

Mourne Rambling Group: Advice for Walkers

Welcome to the Mourne Rambling Group. Please take time to read this information and the advice printed in the Programme, in particular the Memoranda, Safety on Walks/Equipment and Walkers & Group Responsibilities.

The Mourne Rambling Group has three or four levels of walks each Sunday (see Programme – Grades of Walks for details). The walks are lead by unpaid volunteer leaders who are experienced hill walkers. You are encouraged to choose the grade of walk best suited to your fitness level. Please note we are a Hill walking club and you must be fit enough to walk hills and not just on the flat.

There are risks attached to hill walking and newcomers need to be aware of these risks and take sensible precautions. The risks on the hills are caused mainly by three factors: weather, terrain and remoteness.

Weather changes in the mountains - the higher you go in the hills, the lower the temperature (drops roughly 1° C for each 100 metres of ascent); the wind is stronger up there (2 to 3 times the speed in the valleys); there is more rainfall (3 times that in the valleys) and there is more risk of mist and cloud (mist on the tops 3 days out of 5). Weather conditions can change in minutes in the Irish hills and you need to be equipped to cope in different conditions. Get a weather forecast for the Mournes area in advance of the walk – our web site (<https://mourneramblers.com>) recommends several weather sites. If adverse weather is forecast, members are advised to check their email the night before and/or the morning of the walk as the start /location of the walk may be changed.

You will need walking boots with good ankle support (not trail boots) which are essential when walking off-road. Always wear clothing suitable for the outdoors and carry spare warm clothes at all times. Jeans and cotton should be avoided (if they get wet they will not dry, causing loss of body heat and energy and possibly contributing to the onset of hypothermia). A waterproof jacket and over-trousers, warm hat and gloves are essential, irrespective of the weather on starting out. Our leaders have a duty of care and as such will refuse to allow people who are inadequately clothed or equipped to walk with the group.

You should carry a rucksack for spare clothing, food, liquid (hot or cold depending on weather) plus some spare high-energy snacks such as chocolate, glucose sweets or energy bars. A head torch, whistle, small first aid kit and survival bag/emergency shelter should be included as part of your kit.

Be careful about foot placement, as there is always the risk of concealed holes, rocks, slippery ground and soft bog. Be particularly careful when descending steep ground and when crossing streams and rivers. Streams in flood are deceptively dangerous. Remember you are responsible for your own safety. Most accidents happen on the way down, when people are tired, rushing or no longer paying attention. If you find the pace of the walk too slow, you should not attempt to force the pace. On your next outing consider walking with one of the other groups. Most importantly enjoy yourself.

Environmental considerations: Use stiles where available rather than crossing walls or fences. Leave no litter - even biodegradable items like banana skins, orange peel and teabags take years to disappear. Avoid taking short cuts on zig-zag paths as this creates new lines for run-off of water and increases erosion. If you must use an eroded route, walk along the centre of the path if possible to avoid widening the damage. If this is not possible keep at least 10m away from the eroded route. Avoid walking on the Mourne wall.

Health consideration: You should inform the leader at the beginning of the walk of any medical condition, injury or medication carried. You should also have a completed medical/identity card in a secure pocket of the rucksack. This card is provided when you become a member.

Know where you are in the hills at all times. This involves having a map – the 1:25000 scale Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland Mourne Country Outdoor Pursuits map (waterproof or in a case) and compass. The ability to use a map and compass effectively in different weather conditions is a skill fundamental to safe hill walking. Taking an active interest during a walk, for example using your map and compass and seeking advice and assistance from other skilled members will help in developing your navigational skills.

The skills of navigation are simple; it just takes a bit of practice and will greatly improve your enjoyment of the hills. It is likely that new members will not have these skills but would be encouraged to reach a basic level of navigation within their first year. Occasionally, training courses are provided for members.

Hill walking Gear Checklist.

Essential / recommended

- Hill walking Boots (with proper ankle support)
- Waterproof jacket and bottoms
- Socks (wool or wool mixture)
- Walking trousers/tracksuit bottoms
- Thermal top / T-shirt
- Fleece & spare fleece
- Hat & gloves
- Food & drink
- Emergency rations
- Rucksack with liner
- Bivvy bag (double)/blizzard bag/emergency shelter
- Whistle
- Map (laminated or in map case)
- Compass
- Watch
- Head Torch & spare battery / bulb
- First aid kit
- Identity/Medical card

Other useful items

- Trekking pole(s)
- Mobile phone
- Spare socks
- Spare laces

Additional in summer

- Extra water
- Sunscreen / lip balm
- Insect repellent
- Sunglasses
- Sun hat

Additional in winter

- Hill walking boots with some stiffening
- Flask
- Thermal leggings
- Gaiters
- Extra fleece
- Second hat
- Mitts
- Second pair of gloves Scarf/neck gaiter

Snow conditions

- Stiffened hill walking boots
- Ice axe and Crampons
- Sleeping bag (within the group)
- More warm clothes, extra hat & gloves, heavy-duty waterproofs, gaiters essential.

Code of Conduct

At all times members should be respectful and considerate.

- **to other Club members**
- **to other visitors out on the hills**
- **to the environment and to the local communities within the areas we visit and towards other peoples' property**

Mourne Rambling Group Committee

If you have concerns or suggestions regarding the activities of the group, please raise them with a committee member – see web site for membership of the committee.

Further Information

Mourne Ramblers web site	www.mourneramblers.com
Email address	secretary@mourneramblers.com
Navigation in the Mountains	Carlo Forte, ISBN 9780954151157
Hill Walking	Steve Long, ISBN 9780954151195
Mourne Ramblers Newsletter	Distributed approx. four times a year by email or post.