



## Swaledale Outdoor Club

### Risk Assessments and Guidance

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#### Introduction to Guidance Note

##### A. Member Responsibility for Personal Safety

Swaledale Outdoor Club (SOC) is a collection of individuals with a common interest in outdoor activities who come together to participate in activities as a social gathering. Membership of SOC and participation in its activities is voluntary. Swaledale Outdoor Club recognises that several of its activities have a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions. Officials of SOC make no formal assessment of the suitability of a member's equipment, knowledge, ability or experience prior to them partaking in any activity. It is the responsibility of anyone involved in an activity to personally look after their own safety.

SOC publishes the following disclaimer: Members and their family and guests, participating in any of SOC's activities do so entirely at their own risk. Also they are aware:

- a) That SOC exists only to facilitate the mutual enjoyment of its activities by members and guests.
- b) That SOC does not normally offer instruction in any sport unless it is clearly stated in SOC's quarterly activity programme that an event is designated as a coaching activity and a qualified coach is present.
- c) That no member of SOC may offer instruction unless he or she is a qualified coach and is authorised to do so by the relevant Section Organiser and then only on an event designated in the programme as a coaching activity.
- d) That responsibility for decisions affecting personal safety including those involving the use of SOC's equipment rests solely with the individual participants (or their parents/guardians if they are under 18).
- e) That SOC can accept no liability for the act, default or negligence of individual members.

##### B. SOC Management of Risk

However, SOC does take the management of risk very seriously since:

- Any individual or organisation may in some circumstances have a common law duty to take reasonable care to avoid causing harm to others.
- We are obliged by our insurers to 'prevent or diminish losses or liability arising in connection with the insured risk and to act in accordance with the Codes of Conduct of any organisations we are affiliated to'.

**Therefore, SOC operates with the expectation that each member is responsible for their own safety yet accepting that we should do our best to look after each other and remembering the potential involvement of our insurers.**



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#### **C. Sources of Guidance**

To this end, SOC looks to support members to participate safely in their activities. Prior to participation in any Club activity, SOC directs all members to two sources of guidance and expects that they fully acquaint themselves with the content of both:

1. This 'Guidance Note'; issued to all members when they join or renew their annual membership.
2. "The relevant elements of guidance documents produced by national organisations we are affiliated to. Links to these guidance documents can be found in section 9 of this guidance note.

#### **D. SOC 'Guidance Note'**

SOC values the knowledge and experience of its members, many of whom have taken part safely in numerous SOC activities over the lifetime of SOC. SOC is keen to use this knowledge and experience to advise all members so that everyone can enjoy their activities safely.

Reviewed annually, SOC 'Guidance Note' is a set of recommendations which are based on a comprehensive study of key risks and how to mitigate them:

1. Each Section uses the wealth of knowledge and experience held by its members to carefully identify the key risks that members may be subject to when partaking in a SOC activity.
2. Section members then identify practical ways to reduce the likelihood and/or impact of each risk.
3. These assessments are collated centrally; while the types of activities of SOC Sections are diverse, there are many common themes.
4. The 'Guidance Note' details practical ways of mitigating the key risks which can be applied to activities within any Section.
5. The 'Guidance Note' is checked for consistency with guidance produced by national organisations; any inconsistencies are recorded with reasons.

Previous section-specific risk assessments were consolidated into one document during the creation of this Guidance Note. The Guidance Note is intended to be the working document that all members should use. The risk assessment will be reviewed every 3 years or if there is a significant incident or change to guidance. This is to ensure that all known hazards are addressed by the Guidance Note.

#### **E. Failure to follow SOC Guidance Note**

It is the responsibility of a member to ensure that they have read and understood this Guidance Note before taking part in any activity. Implicit in this is the responsibility of a member to ensure that they are prepared in terms of fitness, skills, experience, clothing and/or equipment. If a member is unsure about any of these aspects, they should communicate with the Activity Coordinator well in advance of the activity. It is then the member's responsibility to make an informed decision based on the advice given.



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The Activity Coordinator (or the majority of other participants) has the right to refuse to allow a member to participate in an activity if they believe that person is not adequately prepared in terms of skills, experience, clothing and/or equipment. However, allowing a person to participate does not imply that the Activity Coordinator or other participants take responsibility for having made an assessment of a person's preparedness.

If a Club member persistently fails to follow this Guidance note then the Club Committee has the right, under section 3.9 of the Club's constitution, to remove Club membership from the individual concerned.

#### **F. Responsibilities of SOC Officials**

While members are responsible for their own safety, there still remain specific responsibilities for SOC officials:

- 1) Section Organisers should ensure that Club equipment is fit for purpose and is maintained to an appropriate standard. Where equipment is deemed 'safety critical', this should be checked every 6 months and confirmed safe by submission of a signed 'Safety Critical Equipment' log. However, individual participants have a responsibility to check on the suitability and standard of the equipment before deciding to use it.
- 2) Section Organisers should provide guidance to Activity Coordinators to make them aware of the extent (and limits) of their responsibilities:
  - a. Willingness to share their experience but not be seen as experts in their activities and not taking responsibility for the safety of other participants.
  - b. Knowledge of appropriate responses to emergencies or accidents but not necessarily a trained first aider or expected to carry a first aid kit.
  - c. Advising participants on the level of skill, experience, clothing or equipment required to participate in a particular event and ensuring that the descriptions of activities reasonably describe the difficulty of that activity so that members can make an informed decision on their ability to participate.
  - d. Being aware and taking account of the prevailing conditions which might affect the safety of participants, e.g. water levels.
  - e. Lowering the difficulty level of any event if conditions on the day require it e.g. bad weather. They should only increase the difficulty level, e.g. increase the distance to be walked or cycled if all participants are willing and capable of participating at the harder level. No pressure should be exerted on participants to do so.
  - f. Refusing to allow a person to participate in an event if that person is not adequately prepared in terms of fitness, skills, experience, clothing and/or equipment. However, allowing a person to participate does not imply that the Activity Coordinator or other participants take responsibility for having made an assessment of a person's preparedness.
  - g. Notifying the Section Organiser of all significant accidents (i.e. exceptional incidents requiring medical treatment). The Section Organiser should keep a record of these accidents/incidents and report them as soon as possible to a Management Committee meeting.



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#### **G. Annual Review**

The Management Committee will review the guidance note and the accident/incident records on an annual basis.

*Risk Assessments and Guidance. Agreed by the Management Committee March 2020 (email confirmation in view of Health Protection (coronavirus) Regulations 2020*



## Guidance Note

### Key advisory points emerging from the combined risk assessment

#### 1) People

- a. Look out for each other and if you see something that concerns you about another member of the group – how they look, or how they're talking or behaving, or even if they've just gone a bit quiet, raise it with them. Be appreciative if someone raises something with you – it might save your life.
- b. Everyone is responsible for participating within their own abilities and for choosing what they do and don't attempt. Respect and support the choices of other members of the group unless they're putting themselves or someone else in danger.
- c. All activities are graded – the Activity Coordinator is responsible for grading the activity and for sticking to it. All participants are responsible for understanding what the grading means and if they're up to it – if you're not sure, ask or stick to a grading you are comfortable with while you build up your fitness and skills.
- d. Skills coaching and fitness training: get some - you will be safer and will get more out of your activity.
- e. SOC is all about having fun, and messing about is part of the fun. It stops being fun if you put yourself or others in danger, which includes distracting people, causing them to take evasive action and generally diverting their attention away from what they need to focus on. Junior participants should be shown the behaviours that are expected of them, not just told. Be aware of the effect of your actions on the whole group.
- f. While participating in SOC activities you will inevitably meet other people, all of whom should be treated with respect regardless of how friendly they appear. Occasionally you will encounter someone who is openly hostile, in which case everyone has a responsibility to remain calm and withdraw from possible altercation. Participants should be vigilant and advise others of potential threats, while ensuring their own safety at all times.



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#### 2) The Group

- a. The whole point of SOC is to enable people to enjoy activities as a group, sharing others' company and experience and benefitting from safety in numbers. Certain group etiquette should be followed:
- b. Get to know each other, introduce yourself to people you don't know and make newcomers feel welcome. Activity Coordinators should find out the experience and fitness level of newcomers and pay extra attention to how they're getting on over the course of the activity; buddying-up newcomers with a known experienced participant is recommended.
- c. Activity Coordinators should brief the group before setting out, drawing participants' attention to upcoming hazards; further briefings en route may be appropriate, particularly when tackling specific challenges or route choices to be made.
- d. Work as a group: look out for each other; share hints and tips; warn each other of hazards on the trail / route / pitch / water; look out for other traffic on the road or trail.
- e. Very occasionally we see examples of malicious actions, either towards equipment or the environment e.g. stringing wire across trails. If found, you should stop and warn the rest of the group immediately, photograph the hazard / damage and make the route as safe as possible again for other users. You should report malicious actions to your Section Organiser as soon as possible; do not take any action against individuals or other groups on the spot.
- f. Keep the group together if at all possible, stop to regroup on regular occasions to allow for people going at their own pace to catch up. If you are the fastest in the group then it is your responsibility to stop to allow the others to catch up; the Activity Coordinator may wish to nominate regrouping points on the route.
- g. If you need to leave the group then it is your responsibility to make the Activity Coordinator aware, ideally at the outset if you know in advance. In any case, it is not recommended to tackle difficult or remote terrain / conditions alone and you do so at your own risk.



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#### 3) Emergencies

- a. Learn first aid and carry a first aid kit – the more of us that do this the safer we become as a group. Find out who in the group is trained and who has a first aid kit. Let someone else in the group know about any pre-existing conditions that might be relevant; let them know what to do about it, where to find medication, who to call.
- b. Your first responsibility is for your own safety. Never put yourself in danger to try to help someone else – summon professional help.
- c. Know how to get help. Carry a mobile phone; register for emergencySMS; enable phone location services; find out who in the group has a phone. Remember the International Mountain Distress Signal - six good blasts on a whistle or torch flashes - repeat after a pause of a minute.

#### 4) Planning

- a. Plan the activity; follow the plan. It is the Activity Coordinator's responsibility to make the plan, ideally in conjunction with the other participants and to share it with the other participants. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure they understand the plan and to help the group follow it. Changes to the plan must be communicated to all concerned (see below).
- b. Tell someone back at base what the plan is; agree a time at which, if they've not heard from you, they'll raise the alarm. Tell them if you change the plan!
- c. Activity Coordinators are encouraged to have a Plan 'B', and 'C' if necessary – build in escape routes, short cuts and less demanding options in case they're needed; everyone should be aware of these options and not be afraid or embarrassed to ask to use them if necessary.
- d. Novice Activity Coordinators should work in conjunction with a more experienced Activity Coordinator to plan and coordinate the activity.



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#### 5) Equipment

- a. Make sure you have the right clothing and equipment for the activity planned (make sure you know what is planned!). Some equipment is mandatory and without it you will not be welcome to join the group; the Section Organiser can advise on what is expected in terms of clothing / equipment for each activity.
- b. Check your equipment in advance; making repairs and adjustments during the activity, and even just before you're due to set off, wastes everyone's time and knocks the schedule. Also, everyone cools down, making injuries more likely.
- c. Even if lights are not critical to your activity, you are recommended to carry a torch in case you find yourself out unexpectedly in failing light – test it before you set off and carry spare batteries. Don't use rechargeable batteries if there's a chance they might get wet.
- d. If you're borrowing equipment it's even more important to check and adjust it beforehand and to make sure you know how it works. SOC Section Organisers have a responsibility to check and maintain their Sections' equipment; you are responsible for checking it before use, for returning it in good condition and for notifying the Section Organiser if you are aware of any problems or defects with it.
- e. Only use other people's / party's equipment with permission and only use in-situ equipment if there is no alternative – treat it with extreme caution and inspect it carefully beforehand.
- f. Look out for each other and if you see something that concerns you about the condition of someone's equipment, or how they're using it, raise it with them. Be appreciative if someone raises something with you – it might save your life.
- g. Learn how to maintain and repair your equipment and carry a basic repair kit – the more of us that do this the safer we become as a group. Find out who in the group has what kit. Section Organisers and experienced members will be able to advise on what tools to carry.
- h. Participants are responsible for the safety and security of their own equipment. All equipment is valuable and you should look after it; at the very least it's inconvenient if items go missing. Bikes, however, are particularly prone to theft and participants are encouraged not to leave their bikes unsecured.





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#### 6) Weather

- a. Look at the weather forecast in the days running up to the activity – be prepared to revise the plan accordingly. Be prepared to abandon the activity if very poor weather is forecast. Be aware of the impact on you and your activity of all forms of extreme weather: heavy rain, high winds, extreme hot or cold.
- b. Be aware of the early signs of hypothermia, heat exhaustion and heat stroke in yourself and others and learn what to do if someone is affected. Carry plenty of water unless you're sure you can top up safely on route – being dehydrated will slow you down more than carrying an extra litre or two. Avoid getting wet if it's cold and ideally carry an emergency shelter / bothy bag with the group.
- c. Consider the cumulative effect of rain or snow over preceding days. Remember that heavy rain on both saturated and very dry ground will lead to very localised flash flooding. Do not enter flood water – it can be deceptively deep and fast flowing and there may be hidden hazards. Do not attempt to cross even apparently small streams when in high flow or flood conditions – it takes less than 30cm of fast flowing water to knock someone off their feet.

#### 7) Conditions

- a. Challenging conditions and testing terrain are all part of the fun, and participants should be aware of the risks inherent in SOC activities. Be aware that challenges posed by conditions and terrain can be easily made worse by poor weather, reduced light and tired or cold participants.
- b. Effective planning and grading of the activity by the Activity Coordinator will reduce the likelihood of someone finding themselves out of their depth. Effective briefings before and during the activity and communication between participants will reduce the chances of nasty surprises en route.
- c. Avoid holding activities at locations with known problems. Use guide books for general information and bulletin boards, social media to get information about prevailing conditions and pick up warnings and alerts.
- d. Roads traffic poses one of the highest risks to participants, both en route to an activity and when encountering road traffic during the activity. Leave plenty of time to travel to your activity; ensure equipment is properly secured. Activity Coordinators should plan activities to minimise use of busy roads. Participants using roads should follow the Highway Code (which applies to cyclists and pedestrians as well as motorists).



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#### 8) Navigation

- a. Effective planning will reduce the chances of problems with navigation. The Activity Coordinator should carry plans / maps and compass and know how to use them. At least one other member of the group should have a spare map and compass.
- b. It is not recommended to rely solely on handheld satellite navigation, especially a single unit. Batteries die, electronics fail and very occasionally the location signal is degraded / corrupted without warning.

#### 9) Section Specific Guidance, National Organisation Guidance links and Known differences from National Organisation Guidance

##### Caving

1. Details of the trip (size of party, cave name, route and 'call out' time) should be left with a responsible person who will raise the alarm in the event the party becomes overdue.
2. The weather should be assessed by the participants and they are satisfied that previous/forecast rainfall (or wind if caving downstream of a reservoir dam) will not impact the safety of the planned trip.

British Caving Association publications (including beginners' / non-cavers' leaflet "So you want to go caving" and Weil's disease leaflet) are available at [http://british-caving.org.uk/wiki3/doku.php?id=publications\\_information:publications](http://british-caving.org.uk/wiki3/doku.php?id=publications_information:publications)

##### Climbing

1. Members are encouraged to use a prusik loop as a safety backup when abseiling.

##### Cycling

SOC is affiliated to the CTC. Please take note of the guidance issued by the CTC "Guide to Group Riding": <http://www.ctc.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/events/ctc-guide-to-group-riding-july-2013.pdf> The sections "What is it like on a group ride" and "What to bring on a Group Ride" are relevant to rides with SOC except that as SOC is only affiliated to and not a member group of the CTC, references to a "Guest Entry Form" are not relevant.

If you are leading a ride please take note of the CTC "Guide to Leading a Group Ride": <http://www.ctc.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/events/ctc-guide-to-leading-a-group-ride-july-2013.pdf> The Club has its own insurance policy so ride leaders do not require to be registered; in the event of an accident this should be



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reported to the Section Organiser – there is no set incident report; and we do not have a guest entry form.

#### **Mountain Biking**

All participants in club rides must wear a helmet.