ADVENTURE ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

# Bushwalking

Schools must follow the Department’s [Excursions Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/policy) and [Guidelines](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/guidance) and the requirements outlined in this document when planning, conducting and approving adventure activities.

These guidelines are for developing risk management plans specific to the location, activity and group participating. They are not intended to be used as a training manual. Staff instructing the activity must have sufficient knowledge/expertise in the activity.

Bushwalking refers to activities involving walking or hiking in a diverse range of outdoor settings and in a variety of tracked and untracked environments. Bushwalking may take place during a single day or involve an overnight component.

When conducting a bushwalking activity the final route plan must be documented. Route planning must consider the age and experience of the group and include:

* difficulty and hazards of the terrain
* escape routes
* emergency access points
* alternative routes (in the event the original route is unavailable)
* availability of campsites
* availability of adequate and safe water supplies.

If an overnight camping component is planned, please also refer to [Camping guidelines.](https://nginx-php-content-policy-det-vic-gov-au-production.lagoon.vicsdp.amazee.io/sites/default/files/2020-04/Camping_PAL_Word.docx)

## Definitions

**Day bushwalks** – walks of a single day’s duration where students do not camp overnight.

**Difficult terrain bushwalks** – walks in terrain which includes narrow or uneven tracks, rock scrambling, sustained steep ascents or descents, off track walking or thick scrub.

**Overnight bushwalks** – walks of two or more days duration, where students camp out overnight.

**Remote area bushwalks** – walks in areas where the group may be a considerable distance away from emergency assistance.

## Venue definitions

Bushwalks vary in nature and can be graded according to the Australian Walking Track Grading System.

The Australian Walking Track Grading System classifies tracks as:

**Grade 1** – no bushwalking experience required. Flat even surface with no steps or steep sections. Suitable for wheelchair users who have someone to assist them. Walks no greater than 5km.

**Grade 2** – no bushwalking experience required. The track is a hardened or compacted surface and may have a gentle hill section or sections and occasional steps. Walks no greater than 10km.

**Grade 3** – suitable for most ages and fitness levels. Some bushwalking experience recommended. Tracks may have short steep hill sections a rough surface and many steps. Walks up to 20km.

**Grade 4** – bushwalking experience recommended. Tracks may be long, rough and very steep. Directional signage may be limited.

**Grade 5** – very experienced bushwalkers with specialised skills, including navigation and emergency first aid. Tracks are likely to be very rough, very steep and unmarked. Walks may be more than 20km.

Track grades correspond to relevant class under AS 2165.1 for Grade 1–4, Grade 5 covers class 5 and 6 tracks.

## Staffing definitions

**Staff** – any adult approved by the principal who provides supervisory, instructional or educational elements of the activity or excursion. See [Excursions Guidelines – Staffing](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/guidance/staffing-roles-and-responsibilities) for further details.

**Teacher** – a staff member registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching who provides a supervisory role on a program.

The following roles can be filled by school staff, a teacher, an external provider or a volunteer (See: [Volunteers in Schools Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/volunteers/policy)):

**Designated Instructor** – the appointed staff member on a program who provides the lead technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Instructor** – a staff member who provides professional, technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

**Assistant Instructor** – a staff member who provides assistance to the instructor(s) in the provision of technical expertise and supervision for the activity.

## Student preparAtion and skills

Planning for activities should begin with an assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in outdoor environments.

The assessment of students’ current knowledge, skills and experience in the activity should be documented using [Documentation of Participant Preparation, Prerequisite Skills/Knowledge](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/safety/participrep.doc).

The instructor should ascertain the previous experience of each student.

Instructional staff must brief students on:

* equipment, clothing and footwear that is suitable for the activity and location
* safety measures appropriate to control risks associated with the activity and the environment
* minimal environmental impact techniques relevant to the activity and location
* historical and cultural considerations relevant to the activity and location
* activity scope and boundaries
* communication and communication signals
* relevant terminology
* hazards which may be encountered during the walk, for example, snakes, cliffs, river crossings, bodies of water or steep ground.

Students should also undertake navigation training suitable for the location and activity.

Before and during an overnight or extended bushwalk, students should also develop:

* skills in tent pitching, including awareness of and responsiveness to overhead hazards, safe use of stoves, food preparation and basic first aid
* an understanding of camp practices, including hygiene, response to weather conditions and protection of the natural environment.

### Carrying loads

Overnight bushwalking can involve carrying loads for extended periods with challenging movements and postures. Carrying a heavy backpack is considered **high force** under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017. **High force** is defined as an activity involving a single or repetitive use of force that it would be reasonable to expect that a person in the workforce may have difficulty undertaking. Therefore, when planning individual load sizes and the intended route, staff should consider the potential for loads to cause injury to students. This should also include how much water students will need to carry for the bushwalk.

It is recommended that staff and students travel as lightly as possible. It is also recommended that staff provide student with a strict packing list to avoid overpacking or carrying unnecessary items. Packs must be weighed before departure.

The amount of weight carried will vary from student to student and should be assessed on an individual basis. Influencing factors include:

* students’ age and physical characteristics
* students’ experience
* students’ fitness
* the quality of backpack
* the intended route
* the number and length of rest breaks.

The quality of the backpack plays an important role in distributing the weight of the backpack and preventing strain or injury. A high-quality backpack suitable for bushwalking:

* is an appropriate length for the student
* has wide shoulder straps
* has a chest strap
* has a hip strap.

Students must also be instructed in safe lifting techniques and recommended adjustments which can be made while carrying a backpack. Packs must be adjusted so the weight is carried as close to the back as possible. Students should be assisted in lifting and putting on their packs to avoid leaning or twisting in ways that may cause injury.

Students must be instructed to report any discomfort they feel when carrying their packs

For assistance in the determination of appropriate lifting techniques, load sizes and weights, please see WorkSafe’s [Manual Handling Topic](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/safety-and-prevention/health-and-safety-topics/manual-handling), or Part 4 of the [WorkSafe Compliance Code: Hazardous Manual Handling.](https://content.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-12/Compliance_code%3A_Hazardous_manual_handling.pdf)

## Equipment

All equipment used must be in sound condition, suitable for the activity and must meet applicable industry safety standards.

Before overnight bushwalks, staff must ensure that food, essential clothing and personal equipment are suitable for the planned journey.

Students should be instructed on appropriate packing techniques (e.g. carrying heavier items as close as possible to the back). Staff should oversee the packing process and may conduct pack checks as appropriate to the skill and experience of the group.

For bushwalks no longer than one day, staff must consider:

* suitable food and water
* emergency equipment as appropriate
* footwear that is comfortable, well broken-in and in good repair – in more rugged terrain, footwear should have ankle support
* rainwear suitable for the activity and location
* a well-fitted pack
* maps/walk guides suitable for the activity and location.

Equipment for overnight or extended bushwalks would, in general, include the items described above, and:

* a well-fitted backpack that is large enough to contain internally all of the individual’s required equipment, with a waist belt and waterproof liner, for example, a garbage bag
* a tent or shelter appropriate to the conditions
* overnight equipment, including sleeping bag, sleep mat, toileting equipment and catering equipment.

Backpacks should be of an appropriate style and have features appropriate to distributing weight for long periods of time. Backpacks must be inspected before departure.

In addition, on overnight walks, staff should carry:

* a repair kit for equipment such as stoves, packs and tents
* a stove, even if the group plans to cook on fires
* detailed maps of the area and navigation equipment
* spare emergency food and water
* a length of rope if walking in areas where a handline may be necessary or if it is needed as a navigational aid
* a mobile phone or, in remote areas, other forms of communication such as UHF radios or satellite phones, Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBS) and PLB Personal Locator Beacons (PLB).

## Clothing

Clothing must provide for sudden changes in weather and should include appropriate sun protection and personal safety items for the activities planned, for example, strong footwear, waterproof overpants, a woollen or sun hat.

When deciding clothing to be worn for the activity, staff and students must consider the:

* appropriateness of clothing materials
* principles of layering
* need for a wind and waterproof outer shell.

## Experience and qualifications

Staff instructing the activity should have sufficient knowledge and experience of the activity and the activity environment to operate in all reasonably foreseeable conditions.

There is no widely accepted bushwalking instructor/guide program in Australia. Relevant education and training programs exist. Experience and qualifications need to be investigated on a case by case basis to ensure that required experience, knowledge and skills outlined are satisfied and are current.

The designated instructor should have the following skills and experience in:

navigating participants through and within the relevant location and foreseeable conditions

responding to the foreseeable conditions including with respect to terrain, weather, animal and insect encounters

monitoring individual and group safety

planning bushwalks and selecting campsites appropriate for student groups

maintain suitable overnight campsites using camp craft practices

administering first aid and implementing emergency responses appropriate to the location and incident

leading the activity in a manner that results in minimal environmental impact including using lightweight, portable equipment where relevant

selecting and using equipment available and necessary for bushwalking appropriate to the location, anticipated conditions and participants including

clothing, for example layering and other factors affecting clothing selection

footwear, for example advantages and disadvantages of different footwear and factors affecting appropriate selection for anticipated conditions

techniques for packing (including weight distribution) and waterproofing to protect personal and group equipment where relevant

portable cooking systems

* calculating appropriate food and water requirements to ensure fluid and nutritional requirements to maintain health during the activity

utilising navigation techniques to determine location, direction and potential hazards

instructing and supervising appropriate cooking practices on portable cooking systems

meeting appropriate land management requirements, to determine any conditions that are specific to the location, for example, permits and maximum group sizes.

The designated assistant to the instructor must:

* be able to assume a supervisory role during the activity in the event of an emergency or the absence of the designated instructor such as during a break
* trained in first aid and able to implement/follow established emergency response plans
* have conferred with the instructor to establish the emergency response, communication and supervision responsibilities.

The teacher in charge must:

* have sufficient knowledge of the students to manage logistical, pastoral or medical issues
* have overall responsibility for the activity and legal responsibility for emergency procedures.

[Documentation of staff qualifications and experience](https://nginx-php-content-policy-det-vic-gov-au-production.lagoon.vicsdp.amazee.io/sites/default/files/2020-02/excursion_staff_qualifications.docx) must be used to document staff experience and training in lieu of the listed qualifications.

Where an external contractor is chosen to run all or part of this activity, see: [Excursions Guidelines – External Providers](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/guidance/external-providers).

## Supervision

Effective supervision is a critical factor in managing risk in the outdoors.

A minimum of two staff members must be present for each activity.  One staff member is to have responsibility for instruction in the activity and the other is to assist the instructor. If the designated instructor and the assistant to the instructor are not school staff, then a school staff member must also be present.

It may be necessary to increase the staff allocation based on ability to observe or monitor students on activity with consideration to:

* students (medical conditions, age, physical, mental and emotional maturity, ability and experience)
* group (dynamics and size)
* staff (medical conditions, age, ability and experience, qualifications and skills)
* location (remoteness, communications and environmental conditions).

Reasons for increasing staff allocations must be documented.

The following table shows the minimum staff-to-student allocation that must be used for bushwalking.

|  |
| --- |
| **Bushwalking (day walks)** |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | 1–20 |
| 3 | 21–30 |
| Bushwalking (overnight walks) |
| Staff numbers | Student numbers |
| 2 | 1–12 |
| 3 | 13–18 |

The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school principal as part of the excursion approval process. Staff members must supervise students according to that strategy, and in accordance with their duty of care. It is the role of the teacher in charge to clearly and adequately explain the supervision strategy to all participating staff members.

Students not directly participating in the activity must be separately supervised in line with [Excursions Guidelines – Supervision](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/excursions/guidance/supervision).

## Peak bodies and expert advice

Australian Camps Association <http://www.auscamps.asn.au/>

Bushwalking Victoria <https://bushwalkingvictoria.org.au/>

Country Fire Authority <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/>

Outdoors Victoria <https://outdoorsvictoria.org.au/>

Parks Victoria <http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/>

Victorian Rainfall and River Height Data <http://www.bom.gov.au/vic/flood/index.shtml?ref=hdr>

For further queries, please contact: community.stakeholders@education.vic.gov.au

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