



# SAFETY GUIDANCE FOR THE ORGANISATION OF PUBLIC WALKS ACROSS THE SANDS OF MORECAMBE BAY

May 2016

In partnership with:



**Lancashire  
Constabulary**  
police and communities together



## Background

This guidance has been drawn up by Lancaster City Council with South Lakeland District Council following consultation with the HM Coastguard, Police and local operators as part of a cross boundary working group.

It is aimed at individuals and organisations wishing to organise public walks across the sands of Morecambe Bay. This guidance is not law in itself but provides a minimum benchmark that will help in demonstrating compliance with the duties placed on organisers by the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and related regulations. Operators are free to adopt alternative methods of operation so long as they can demonstrate a level of safety that is **reasonably practicable**.

Special thanks are given to the co-operation and input provided by the Guide over Sands Trust in updating this guidance.

## Introduction

The recorded history of people walking across Morecambe Bay goes back many centuries. Until the coming of the railway in the 1850s, a trek across the sands by foot or horse drawn carriage was the only way of avoiding the lengthy and poorly maintained coastal road route. In order to reduce the many cases of drowning the first official guides to the Bay were appointed by the Crown in the 1500s, a practice which continues to this day.

Cases of drowning however, still tragically continue to occur to the inexperienced and unwary. The greatest tragedy in recent times was the death of twenty Chinese workers engaged in cockle gathering on the right of the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2004.

## The Need for New Safety Guidance

Morecambe Bay is the largest intertidal area in the UK and presents a number of well documented hazards to the ill prepared and unwary. Weather, tides, quick sands, unpredictable channels, remoteness and the speed of change in conditions all add to the risks. It is essential that anyone attempting to walk across the bay must seek the support of a competent guide.

In recent years the popularity of cross bay walks has increased exponentially with average group numbers increasing considerably and interest being expressed by different parties and persons in organising participating in the cross bay walk experience. A walk across the bay supervised by a competent and experienced guide is a unique opportunity to experience the wilderness and wildlife habitat of Morecambe Bay in safety. This guide has been produced to provide a **minimum benchmark** of common understanding regarding safety management for all concerned in such activity.

## Pre-Walk Information for Participating Walkers

Where practicable, all participants should be pre-booked with an organiser. This gives the opportunity to collect emergency contact details and provide written pre-walk information to walkers. Written information should be provided in advance by the operator or booking agencies. Should individuals wish to turn up on an ad-hoc basis completion of the suggested application (Appendix 1) should be completed before attempting a walk. It is essential that walkers are fully aware of the circumstances they are likely to face as they walk across one of the UK's few

remaining wildernesses. This essential information should include at least the following:

- That **ALL** participants including pets must have a reasonable level of physical fitness and be able to walk unaided for at least 10 miles.
- Crossing of at least two river channels will take place that are cold and possibly fast flowing and deep. (This depth may be greater depending on the weather and the nature of the group making the crossing – this will be dynamically risk assessed at the time by the walk organiser).
- Although routes are largely flat, the ground surface can be demanding consisting of sand, mud, shingle, pebbles, rocks, salt marsh vegetable and gullies.
- That weather can be changeable and suitable waterproof clothing and dry clothes and footwear to change into at the end of the walk must be taken.
- Participants will become wet during the walk.
- Sun cream, water and suitable food to consume on the move will be needed, e.g. chocolate bar or mint cake.
- No toilet facilities are available unless specified.
- Parents must give careful consideration as to whether a particular walk is suitable for their children. The walk is onerous and it may be difficult to carry children if they become tired or foot sore. Children must be able to negotiate water channels with minimum assistance. The operators may consider that certain weather conditions are not suitable for children and as a result cancel a walk. Tractors may be an appropriate form of transport to assist walkers if available.

### **Experience of Lead Guides**

All lead guides **MUST** (a) have a background of significant work experience out on the sands of Morecambe Bay, ideally with one of the existing experienced operators. Understanding of the constantly changing nature of this unique environment is essential especially when leading large groups of inexperienced people across the bay.

A general risk assessment covering the broad range of activities and the safety control measures adopted **MUST** (a) be undertaken by the operators. However, if more than five persons are employed the risk assessment must be documented we do recommend that a written record is made of this assessment as best practice. A risk assessment template is contained in Appendix 2, detailing the examples of risks encountered with cross bay walks and associated controls. This assessment must be tailored to each walk and be specific to your circumstances; the document provided is to be used as a guide only and must be tailored to each individual walk.

Guide knowledge on the ground will be essential in adapting and tailoring the approach contained in the risk assessment to daily conditions and circumstances in the bay. The written risk assessment needs to be dynamic and **support** decision making by operators when out in the bay.

(a) Operators must consider the risks to those in their employ or as a result of their actions on members of the public under Regulation 3 of The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

Lead guides must be able to carry out a pre-walk briefing and demonstrate sufficient knowledge of:

- Operators' general risk assessment
- Weather conditions and weather forecast assessments
- Navigation and use of the Global Positioning System (GPS)
- Route marking and assessment
- Changeable nature of the bay environment
- Walker supervision and stewarding
- Managing stewards.
- First Aid
- Emergency procedures
- Use of vehicles
- Liaison procedures with HM Coastguard

The agencies responsible for regulating the safety of guided cross-bay walks have identified the need for competent training of future guides and stewards. Further information will be added here when a provider is identified.

### **Experience of Stewards supporting Lead Guides**

Stewards must be able to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of:

- The significant findings of the operators general risk assessment
- Navigation and use of GPS
- The changeable nature of the bay environment
- Walker supervision
- First Aid
- Emergency procedures
- The use of vehicles
- Liaison procedures with the coastguard in emergency

The agencies responsible for regulating the safety of guided cross-bay walks have identified the need for competent training of future guides and stewards. Further information will be added here when a provider is identified.

### **Insurance**

All operators must have:

- Public liability insurance
- Employer's liability insurance (b)
- Vehicle insurance, so far as commercial insurance is available for the purpose. Where vehicle insurance is not available (such as for passenger carrying and the use of vehicle on the sands) walkers must be informed.

**A copy of each should be provided to Lancaster City Council or South Lakeland District Council at the beginning of the year before commencement of walks. As a public register is retained of those intending to lead walks across the sands.**

(b) Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969

## Preparation, Planning and Risk Assessment

All operators must ensure that:

- A general risk assessment is carried out and the findings are implemented (see Appendix 2 and end note to this section).
- A suitable margin of safety is calculated into the timing of walks in terms of the tide and weather. All walkers should be off the bay at least two hours before the incoming tide.
- HM Coastguard is informed of the years events schedule in advance and immediately on any change. This can be at the start of the year or as you go. In addition: HM Coastguard is telephoned on: 01407 762051
  1. Prior to each walk setting off to inform them of the time of departure, route, the number of people on the walk and estimated time of completion.
  2. If significant difficulties are experienced.
  3. On completion of the walk and all walkers are accounted for and off the sands.
- Suitably experienced guides to mark the planned route are used.
- Sufficient Lead guide and stewards are provided (Ratio justification must be via the risk assessment).
- Sufficient GPS equipment is provided.
- Vehicles carry sufficient drinking water and food as well as rescue equipment.
- Sufficient First Aid materials are carried in accordance with the First Aid at Work Regulations (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l74.pdf>)
- All stewards have mobile phones kept in waterproof containers/bags along with spare batteries and that a second back up emergency mobile phone network is available.
- All stewards are properly equipped and are readily recognisable by the walking group by means of suitable high visibility tabards etc.
- All vehicles are subject to pre-walk checks (see section on vehicle support).

The operators risk assessment should produce a detailed work instruction that may expand and add to the issues specified above. A suggested checklist for the event is displayed in Appendix 3.

### Vehicle Support

Vehicles may be employed of a suitable type to deal with the terrain and be able to transport any walkers that get into difficulty through illness or accident. It is envisaged that operators may need to use a combination of tractors with suitable

trailers and possibly other all terrain vehicles for this purpose. Trailers used for carrying passengers must comply with the relevant section of the Health and Safety Executives guidance on this matter can be obtained from:

Safe use of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in agriculture and forestry:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais33.pdf>

Carriage of passengers on farm trailers:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais36.pdf>

- In most circumstances the carriage of passengers on quad bikes is illegal. If quad bikes are the only vehicles available for routine use on the sands they must only be used for the carriage of passengers in **emergency situations**. (an emergency situation is defined as: a serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action)
- Due to the availability of more suitable vehicles, the use of quad bikes should be phased out for emergency passenger carrying purposes. All terrain vehicles with full roll over protection and sit in passenger carrying capacity are now on the market and are the only vehicles designed and fully suitable for this purpose. Quad bikes may remain in use for single driver use by stewards.

## **Railway Crossings**

Should Kents Bank Level Crossing (or any other rail crossing) be used as part of the cross bay walk, contact should be made with the Network Rail Helpline on 03457 11 41 41 a minimum of 14 days prior to the walk taking place. Please state that the matter is for the attention of the Carnforth Level Crossing Manager. This will enable Network Rail to liaise with the walk organiser to ensure a safe crossing for all participants is in place.

## **Accidents and Incidents**

A log book should be maintained recording any significant events occurring on any organised walk. Significant events may include issues of weather, environment, walker behaviour, complaints etc. This information can then be used to inform the planning and organisation of future events.

Significant accidents and near misses must be recorded in an accident book and reported to the National Incident Contact Centre (ICC):

By phone: **0845 300 9923 (local rate)**

Via the internet: **[www.riddor.gov.uk](http://www.riddor.gov.uk)**

Via the HSE website: **[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)**

By e-mail: **[riddor@natbrit.com](mailto:riddor@natbrit.com)**

By post: **Incident Contact Centre, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG**

All significant accidents and near misses must be investigated by the operator and any conclusions used to inform future planning.

Appendix 1: Competence recognition note

Appendix 2: Suggested General Risk Assessment format

Version 3: **May 2016**

Appendix 1: Suggested application template

Conditions that apply to cross bay walks	Number:
Today's walk from _____ to _____ is organised and lead by:	
To do the cross bay walk you <b>MUST</b> have:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A reasonable level of physical fitness and be able to walk unaided for at least <b>10 miles</b>.</li><li>• Crossing of at least two river channels will take place that are cold and possibly fast flowing depth. (This will be actively assessed at the time by the walk organiser).</li><li>• Although routes are largely flat, the ground surface can be demanding consisting of sand, mud, shingle, pebbles, rocks, salt marsh vegetable and gullies.</li><li>• I acknowledge that I will become wet during the walk.</li><li>• Sun cream, water and suitable food to consume on the move are essential.</li><li>• No toilet facilities are available unless specified by the organiser.</li><li>• Parents must give careful consideration as to whether a particular walk is suitable for their children. The walk is onerous and it may be difficult to carry children if they become tired or foot sore. Children must be able to negotiate the distance and terrain described above in addition to water channels with minimum assistance. The operators may consider that certain weather conditions are not suitable for children and as a result cancel a walk.</li><li>• Weather can be changeable and suitable waterproof clothing and dry clothes and footwear to change into at the end of the walk <b>must</b> be taken.</li></ul>	
I acknowledge the above conditions that apply to the cross bay walk.	
Signed _____	Name _____
In the event of an emergency please contact:	Date _____ Tel: _____
Conditions that apply to cross bay walks	Number:
Today's walk from _____ to _____ is organised and lead by:	
To do the cross bay walk you <b>MUST</b> have:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A reasonable level of physical fitness and be able to walk unaided for at least <b>10 miles</b>.</li><li>• Crossing of at least two river channels will take place that are cold and possibly fast flowing depth. (This will be actively assessed at the time by the walk organiser).</li><li>• Although routes are largely flat, the ground surface can be demanding consisting of sand, mud, shingle, pebbles, rocks, salt marsh vegetable and gullies.</li><li>• I acknowledge that I will become wet during the walk.</li><li>• Sun cream, water and suitable food to consume on the move are essential.</li><li>• No toilet facilities are available unless specified by the organiser.</li><li>• Parents must give careful consideration as to whether a particular walk is suitable for their children. The walk is onerous and it may be difficult to carry children if they become tired or foot sore. Children must be able to negotiate the distance and terrain described above in addition to water channels with minimum assistance. The operators may consider that certain weather conditions are not suitable for children and as a result cancel a walk.</li></ul>	

- Weather can be changeable and suitable waterproof clothing and dry clothes and footwear to change into at the end of the walk **must** be taken.

I acknowledge the above conditions that apply to the cross bay walk.

Signed

Name

Date

In the event of an emergency please contact:

Tel:

### Appendix 3 - Cross Bay Walk checklist

- Risk Assessment completed
- Walk notified to HM Coastguard before the walk
- If Charities commission the walk, liaise with Charity to complete risk assessment on walkers abilities.
- Ensure adequate supplies of drinking water and food as well as rescue equipment for the group.
- Check GPS is working.
- Complete register of walkers
- Inform HM Coastguard (Tel: 01407 762051)
  - Before walk of:
    - Walk Leader
    - Start Point and time
    - The planned route
    - Destination and estimated completion time
    - Number of walkers and any vulnerable individuals
    - Contact mobile telephone numbers
  - During the walk:
    - If significant difficulties are experienced.
  - After the walk
    - When all walkers are accounted for during the walk