitness, physical ability and experience for the particular activity.

Limitations of Section participation in Bushwalking Activities:

Joey Scouts – No Overnight expeditions

Cub Scouts – No Overnight expeditions

Scouts – No Restrictions

Venturer Scouts - No Restrictions

Rover Scouts - No Restrictions

7 Pre-Activity Briefing

Pre-activity briefings are the responsibility of the Leader, in consultation with the Scout Appointed Guide, where one is required. It is essential that all information is accurately disseminated to potential participants in adequate time for an informed decision to be made about their participation.

The briefing should be delivered in a way that ensures that all participants are aware of the following, as appropriate:

- Identity and role of Guide(s)
- An outline of the activity plan and objectives
- Transport arrangements
- The nature of the activity and its inherent risks
- Essential equipment and clothing
- Correct use and/or fit of equipment
- Cost
- The food and water required and the availability of water
- Conservation arrangements including protection of flora and fauna, rubbish removal and sanitation

- A summary of the emergency plan or sufficient information to allow participants to act appropriately in the event of an incident or emergency, including methods of emergency communication and equipment to support any such event
- An explanation of what is expected of participants and the participant's responsibility to act as requested (conduct etc.)
- Restrictions to participation
- Agreed methods of communication within the group (signals and calls) devised before the activity commences
- Final check that all documentation is completed and submitted, particularly activity approval, parental approval and indemnity forms.

8 Ratios and Leader Presence

The ratio of participants to leaders and guides will vary according to the age and experience of participants, the conditions likely to be encountered, the duration of the activity, its remoteness and the potential to shorten the activity if needed. More challenging activities or low participant skill levels will require more leaders and guides to support participants. Less challenging activities or highly skilled participants require fewer leaders and guides.

Scout ACT rules regarding the minimum number of leaders/adults and on sharing tents apply.

The Leader, in consultation with the Scout Appointed Guide (where one is required) will also need to consider how adult participation and support is to be provided:

- For OAS stages 1-4, Leaders are expected to provide direct support, walking with the youth members, in most circumstances. As youth member competence increases to stage 4, Leaders can start to provide indirect support through the use of CB radios and the like. Generally, the Leader should be available to provide support quickly.
- For OAS stages 5-6, Leaders are expected to provide indirect support and not walk with the youth members unless the situation requires it (such as there being no alternative route or a particularly complex or challenging situation makes it appropriate). For indirect support to be effective, the Leaders must be in the vicinity of the youth members and have a means of regular contact. This might be via CB radios, meeting them at checkpoints or campsites.
- For OAS stages 7-9, apart from Rovers, Leaders are expected to provide indirect or remote support. Remote support means they are unable to provide assistance in a short time frame; communication means such as SPOT Beacons and the like are appropriate. When providing remote support, Leaders need to carefully consider the ability of the youth members to handle contingencies without assistance in the short term. Remote support is only appropriate for very highly skilled youth members in environments with risks they are capable of managing.
- Rovers, as adults, do not require Leader support unless they request it (but must comply with the activity approval requirements including the use of a Scout Appointed Guide where required).

9 Further Advice and References

The Australia Adventure Activity Standard and associated Good Practice Guides provide a guide to best practice when conducting adventurous activities. They can be accessed at <https://australianaas.org.au/>.

Other useful sites include (Scouts ACT does not endorse or have any control over these sites):

- <https://lotsafreshair.com/>
- <https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/safety/bushwalking-safety>
- <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/parks-conservation/parks-and-reserves/find-a-park/namadgi-national-park/namadgi-national-park>
- https://canberrabushwalkingclub.org/whats-on/self-guided-walks/?fbclid=IwAR1lzQd-H28GTHm3mwXVS8FNwQgfW6f2ntSz7-hv54jafjbyPGGqf1_B2hY
- <https://bushwalkingvictoria.org.au/frontpage/walks-directory>

10 Authority

This Chief Commissioner's Directive/Standard Operating Procedure or amended Directive/SOP was approved by the Chief Commissioner in October 2013 and 10 December 2020.