

Bushwalking with the Newcastle Ramblers



Views from Rodway Hut on the Tarn Shelf Walk, Mt Field NP – February 2024 (photo by Bob Clifton)

*The Newcastle Ramblers Bushwalking Club, Inc is incorporated under the NSW Incorporated Associations Act.
Membership application forms and other information are available on the club website*

<http://newcastleramblers.org.au>

The Club's email address is newcastle.ramblers@gmail.com

Version – March 2024

Welcome

Firstly, a big welcome to the Newcastle Ramblers Bushwalking Club. We hope you will enjoy meeting new people, learning new skills, and being out in the wonderful natural places of our country.

Our Club seeks to promote bushwalking, camping and related recreational activities, increase the knowledge of members in the art of safe bushwalking, develop leadership skills, and foster an appreciation of our environmental and cultural heritage. While we are primarily a bushwalking club, our members engage in a lot of other activities as befitting their interests and abilities. There are backpack walks, day walks, twilight walks and car camps as well as packrafting, canoeing and cycling. And it's not always in the bush, some trips are social, to big events or are extended trips to other countries.

We place a lot of emphasis on safety. Our activities involve a combination of skills that are best learned by experience – and by being with experienced Leaders – and include planning and organisation, map reading, navigation, camping, bush cooking, being able to safely negotiate rough terrain or to travel safely in foreign places. Our experienced Leaders and members will help you learn the basics and encourage you to continue to learn and benefit from your experiences with the Club.

The Club is a voluntary organisation. If you decide to join the Ramblers we will welcome your active involvement so that others can benefit from the skills that you have undoubtedly gained over your own lifetime.

The Club has a web site at <http://newcastleramblers.org.au> that has links to useful information and links to download forms and guidelines. The Club also has a Facebook presence 'Bushwalking with the Newcastle Ramblers' and a private Facebook 'Friends of the Ramblers'. It has a small library of maps, guides and books, and has Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) available for use.

Risk Management and Duty of Care

'Duty of Care' is your legal duty to take reasonable care so that others are not harmed.

We take care to manage the risks of our activities. Over many years the Club has developed and documented a risk management plan to control and minimise those risks. The plan includes a walks grading system, skills training, training talks and some guidelines for leaders and members.

Upon joining the Club, you will be required to sign a 'Risk Waiver Form' accepting responsibility for your own wellbeing and safety. You will also participate in a risk assessment and sign a risk acceptance statement prior to taking part in each activity.

Children under the age of 18 must be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian, or carer, and they remain that person's responsibility during the activity. A specific 'Acknowledgement of Risk Form' or 'Risk Waiver Form' must also be signed.

The Club has personal accident and public liability insurance coverage through Bushwalking Australia (Inc), which covers financial members. Most of the Club's annual membership fee goes toward the cost of this insurance. Visitors and prospective members are also covered by the insurance policy for their first three walks. Details of the policies are available on request.

Walk Grading System

All walking trips have a grade of difficulty represented by three numbers: the **terrain**, the **distance** and the **altitude gain**. It will appear as something like **G3/12km/200m**.

The terrain is represented by a Grade Number:

Grade 1 (G1) On tracks or roads, mostly flat.

Grade 2 (G2) Mostly on tracks, low gradient, relatively flat terrain.

Grade 3 (G3) Mostly on tracks, some hilly sections/rougher terrain.

Grade 4 (G4) Steeper, rougher terrain; may be off track.

Grade 5 (G5) Mostly off track; difficult terrain.

Grade 6 (G6) Strenuous off-track walks.

The distance is the number of kilometres to be covered.

The altitude gain is meant to indicate how much 'uphill' there will be. This is the total of all the separate climbs in the walk.

Taking Responsibility

Please understand that with all activities you undertake with the Newcastle Ramblers you must take responsibility for yourself. Please read and understand the waiver/assumption of risk form that you will be asked to sign before each activity. Consult with the Leader if you have any doubts.

Leaders put in a lot of effort to plan and implement an activity for the group and your enjoyment. Please respect these efforts and comply with the Leader's requests. Leaders should not have to worry about individuals in the group not taking responsibility for themselves.

You should check the description and grading of the activity to confirm that it is within your capability. Other aspects of taking responsibility would include being on time, carrying your own First Aid kit, having suitable shoes/boots and clothing, carrying enough water and food, staying with the group by not lagging behind or racing ahead.

Our Leaders are volunteers and do so because they love walking – so please be patient and treat them kindly and express your appreciation at the end of the activity.

Club Meeting Evenings

Club Meeting evenings are held on the first and third Monday of each month (except public holidays and the first Monday in January) at the Uniting Church Hall, 24 Milson Street, Charlestown. Meetings commence at 7:30 pm with general business, followed by reports on past activities and information about forthcoming activities, a short training talk, or a guest speaker, member's photos, or equipment nights. Supper and a chat round off the evening. There is no obligation to attend meetings.

Club nights are a great way to find out about the wonderful places that the Ramblers go to, the adventure, the excitement and sense of achievement at the end of a trip.

Email

Email is an essential way for us to remain in touch between meetings and is the means by which the Club distributes the Program and Newsletter and notifies members of new or changed activities in the Program. If you do not provide your email address you will miss out on being kept up to date on aspects of the Club's activities.

You are encouraged to make direct contact with any of the Club's committee members or nominated leaders for information, particularly if you may not be certain if an activity is suitable for you.

The Club's email address is newcastle.ramblers@gmail.com

Before a Walk or Activity

Always let a Leader know in advance (preferable at least a week) that you wish to participate in an activity. You can do this by contacting the nominated Leader directly by telephone, email or text. Always let the Leader know if you change your mind or you can't make it. This has implications for the planning of the activity and is also a courtesy thing. Also don't just turn up – you could be disappointed. The nominated time for the activity is the **actual departure time** so be punctual and ready to go or you could get left behind.

The Leader takes on the responsibility for organising and leading the activity. **Leaders have the right to refuse to take you on an activity** if you don't have the right clothing, equipment, food and water. You may also be refused if the Leader feels your fitness or ability will not allow you to complete the activity safely or might unduly hold up the rest of the group. If you have any doubt, please speak with the Leader beforehand.

If you suffer from a medical condition which could become an issue during an activity, please let the Leader know, discreetly.

If you must leave an activity early or before it ends, make sure the Leader knows.

Contact Person

Sometimes groups can be delayed. For major walks or trips a Leader might decide to nominate a contact person to keep track of the activity and to check that the group returns safely at about the appointed time. The contact person will have details of the activity, the contingency plans, and who is on the activity. If you let someone know that you are out on a Club activity, tell them also who the contact person is (if known to you) and their contact details, or alternatively let them know that they can telephone any Club Committee member if they have any concerns.

A list of Committee members and contact telephone numbers are on the top of the Club Program and are also on the Club's web site.

For off-track and remote bushwalking activities Leaders lodge details of their plans with the Committee.

Car Convoys and Shared Travel

Car convoys and shared travel are arranged to reduce the number of vehicles involved in activities. It also provides an opportunity for company and social interaction on the sometimes-long drives to and from an activity. Drive at a sensible speed, with headlights on, keeping an eye on the car behind. Pause at turn offs to make sure all vehicles stay together. It is important to have a general idea where you are heading and to carry a mobile phone for contact with the Leader if you get separated.

At the end of the walk, before leaving make sure all vehicles have started and are able to move off. It is not good if your car won't start, everybody else has disappeared and you are left alone in the bush.

Petrol and other costs such as park entry fees, etc. should be shared between the driver and passengers. There is no hard and fast rule for this but be fair and generous as the car owner is bearing the cost of providing the vehicle.

On the Walk

To keep a group together, the group will travel at the pace of the slowest walker. Those up in front should keep the rest of the group in sight and pause if necessary, to let the rest catch up and have a breather before moving on. **Always stop** at a turn off along a track to make sure everyone knows which way to proceed. With larger groups Leaders might appoint a Tail End Charlie to bring up the rear. If you need to stop (for a call of nature or to take a photograph) let the Leader or Tail End Charlie know.

If you are separated from the group -- **Stop Where You Are** -- as soon as you realise that you are misplaced and wait. Remember your group will come looking for you. Get your safety whistle out and give it three blasts (and repeat) – this is a signal for distress.

Please don't leave any litter about, carry it all out including fruit peelings. It does not hurt to pick up the litter of others. Bury toilet waste.

We are out to enjoy our natural surroundings so please leave behind or turn off the modern-day intrusions - mobile phones and I-pods, etc. Others will want to enjoy the quiet and seclusion of the bushland, so please respect this.

Swim and wash downstream from where drinking water is collected, and please don't allow soap and detergents to enter a stream.

Please don't walk upon Aboriginal engravings or touch or mark cave paintings.

First Aid/Emergency Kit

Members should carry their own first aid kit/emergency kit on all activities – don't rely on others to provide first aid items for you. You are encouraged to obtain first aid qualifications for yourself, and the Club arranges regular opportunities for this to occur.

A first aid kit which is not too big, and which would be able to provide for most eventualities in the bush is suggested below:

Emergency Blanket

1x 'Snake Bite' Compression Bandage and a Triangular Bandage

2x Sterile Dressings (10cmx10cm) and a 10cm Crepe Bandage

Scissors, tweezers and several Band Aids

Small roll of Sticking Plaster to treat blisters or fix things

Re-hydration tablets (eg 'Gastrolyte')

Panadol tablets

Water purifying tablets (eg 'Aquatabs')

Matches, in a waterproof container

Personal items that you may need.

A kit of this nature should weigh about 400-500gm. Stow it near the top of your pack – and hope that it will never be used!

An emergency contact medical information form has been developed. A copy is in the back of this booklet. You are encouraged to fill it in and have it in your kit should an emergency occur that involves you.

Preparation for a Day Walk

There are a few basic items required for bushwalking, which will contribute to comfort and safety. For a day walk the following should be considered, with some walks requiring more items and others less. Again, please discuss your needs with the Leader until you develop your own list.

- **A small day pack** of about 35 litres capacity is the most convenient for walking. Since few packs are completely waterproof, things that might be damaged if they get wet should always be protected in plastic bags inside the pack.
- Wear **sensible clothing** – old clothes and items you will not mind getting dirty or damaged. Shorts or long pants are good but **don't wear denim jeans** (they are terrible when wet). Put something warm in your pack in case it turns cold, or you are delayed into the night. Several thin layers are better than a single heavy garment. In very cold conditions gloves and a beanie may be necessary.
- **Raincoat** as rain is always a possibility, even on the finest of mornings. A raincoat is light and can be folded into a small bundle in your pack. Rainwear is also useful for keeping out the cold.
- **Footwear and gaiters.** Good, well fitting, footwear is important. Boots or shoes must be sturdy enough to provide support, protection and comfort to allow you to enjoy the walk. Don't try walking in new shoes until you are sure they won't cause you discomfort. Good socks are also essential – some people wear two pairs. Sock protectors or gaiters keep those annoying grass seeds from sticking to your socks or loose soil from getting into your boots. Gaiters give a measure of protection to your legs if you walk in shorts. Remember **if you feel any discomfort to your feet when walking don't feel bad about asking the Leader to stop immediately** while you sort the problem out. Don't let it deteriorate into something really painful.
- **Sun protection.** Sun exposure is a major risk while bushwalking. Sunscreen lotion or cream is essential, as is a broad brimmed hat, and wearing a long-sleeved shirt.
- **Map and compass**, and don't forget your camera – you might just capture that award-winning shot for the photo competition.

Carry your own Personal and Emergency Supplies

A **whistle** is handy for attracting attention and a small **torch** in case it gets dark. Carry at least **1 litre of water** in a strong plastic or metal bottle for a day walk. You will need a lot more (up to 1 litre an hour) in very hot or strenuous conditions. You may like to have a **change of clothes** and towel in the car for the end of the walk.

Food of course is needed on the walk. We usually stop after about 2 hours of walking, say 10am, for morning tea such as a muesli bar, fruit, dried fruit; and then for lunch about 12.30pm, for example sandwiches, Vitaweats, fruit – even boil the billy. After a few walks you will develop your own ideas about what you need to take.

Longer Walks and Backpacking

Overnight walks and longer walks require more planning and more equipment. When you are ready, do try an overnight walk – these are great experiences and fun. Start talking to more experienced members who will just love to share their knowledge and help you get started or guide you through more challenging adventures.

Additional Calendar Events

During each year the Club holds an Annual General Meeting in March, occasional auctions of bushwalking gear, and a photographic competition for the Garry Scully Memorial Trophy in November.

NavShield and other orienteering and navigation activities are participated in. The Club facilitates regular First Aid Training Courses.

The Bushwalker's Code of Conduct

Minimal Impact Bushwalking

We leave no trace

- We leave campsites better than we found them.
- We use existing fireplaces or carry cooking equipment when possible, and do not scar the landscape with fire rings.
- We comply with fuel-stove only requirements.
- We remove our rubbish from the bush and bury human waste away from watercourses.
- We do not pollute the ground and waterways with soaps and detergents.
- We do not remove plants or rocks from National Parks.
- We do not disturb native wildlife.
- We avoid easily damaged places such as peat bogs, cushion moss, swamps and fragile rock formations.
- We use existing tracks where possible and avoid creating multiple tracks which lead to erosion.

We preserve Australia's bio-security

- We seek to protect the natural environment from the negative impacts of pests, diseases and weeds.
- We clean our clothing, equipment, cars, wheels and vessels to prevent the spread of pathogens and diseases that threaten bio-security.
- We report significant or unusual pests, diseases and weeds.

We mitigate incidents

Because incidents and rescues have the greatest impact on the environment:

- We prepare for, and carefully plan each trip
- We share our trip intentions
- We act safely
- We are self-reliant
- We seek appropriate training in remote area first aid and rescue

We take responsibility for acting safely

- We always carry clothing and equipment appropriate to our planned activity
- We carry first aid kits and are trained in first aid appropriate to our activities.
- We do not rely solely on GPS systems, but carry a map and compass, which we know how to use.
- We do not rely on mobile phone coverage for dealing with an emergency, but carry a Personal Locator Beacon and/or satellite phone when appropriate.
- We prepare an exit plan as part of our emergency planning.
- We check the safety status of our destinations before entering, observe the safety instructions of park rangers, and do not enter closed National Parks.
- We advise appropriate authorities, friends or relatives of our walking plans
- We walk in groups of three or more so that there are sufficient people to summon help in an emergency.
- We keep emergency contact details updated on our club website
- We only light fires when it is safe to do so, and ensure they are fully extinguished.
- We ensure the safety and well-being of all children entrusted to our care on a bushwalk.
- We engage in bushwalking activities unimpaired by the consumption of alcohol or use of drugs.

We are self-reliant

- We carry sufficient food and water in order to survive unexpected delays.
- We wear and carry appropriate clothing and equipment for our comfort and safety in expected weather conditions and carry gear to suit the worst possible conditions we are likely to encounter.

- We ensure we have sufficient training, experience and expertise to safely carry out our planned activity.

We respect fellow bushwalkers

- We welcome people from all walks of life irrespective of gender, age, race, religion, culture, colour, sexuality; and behave in an harmonious manner.
- We appreciate difference and welcome learning from others, building relationships based on mutual respect.
- We do not tolerate bullying, harassment or discrimination in any form.
- We encourage, respect and support our leaders as competent and motivated leaders are essential to the success of our activities.
- We respect the right of our leaders to accept or reject walker applicants for specific activities based upon the assessed degree of difficulty and the assessed competence of individual walkers.
- We respect the right of bushwalkers to enjoy the peace and quiet of the bush without undue disturbance from technology.
- We help fellow bushwalkers in need, in situations such as: assisting with emergency communications, offering medical aid for which we are qualified, carrying the gear of an injured person, or sharing equipment.

We respect indigenous culture

- We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we walk.
- We treat sites of spiritual or cultural significance with respect.
- We obtain permission from traditional landowners or the relevant land manager to visit sensitive areas.
- We do not damage aboriginal rock art or camp under overhangs that contain aboriginal rock art.

We respect landowners

- We respect landowners and do not trespass on their land.
- We leave farm gates as we find them.
- We respect the rules of National Parks, and other land managers, regarding camping conditions, maximum numbers in wilderness areas, pets, permitted activities and park closures.

Safety tips

- Plan what you will do in an emergency and maintain a current first aid qualification so that you know how to handle illness and injuries.
- If possible, carry a satellite phone as it has global coverage and will allow you to inform emergency services of your needs. Otherwise, carry a mobile phone, but be aware that it may not have coverage in remote areas or national parks. Consider battery life and take a recharger if necessary.
- Even if you have a GPS, carry a map and compass and Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). Your PLB must be registered with AMSA and is essential in wilderness areas.

Emergency contact

- Before heading off complete a Trip Intention Form and give it to a responsible person who will check that you have returned on time. Register your trip at selected police stations or national park offices.
- Inform your contact when your group has safely returned.
- If in distress, contact the emergency services on **Triple Zero (000)**. If you are in distress and need assistance and have no other means of communication, set off your Personal Locator Beacon (PLB). Remain near your PLB and be prepared with food and shelter to wait for a response. This may take several hours, or longer if conditions are not suitable for flying, or if a ground team needs to reach you. Make yourself visible from the air with a brightly coloured sheet of fabric, or if safe, make a smoky fire. Extinguish any fire entirely when the helicopter approaches. Pack up and secure your gear against the helicopter downdraft so your gear is not lost and the rescue site is left as untouched as possible.

EMERGENCY CONTACT MEDICAL INFORMATION

This form follows the risk management guidelines of Bushwalking Australia. It is suggested that you carry it in your first aid kit in a cliplock plastic envelope in case it is needed in an emergency. Review and update the details if there is a change in your health status.

Your Name:

Home Address:

..... Postcode:

Telephone: Home: Mobile:

Medical Information

Have you any medical Conditions?

.....

Are you taking any current medications?

Do you have any allergies?

Do you have current immunization against tetanus? Yes/No

Medicare Number.Private Health Insurance Fund Name:

Ambulance subscriber: Yes/No

Your Doctor Contact

Name:

Practice Address:

Telephone:

Your Emergency Contact

Contact's Name:

Contact's Home Address:

..... Postcode:

Telephone: Home: Mobile:

Relationship to you:

Signed: **Date:**