

Safe Operating Procedures for Expeditions on Foot in Normal and Open Country

Introduction

This document contains the Safe Operating Procedures for DofE expeditions and other hill-walking ventures in normal and open country. "Normal and open country" includes any terrain in Britain that is not defined as Wild Country (see definitions on page 3). The safety of participants is of the highest priority in the leadership of expeditions of this nature, and all reasonable precautions are taken to prevent participants coming to harm. At the same time, it is recognised that one of the key benefits of expeditions of this nature is the opportunity they provide for young people to become self-reliant and to assume a measure of responsibility for their own safety, commensurate with their age, maturity, training and ability.

Walking in Normal or Open Country under Remote Supervision - Duke of Edinburgh's Award Groups.

All Duke of Edinburgh's Award expeditions are supervised by an expedition supervisor who has a relevant national Award (BELA, WGL or ML) or who has successfully completed the DofE Expedition Supervisors course organised by the County Duke of Edinburgh's Award office.

DofE expeditions under direct or close supervision are organised in accordance with the operating procedures below.

Responsibilities of expedition supervisors and group leaders:

The expedition supervisor is the adult in overall charge of the expedition which may comprise one or more walking groups. The supervisor may delegate responsibility to a group leader, who is an adult in charge of supervising one walking group. The expedition supervisor must ensure that all group leaders are competent to fulfil this role.

These procedures apply to expedition walking where the participants are under remote supervision. These procedures also apply in circumstances where participants are accompanied by an adult who has not been judged competent to fulfil the role of group leader. Such participants are deemed to be under remote supervision for the purpose of these operating procedures.

The expedition supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the procedures below are followed. Tasks may be delegated to group leaders at the expedition supervisor's discretion.

Conduct of the activity

The decision to permit a group to walk under remote supervision can only be taken by the expedition supervisor based on their personal knowledge of the maturity and competence of the participants. The following specific conditions must also be met:

- The walking group must have undertaken at least ½ day of walking under direct or close supervision in similar terrain for Bronze expeditions and 1 full day for Silver and Gold Expeditions, prior to the first occasion on which they are permitted to walk under remote supervision.
- The expedition supervisor must satisfy him or herself that the group:
 - possess sufficient navigating ability to undertake the proposed route safely
 - have sufficient experience of the type of terrain that will be encountered

- have been briefed on any specific hazards likely to be encountered, for example busy roads or open water. **Note** no swimming or paddling in open water is permitted under remote supervision.
 - are aware of the precautions to take to prevent heat exhaustion or hypothermia
 - have sufficient maturity to stay together and take decisions as a group as required.
 - have rehearsed appropriate procedures to adopt should they become lost.
- The route chosen must be:
 - Appropriate to the needs and abilities of the group
 - Able to be modified in response to changing conditions, with pre-planned bad-weather alternatives where appropriate
 - Consistent with information provided to parents, both in respect of the nature of the route and remote supervision arrangements.
 - The expedition supervisor must establish a supervision plan which determines where and how frequently each walking group should be seen by their supervisor, which must be as a minimum twice daily, and for Bronze and Silver expeditions will normally be more frequently.

Equipment

- All participants must wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Adequate spare clothing and waterproof outer garments must be carried. Clothing and footwear must be checked prior to the group being permitted to walk under remote supervision.
- Each group must carry at least two maps, route cards and compasses. Maps must cover the intended route, and sufficient terrain either side of the intended route to include all planned escape routes.
- Emergency equipment must be carried including an appropriately stocked, checked first aid kit, a whistle, torch and spare batteries and emergency rations.

Emergency Planning

- All members of the group must carry the telephone contact numbers needed to make contact with their group supervisor, and/or the expedition supervisor. Use of the *Expedition Safety Card* is recommended.
- The group must be competent to affect emergency procedures if required. These must have been practised in the field during prior training.
- At least two group members must have emergency first aid training (as a minimum, attendance at the required first aid training given to DofE participants).
- Group members must be aware of participants' relevant medical conditions.
- The expedition supervisor and group leader must be familiar with the County's emergency procedures. Copies are available on request.
- Participants' parental contact and medical information must be carried by the expedition supervisor and copies left with the designated emergency home contacts. Group leaders must be briefed on participants' relevant medical conditions.
- Escape routes to locations from which the emergency services could be summoned by landline telephone must be pre-planned for all sections of the route. Each group must also carry a mobile phone to facilitate summoning the emergency services and/or contacting the group leader in an emergency, but reliance should not be placed solely on mobile phones to perform this function.

Note with DofE groups it may be appropriate to require the mobile phone to be sealed and only opened in an emergency.

- Immediately prior to walking under remote supervision the group must be reminded that they are now responsible for their own safety and that they cannot rely upon help from their group leader even if he or

she is planning to meet them en route or be present in the area. A brief reminder of emergency procedures is advised at this juncture.

Reporting

- All incidents, accidents, near misses and hazards must be reported using the County incident report form (*or comparable procedure for non-County groups*).
- Any safety concerns arising from the activity must be reviewed by the staff involved. The expedition supervisor must ensure that these are communicated to any other expedition supervisors involved with the DoFE Unit. If relevant safety concerns should also be communicated to County DoFE Manager.

Risk Assessment and Operating Procedures: DoFE Expedition Camping

All expedition camping is supervised by an expedition supervisor who has a relevant national Award (BELA, WGL or ML) or who has successfully completed the DoFE Expedition Supervisors course organised by the County Duke of Edinburgh’s Award office.

DoFE Expedition camping is organised in accordance with the operating procedures below.

| Risk. | Control Measure |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Fire (Tents) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are not permitted to smoke or use naked flames in tents. • Tents are pitched a minimum of 1m apart. |
| Burns and Scalds (Cooking Stoves) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All use of stoves, and carriage and storage of fuel, is carried out in accordance with the procedures below. |
| Infections (Poor Hygiene) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are trained in the importance of personal hygiene whilst camping, and in the safe storage and preparation of food. |
| Hypothermia (Cold / Wet Conditions) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants’ camping equipment is checked for suitability in the expected conditions. • Camping in winter conditions only takes place with a means of evacuation to indoor accommodation. • Any wild country camping is supervised by a holder of the ML Award. |
| Overnight Safety | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campsites are chosen which have security precautions in place to deter unwelcome intruders or in locations where the risk of intrusion is small. |

Responsibilities of expedition supervisors

The expedition supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the following procedures are followed.

Supervision

- Expedition campsites must be chosen with regard to the suitability of the facilities (eg the availability of clean drinking water and adequate toilet and washing arrangements), any hazards in the local environment (eg open water) and any risk of unwelcome intrusion and assault.
- An adult leader of the same gender must always be present at the campsite overnight, in proximity to participants, when participants undertake their first DoFE expedition.
- For subsequent expeditions, the expedition supervisor must determine the level of supervision required, taking account of the training, experience and maturity of the participants, and the nature of the campsite.

Note normal practice is for a progressive relaxation of supervision, through adult leaders camping at a distance on the same site, to fully unaccompanied camping. However, unaccompanied camping must only be permitted where the expedition supervisor has personally checked the campsite for its suitability and assessed the group to be sufficiently competent and mature to camp safely without adult support. Contact with the expedition supervisor by phone (mobile or landline) should be possible in an emergency.

- All members of the group must be judged competent before supervision is relaxed. This is especially important when direct DofE entrants at Silver or Gold levels join a more experienced group.
- The supervision of camping must be in accordance with information supplied to parents. If, exceptionally, mixed gender tenting groups will be permitted, or if participants are to camp unaccompanied, parents must be informed and give consent on this basis.
- No smoking or other use of naked flames may be permitted inside tents. Tents must be pitched a minimum of 2 metres apart.
- A competent adult leader must closely supervise all camp cooking until participants have been trained and judged competent in the use and re-fuelling of the type of stove concerned, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. It is recommended that participants do not cook at night.
- No cooking is permitted inside tents. Exceptionally, in inclement weather, expedition supervisors may make a judgement to permit cooking in the porches of tents provided the porch is kept open and an alternative exit is available at the other end of the tent. This judgement must be based upon the group's training and experience in camp cooking and their general level of responsibility, and would normally only be appropriate at Gold Level.
- Open fires must not be permitted - floating embers will damage tent fly sheets.
- Participants must be trained in appropriate personal hygiene and the safe storage and preparation of food.
- Participants must be briefed on appropriate precautions in relation to any hazards in the local environment (eg open water).

Equipment

- Participants' tents, sleeping bags and waterproof clothing must be of an adequate standard for the expected conditions.
- Cooking stoves must be inspected and maintained regularly, in accordance with the manufacturer's guidance.
- Fuel must be stored and carried in containers with safety valves, or kept well away from naked flames if carried in other containers. Stoves requiring methylated spirit must only be used with fuel containers with safety valves and must never be re-filled unless extinguished and cool to the touch. Fuel in bulk may only be handled by adult leaders.

Emergency Planning

- A person with emergency first aid training (as a minimum, attendance at the required first aid training given to DofE participants) must be present at all times.
- The expedition supervisor, group leaders and participants (if unaccompanied) must be familiar with the County's emergency procedures and be able to contact their designated home contacts in an emergency
- Where participants camp unaccompanied by adult leaders of the same gender, they must have the means of making urgent contact with an adult leader of their gender. This leader must be able to travel to the campsite promptly if required.

- If camping takes place outside the recognised DofE expedition season, or at other times when serious weather conditions are forecast, then an adult leader must be present on site and able to evacuate the party to indoor accommodation promptly if required.

Reporting

- All incidents, accidents, near misses and hazards must be reported using the County incident report form.
- Any safety concerns arising from the activity must be reviewed by the staff involved. The expedition supervisor must ensure that these are communicated to any other expedition supervisors involved with the DofE Unit. If relevant safety concerns should also be communicated to County DofE Manager.