

Led Walks Case Study #3



Overview

During the autumn of 2010 an incident occurred on a Ramblers walk in Derbyshire. Due to the location of the incident it proved challenging for the Group to manage. However, the leader and Group dealt with the incident admirably. This case study aims to raise awareness, share good practice and promote learning amongst Groups and Walk Leaders.

Details of the incident

The Group had been walking for approximately one hour in moorland terrain when they came to a particularly rocky section on the footpath. The leader was assisting walkers when someone slipped, falling sideways. It was immediately obvious the walker had injured their leg as they were in considerable pain and unable to walk.

The walker was kept warm by being given extra clothing and wrapped in an emergency blanket. The leg was immobilised and elevated and painkillers were offered. There was no mobile signal at the location. Two members stayed with the injured walker whilst the leader and the rest of the Group ascended the hillside until a mobile signal was obtained. The leader then called 999 and asked for the police. The police then contacted the local Mountain Rescue Team (MRT). An experienced walker then descended back down to the injured party to inform them the MRT was assembling. After discussion with the Group the leader appointed another experienced walker as assistant leader. After ensuring the assistant leader knew the route, they were requested to continue the walk with the remainder of the Group. The leader then returned to the injured party.

Two walkers then descended to the nearest road head to help coordinate the MRT and ambulance. Approximately one and a half hours after the incident took place the MRT arrived on scene, along with a paramedic. After administering emergency treatment the injured walker was stretchered to an awaiting ambulance. They were then transported to hospital, where it was confirmed the leg was broken.

Analysis

Overall walking is one of the safest outdoor activities, however the Ramblers recognise accidents occur and often there is no way of preventing them. Although it is not possible to predict or anticipate every possible incident and subsequently how to handle the situation, there is a coordinated approach that should be undertaken to ensure the safety of both the casualty and the rest of the group and prevent the situation worsening. Various factors will influence the handling of any incident, these include: time of day, distance from available help, severity of injury, weather and equipment available. By sharing the learning from such incidents it is hoped to raise awareness and increase good practice amongst Groups and Walk Leaders.

Equipment

The Group in this case study was obviously well prepared with an emergency blanket, a first aid kit, mobile phone and spare clothing. This ensured the casualty was kept warm, made as comfortable as possible and prevented them deteriorating. The leader should ensure adequate equipment is taken on a walk, however they do not necessarily have to carry all the spare equipment; it can be shared amongst fellow walkers.

Communication

The handling of an incident should not necessarily be left to the leader alone. Advice and support should be sought from other experienced walkers and in some cases it might be appropriate that there is somebody else better placed to handle the situation. If the leader appoints other people to assist, the leader should communicate their actions to everyone present. It is important for the leader to remain calm and to communicate effectively with the casualty, the remainder of the party and emergency services. During this incident the leader discussed the plan of action with all walkers at various stages. Good communication is essential during any incident and a plan of action is necessary to decide the best way to handle the situation.

Care of the casualty, leader and the rest of the party

It is essential that the casualty, the leader and the rest of the group look out for each other during an incident. It is often that attention is given to the casualty and the rest of the party is unintentionally ignored. Whilst spare clothing should be given to keep the casualty warm, it is essential that the rest of the party, including the leader, do not suffer any ill effects, such as hypothermia for instance. During this incident the leader appointed an assistant leader to look after the rest of the party whilst they dealt with the injured party personally.

The casualty in this incident was also made as comfortable as possible being kept warm, having their leg immobilised and elevated and being offered painkillers, which were self administered. They were also reassured by the competency and efficiency of the leader. It is not always necessary for walkers to be first aid trained, common sense should prevail, however the key principle of first aid is do no harm.

The Ramblers have a handy A5 laminated Walk Leaders Checklist that provides information about what to do in the event of an emergency and first aid information. To order a copy or view an online version please visit the Walk Leaders page on the Ramblers website.

Assisting the emergency services

If an incident takes place in a remote location, where vehicle access is impossible, and the emergency services are required, then the police should be requested when calling 999. The police then contact the local MRT and coordinate a rescue. The minimal information required by the emergency services is: location of the incident (grid reference, map sheet number, name of mountain area and description of the terrain), number and names of people in the party and the condition of anyone injured.

The Group involved in this incident also ensured the MRT located the casualty as fast as possible by sending two walkers to the nearest road to meet with the MRT and ambulance.

Conclusion

The Ramblers would like to thank the Walk Leader and Group for allowing the incident to be featured as a case study and for their competent and efficient handling of the incident.