

*walksafe*

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# contents

<b>Walksafe means equipped to be able to enjoy bushwalking</b>	2
<b>Walksafe means advance planning of the</b>	
Group	4
Route	8
Clothing	12
Equipment	14
Food	18
Water	20
<b>Walksafe means using commonsense with</b>	
Bushcraft	22
Camping	28
Minor	30
Mishaps	
<b>but, in the unlikely event of</b>	34
Becoming Lost	38
Becoming Separated	40
Major Accident	42
Extreme Heat	44
Extreme Cold	48
Snakebite	50
Electrical Storm/Bushfire	52
Flooded River	
<b>“DO NOT PANIC, REMEMBER WALKSAFE.”</b>	

# walksafe

means equipped to be able  
to enjoy bushwalking

The Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs, VicWalk has produced this WALKSAFE booklet as a general guideline for the inexperienced bushwalker, and as a reminder to the more experienced, of the best of accepted practice for safe and responsible walking in the Victorian bush. It is not a book of rules. It is a book of basic common knowledge on which novice bushwalkers can base and build their own store of practical experience and employ common sense to ensure enjoyment and appreciation of this environmentally friendly form of recreation.

The underlying philosophy is that to WALKSAFE means to be armed with sufficient knowledge to avoid encountering unnecessary problems in the bush. It means to plan in advance a suitable route, clothing, equipment and food for your walking party. It also means to be aware of potential difficulties or hazards and the accepted courses of action when problems arise.

People's reasons for "going bush" are as varied as the locations and terrains they frequent, but the knowledge they require in their pursuit is common. For various reasons, many of today's Victorians lack a background of childhood or early experience of "roughing it" in the Australian bush. It is hoped that the information in this publication

may encourage the uninitiated to sample some of the unique experiences offered in both day and overnight (multi-day) bushwalking.

VicWalk advises that a bushwalking party without any experienced members should not undertake a trip in remote areas of the state, where external assistance cannot be readily attained in the event of major accident or disaster. VicWalk stresses the advantages of learning from the experience of others and thus encourages novice walkers to join a bushwalking club.

VicWalk exists to serve the interests of bushwalking clubs and bushwalkers. It is a peak body representing over 70 member clubs with an estimated total individual membership of 12,000 walkers.

## preface



VicWalk would like to acknowledge appreciation to the many who have contributed to the production of this WALKSAFE booklet, from its original conception to final publication.

VicWalk would also like to thank and acknowledge the financial support of Sport and Recreation Victoria in the production of WALKSAFE, which has contributed to our ability to provide free distribution of safety information to the bushwalking and potential bushwalking community.



# walksafe

means advance planning of the group

group

## Leadership

Irrespective of the experience of a bushwalking group, to WALKSAFE means responsibility must be taken by one or more members of the group to ensure that all aspects of planning and organizing a trip are covered. In large and particularly inexperienced groups it is also preferable that responsibility for navigation and other decisions in the field is taken by an experienced individual.

The leader and ideally others in the group should be aware of the skills and any special needs of the members of the group with respect to bushwalking. This

includes individuals' experience, knowledge, ability, fitness and, more particularly, medical problems (such as asthma) and associated treatment or medication required.

> Bushwalking clubs are an excellent source of experienced leaders and can also offer trip suggestions, equipment hire and advice, as well as potential walking companions.

## Numbers

Whilst small parties are easier to manage and have less impact on the environment, a minimum of four is recommended for safety. In an emergency requiring external assistance, one member

can care for the injured person whilst two walk out safely to raise the alarm. Any reduction in number compromises safety and should only be undertaken when the level of experience and the potential hazards of the trip are taken into consideration. Clearly, a day walk in a popular, well tracked or open area such as the Mornington Peninsular does not carry the same risks as an extended walk and overnight camp in the Wongungarra wilderness.

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It would be irresponsible for an inexperienced bushwalker to walk alone under any circumstances, and unwise in a party of less than four.



## Organization



Each member of the group must know what personal clothing and equipment is appropriate for the proposed walk.

## Children

When planning walks with children allow for a slower walking pace, more frequent and longer rest times, higher water consumption and the inevitable tendency of children to either run ahead or fall behind the adult party. Preferably plan short walks with as much variety as possible that will hold their interest and will remain easily and enjoyably within their physical capabilities.

As a rule of thumb, children between the ages of 5 and 15 can only comfortably walk as many kilometres per day as their age. Less in difficult terrain or poor conditions. Children under 7 should not be relied upon to carry a pack or equipment.

Very young children can enjoy being piggy backed in special child carriers on short bushwalks if the terrain is not rugged. However, be aware of the potential danger from overhanging branches and take extra care to protect the immobile child from the sun and the cold. Remember that whilst you may be uncomfortably hot with exertion, the child could be quite cold, particularly if there is a wind.

A detailed checklist is very useful for inexperienced walkers or those who pack in a hurry.

For walks extending over more than one day, considerably more equipment is required but pack weights can be minimized by organizing to share equipment and food.

Organize efficient sharing of transport, and after a walk ensure that all vehicles are mobile before leaving. For safety, remember to break a long journey, particularly on the way home after a strenuous walk.

Many bushwalking clubs offer cheap public liability and personal accident insurance with membership. Currently (2004/2005), all affiliate member clubs of VicWalk cover their members for public liability risk. Also, since bushwalking activities generally involve travelling a considerable distance from your home, ambulance insurance is worth serious consideration if you are not already covered.



# walksafe

means advance planning of the route

route

## Match Difficulty with Ability

When planning a trip, whether a day walk, an overnight hike or an extended trek, always aim to match aspirations with ability, fitness and experience.



Keep in mind that a successful trip for a party of mixed abilities and expectations is difficult to organize.

For a safe and enjoyable introduction to bushwalking, arrange early trips with experienced bushwalkers or walk on well marked tracks using up to date walk notes and maps. There are a number of books available containing advice and track notes for both day and overnight walks in Victoria.

## Estimate Times



When planning a route, take the terrain into consideration and estimate the time for completion of each section of the walk.

As a rough guide for the average party allow 1 hr for every:-

3-4K on a smooth flat track  
1-2K in rough terrain

plus an additional hour for every:-

500m ascent  
1000m descent

These times are approximate and need to be modified for fitness, tiredness, pack weight, size and age of party, extreme weather and overgrown or untracked walking. These times do not include rest stops.

In the field, comparison of these estimates with the time actually

taken to cover each section provides a useful check of navigation and enables calibration of track notes or advisory track signs with your party's ability.

Allow time for regular rest stops appropriate to the needs of the party.

As a guide, a fit group of experienced walkers may stop only 5-10 minutes every hour, whilst children, hot weather or a steep climb may dictate more frequent breaks.

Be aware of seasonal daylight hours and aim to reach camp or return to transport well before dark. It is wise to always carry a torch, even on a day walk. An early start is the simplest way to avoid the unnecessary pressure being placed on walkers who are generally more tired at the end of the day.



Devise contingency plans to shorten a walk in the event of miscalculation of walk times, bad weather or an emergency.

Parks Victoria produces a range of free park notes and brochures. Its website [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) also provides up to date information on track closures.



## Overnight campsites

Plan sheltered areas with access to water for campsites, and never rely on reaching mountain huts for shelter.



Overnight bushwalkers should be equipped to camp out at all times and in all conditions, since poor visibility or uncertainty of exact location introduce considerable risk of failure to reach a hut. Alternatively, a hut may be full, not available for public use or, in some instances, derelict or even demolished.

### Before leaving home check

- Fire restrictions for the appropriate region\*.
- Weather forecast for the specific area where you will be walking\*. Remember that the forecast for Melbourne can be a very poor guide to weather conditions in other areas of Victoria, particularly alpine regions.
- River levels if major crossings are planned\*.
- Tides for some coastal walking\*.
- Owner's permission if route involves crossing private land.

\* Bureau of Meteorology  
[www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)

## Leave Trip Intentions

A clear record of your trip intentions should be left with a responsible person.

These ideally include a photocopy of a map marking your intended route and possible alternatives. Indicate the names of members in the party, vehicle registrations, the time you expect to return and the time considered to be notifiably overdue. In the absence of a suitable contact, leave this information with the local police, park ranger or in your vehicle. Where available, leave details of destination, route and time of departure in hut, park or track log books.



**REMEMBER TO INFORM  
YOUR CONTACT OF  
YOUR SAFE RETURN**



# walksafe

means advance planning of clothing

## clothing

✓ The right clothing ensures you enjoy bushwalking in both comfort and safety.

Your clothing is important since it is your first line of protection from the cold, the wind, the rain, the sun, insects, snakes and the scrub.

✓ A number of light, adjustable layers is preferable to a few layers of thick fabric.

Adjust zippers and layers to minimize sweating during exercise and be sure to add layers before you feel cold at rest stops.

There is a wide range of specialist clothing available today and an equally wide range in personal

preferences and body needs. A sensible, personal balance needs to be struck between the advantages and disadvantages of wearing clothing made from cotton, wool and synthetic fibres. Experiment to find what best suits your comfort, particularly during exertion. For instance, many bushwalkers wear shorts in all weathers, often combined with thermal underwear in the cold, with wind and waterproof over-pants quickly donned at rest stops in bad weather. In comparison, the ubiquitous jeans are highly unsuitable for bushwalking.

Some advantages and disadvantages to be considered when selecting clothing for bushwalking.

### COTTON

- A Cool sun protection, non irritant
- D Cold when wet, slow drying

### WOOL

- A Warm when wet, low flammable
- D Skin irritant, slow drying, heavy when wet (unless superfine merino)

### SYNTHETICS

- A High warmth/weight ratio, absorbs little moisture, quick drying
- D Warm in hot weather, often expensive, non fire resistant



We emphasize that in alpine regions, to WALKSAFE means to be prepared for rapid change to blizzard conditions in all seasons. Neither should the danger from the sun be underestimated.



## CONSIDER:-

When choosing your clothing for a specific trip make allowances for dealing with the expected terrain and the worst weather conditions that may be encountered in the walk area.

Despite the deceptively cooler air temperatures generally encountered at altitude, ultraviolet levels are significantly higher, and reflection from snow can reach parts of the body not usually exposed to the sun's rays. Resist the temptation to reduce pack weight by leaving spare clothing behind.

### Terrain

ALWAYS wear comfortable, well treaded foot-ware. Many walkers prefer boots with ankle support when pack carrying or walking on rough ground. Thick well fitting woollen socks are invaluable. Gaiters give protection from grass seeds, stones, scrub, snow, snakes and leeches.

### Rain

ALWAYS carry a good water and windproof jacket, preferably thigh length with integral hood, NOT padded and NOT a light nylon "spray jacket". Waterproof over-pants. NOT jeans.

### Cold

Beanie/balaclava, mittens/gloves, jumper/polar fleece, windproof shirt, thermal underwear, woollen socks. NOT jeans.

### Sun

Hat, light weight long-sleeved shirt.



# walksafe

means advance planning of the equipment



## equipment

### DAY WALKING

Pack - Comfortable, adequate size, line with a strong plastic bag\*  
to keep contents dry  
Water bottle/s - Durable.  
Aluminium or heavy duty plastic  
Map - Laminated or protected in map case  
Compass - Oil filled  
Watch  
Sunglasses - 30+  
Sunglasses  
First aid kit  
Torch - Compact  
Whistle  
Pencil and paper  
Toilet paper and trowel

\*an overnight pack liner doubles as a "bivvy bag" for emergency shelter. Day walkers may also contemplate carrying a specific bivvy bag.

### PERSONAL FIRST AID KIT CONTENTS

Compact first aid manual  
1 triangular bandage  
1 medium wound dressing  
1 10 cm elastic bandage  
Assorted bandaids  
Antiseptic liquid/cream  
Tweezers  
Moleskin and/or blister kit  
Soluble pain relievers  
Antihistamine  
Insect repellent  
Salt (for leeches)  
Matches  
Personal medications - with instructions

Ideally, pack weight when sharing equipment between two people should be 13 kg + 0.9 kg of food per day.



### OVERNIGHT ADDITIONAL GEAR

Tent - Preferably with fly, integral floor, insect proof  
Sleeping bag - Seal in plastic bag to ensure that it stays dry. Liner sheet preferable.  
Sleeping mat - Closed-cell foam or self inflating mat  
Stove and billies - Compact  
Fuel Bottle/s - Leak proof and clearly labelled.  
Matches - Sealed in waterproof container  
Extra water container - Used wine/water cask bladder  
Mug, bowl/plate  
Utensils  
Pocket knife  
Spare torch batteries and bulb  
Cord  
Change of clothes

Major items of overnight camping equipment can be borrowed or hired until you decide exactly what you need. Specialist bushwalking shops and many clubs hire equipment and can also help with advice. Sharing equipment between walkers can considerably lighten your load.

Taking care to clean, dry and air equipment after a walk will increase its reliability and lifespan.

### AND IF YOU STILL HAVE ROOM IN THE PACK

Camera and film  
Cards  
Book  
Repair kit  
Candle lantern



# walksafe

means advance planning of food

food

On overnight walks, food and its preparation also contribute significantly to morale, providing a pleasant social end to a physically hard day.

A day spent bushwalking generally expends more energy than a typical one at home. So don't skip breakfast, eat a little more than usual and have frequent snacks of high energy, easily digestible food.

On overnight walks, have a generous serving of carbohydrates such as rice or pasta for the evening meal. Hot soup replaces lost salts and is an excellent starter to warm a tired body whilst preparing the main meal.

Popular quick acting high energy

snacks include dried fruit, nuts and chocolate which, when mixed together, acquire the colourful bushwalking name of "scroggin". Simple but adequate lunches include bread or biscuits and cheese, with a little fresh fruit or salad vegetable. Evening meals are generally prepared from dehydrated ingredients because of weight considerations. However, a little fresh capsicum, snow peas or bean shoots are also light and can add a certain edibility to the dish. Although today there is a substantial range in price and variety of commercial dehydrated food on the market, there are an increasing number of overnight bushwalkers who enjoy the challenge of producing their own creations with home food dryers.



Since food is the main energy source for both exercise and maintaining body temperature, it is important to eat often and wisely when bushwalking, particularly on extended or physically demanding trips.



Carry extra food for an emergency.



# walksafe

means advance planning of water

water

Surprisingly, thirst is not always the best guide. For safety it is advisable to drink slightly more water than you appear to need, particularly in the extremes of both hot and cold weather.

▶ On a day walk it is generally unwise to rely on finding drinking water on route...

... particularly in the summer months. Carry at least 1 litre, and preferably more, on any walk. When planning overnight campsites, make every attempt to confirm information about the availability of water near the site. If doubtful, carry extra water

from the last source of sure water before camp. Used wine or water cask bladders are ideal for this purpose.

Most running water not downstream of human habitation or grazing areas is safe to drink. However, water supplies are increasingly being rendered unfit for drinking due to pollution from human and animal wastes, and require treatment. If in any doubt, water should be boiled for 5 minutes before use. Alternatively, water suspected of bacterial contamination can be chemically treated with iodine tablets. Compact water purifier kits are now commercially available which filter both bacterial and amoebic (such as giardia) pollutants.

The most durable water containers are made from aluminium or heavy duty plastic. Light plastic bottles may burst when subject to rough use. A recent innovation in water bottles incorporates a strong flexible bladder with a drinking tube that enables water to be consumed en route.

▶ As a guide, the daily water requirement of the average active person is approximately 2 litres in cool weather, rising to 5 litres in very hot weather.



# walksafe

means using commonsense with bushcraft

bushcraft

Aim to develop your own bushcraft skills and increase your self-reliance by learning from others. Hone your observation skills whilst walking and do some background reading at home. Safety considerations aside, most people find the greater their knowledge and understanding of the bush and bushcraft, the more rewarding and enjoyable are their experiences in the bush.

## NAVIGATION

> Map reading is an indispensable skill of bushcraft.

Navigation is essentially observation, recognition and mental noting of geographical features and relating these to a map in order to identify a location or route.



Visual recognition of features represented on a map, such as hills and creek junctions, is complemented with estimates of distances covered and the use of a compass for orientation.

The ability to navigate with a compass is essential in untracked or featureless terrain, or when dense forestation or low cloud reduces visibility. For this reason, it is recommended that a bushwalking group without a member experienced in navigation should choose walks on well marked tracks and use the opportunity to practice the skills of observation, estimation, map reading and use of a compass.

When on a trip with an experienced navigator, remain observant and take the opportunity to improve your skills rather than simply playing "follow the leader".



It is particularly important to take extra care with navigation when departing from a known position. If you start in a wrong direction, all subsequent decisions are compromised and the confusion can escalate rapidly. Taking the wrong spur when many radiate from a hilltop, or the wrong branch at a complex track junction can result from a slight initial error in direction but may subsequently lead to major disorientation.



Some little used routes are indistinct on the ground and rely on track markers such as metal plates or plastic ties usually fixed to trees. Particularly when markers are sparse, they have a habit of disappearing altogether when walkers fall into deep conversation or rush ahead enthusiastically on a downhill stretch. All the more reason for everyone in the party to be aware and participating in the navigation. Look back on your route occasionally so that you can more easily retrace your steps to your last marker if you find you have inadvertently strayed from the track.

Global positioning systems (GPS) can provide navigational assistance but should not be considered a substitute for skill with a compass since they are neither fail safe nor operational in all terrain, particularly in mountainous areas where they are most likely to be used when

walking. Nor do they remove the bushwalking need to be able to interpret a map and translate it to features in the surrounding terrain for route selection. They are likely to be of most assistance when visibility is compromised by weather or featureless terrain.

## Keeping the Party Together

It is important to regroup at track junctions and maintain sight contact on untracked or poorly marked routes.



With larger groups it is advisable that responsibility for keeping the party together is taken by both a leader and an appointed whip. The latter is a person who brings up the rear and keeps track of all the party to ensure that no-one is left behind, a particularly important role when the leader is heavily occupied with navigation or the party has mixed physical

abilities. It is generally safer to encourage slower members to walk toward the front of a group, and special care is needed with children who inevitably like to run ahead.

## Fitness

Begin with short bushwalks and as your fitness improves so too can your aspirations of completing more demanding walks. You can easily increase your fitness by treating your day to day activities as training. When you walk, choose to walk briskly, take the stairs rather than the lift, leave the car in the garage for the trip to the local shops and refuse the second helping of desert.

Keep in mind that enjoyable bushwalking is more difficult to achieve if there is a wide range of fitness and expectation among members of a group.



It is widely accepted that the best way to get fit for bushwalking is to walk.



Check the latest forecasts in the walk area before departure and keep a close watch on the weather, particularly in alpine areas where changes can be both sudden and severe\*.

## Weather

The development of high cloud, often thin and fibrous, frequently forewarns of a deterioration in the weather that is later seen by an ominous thickening and lowering of the cloud base. When camping, consider the direction of the winds when choosing location and orientation of tents. Be aware that trees can fall or lose limbs without warning. Some species are worse than others; river red gums are known to be particularly bad.

## Responsibilities

A responsible bushwalker is aware of the potential impact of walking and camping on the environment.

To minimize damage to the bush, keep to established routes and tracks where possible.

Do not cut corners on switchbacks or create new tracks. However, in open untracked country, the group should spread out to disperse any damage to the terrain or vegetation. Avoid walking over easily damaged areas such as alpine bogs.

Obtain permission before crossing farmland and leave gates as found. Cross fences preferably at gates or strain posts, or pass between the wires when possible.

Be considerate and respect the rights of members of your party and other groups to enjoy the peace and solitude of the bush at all times. It is not appropriate to subject others to the noise from radios and other electronic devices in the bush.

Domestic animals also have no place in the wilderness and are banned in National Parks.



\* Bureau of Meteorology  
[www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)



# walksafe

means using commonsense with camping

camping

## Stoves and Fires

In many bushwalking areas of Victoria, firewood has become scarce and fires are completely banned in an increasing number of places, specifically in alpine regions. Dead wood makes an important contribution to natural ecosystems.

Be aware of any fire restrictions in force and use existing fireplaces. For both convenience and conservation, most overnight bushwalkers use modern fuel stoves for cooking.

There are a variety of stoves on the market ranging from the noisy but efficient shellite burning "choofer" to the metho burning Trangia popular for its silence and simplicity, to the disposable mini gas burners and the emergency solid fuel contraptions. All, unlike fires, are good in wet weather and safer in

times of high fire danger. These stoves are relatively efficient, quick and easy to operate, lightweight, clean to use and have a reasonably controllable temperature.

## Hygiene

Where there is a toilet please use it. In areas without toilets, or if toilets are full, you should bury human waste at least 100 metres away from campsites, water courses and tracks.

Dig a hole 10 - 15 cm deep within the soil's organic layer. In snow, try to find a place where you can dig through to the soil.

Carry out sanitary pads or tampons as they do not readily degrade.

Always wash up at least 50 metres away from creeks or lakes and scatter the used washing water so that it will be filtered as it returns to the water course.

Avoid using soap to wash dishes and billies. Sand or grass make excellent substitutes if you don't have a commercial pot scourer.

## Responsibilities

Campsites should be chosen with a view to minimum impact and areas with fragile vegetation or overuse should be avoided.

Carry out all your own rubbish and, if you can, clean up waste left behind by less considerate visitors. The motto is "If you can carry it in, you can carry it out." It is therefore worth planning how to meet your trip needs with a minimum generation of rubbish.

Mountain huts form a valuable part of our historical heritage and their usage should be regarded as a shared privilege, not a right. Some huts attract many visitors and thus highlight the need for minimum impact practices and self sufficiency with respect to camping equipment. Leave huts clean and tidy for others.



Take care to keep any fire small, well contained and completely extinguished and cold when leaving the campsite.



Seek advice about suitable choice of stove and read the manual thoroughly before use.



# walksafe

means using commonsense with minor mishaps

mishaps

## Blisters

New boots should be broken in and tested BEFORE you go bush. Know your feet. Some walkers find blisters are best prevented by wearing two pairs of socks, others pre tape areas of the foot that are sensitive to rubbing.

> It is always worth the time to stop to take preventative action before a blister becomes a problem.

There are several "artificial skin" preparations available to treat blisters. If fluid in a blister needs to be released, use a needle sterilized in a flame and cover with antiseptic and a dressing.

## Bites, stings and other annoying things

Leeches are an unpleasant nuisance rather than a danger. <

They are generally only found in wet or damp forest areas. In leech infested areas wear clothing to minimize exposed skin and wear gaiters or pull socks over trouser legs. Inspect for freeloaders at rest stops. Leeches can be readily removed with a little salt, or saltwater solution if easier to apply to areas such as the eye.

Profuse bleeding may occur but can be easily stopped and there may be irritation or itching a day or two later.

Ticks can be more of a problem, depending on the variety, but are not commonly found in the Victorian bush except in coastal regions and East Gippsland. If walking in scrub in areas known to have ticks, inspect daily for these parasites. Small larvae stage ticks can be killed using a paste of bicarb soda but it is not currently agreed that killing adult ticks with stove fuel or insect repellent is advisable. Use fine, preferably curved tweezers as close as possible to the skin to ease out the tick. Take care not to crush or squeeze the body during removal. The source of toxins is removed once the body is removed. The affected area may swell a little and itch for a day or so.

Repellents and anaesthetic creams are useful to minimize the impact of the irritation of bites or stings from ants, sandflies, march flies, mosquitoes, wasps or bees which may be encountered whilst walking in the bush. Individuals who are allergic to particular insects should carry antihistamines or prescribed drugs for their treatment.



## Strains and Sprains

A sprain occurs when a joint is forced beyond its normal movement.



If possible, cool and elevate the injured joint and apply a firm crepe bandage before continuing the walk after a rest.

Adjustable walking poles are becoming increasingly popular, particularly amongst older walkers, to minimize the stress on knee joints particularly during steep descents.

A sprain can be very painful but is not as disabling as a fracture or dislocation.

Lighten the load of the injured party, fashion a stick for support and do not rush their progress.

A strain is caused by overstretching a muscle or tendon and is indicated by pain and a loss of power in the injured area. Treat as for a sprain. A routine of stretching muscles prior to commencing exercise is recommended to help prevent strain.

The chance of a sprain can be reduced by wearing boots with good ankle support and stopping for sustenance or avoiding walking when tiredness increases clumsiness.



## Cramp

Cramp is a sudden and painful involuntary tightening of a muscle. It is relieved by manually stretching the affected muscle, and then gently massaging the area, keeping it warm. When bushwalking in hot weather, failure to replace body salts lost through perspiration can result in heat cramps, but are avoided by making sure that when you are drinking a lot of fluid that you maintain an equivalent increase in food intake.

## Minor Burns

Cool the burn area immediately in cold water



(wet cloth if not possible) and continue treatment for at least 10 minutes. Do not apply cream or ointment. Cover with a clean dry dressing. Any blisters which form should not be deliberately broken.



# but

## in the unlikely event of becoming lost

### Prevention

> Always carry a map and compass.

Have an experienced navigator in your party and take every opportunity to improve your own navigation skills. Pay attention to geographical features and general terrain and regularly identify your position on your map. Always leave a record of your trip intentions and possible alternatives with a reliable contact who can initiate a search if your party is overdue by a predetermined time.

Although a mobile telephone is potentially useful to a lost party, it should not be regarded

as security against becoming lost. Most mobile phones will not operate in many of the locations in Victoria popular with bushwalkers, particularly in the more remote areas of the country. Satellite mobile phones offer the promise of operating in more areas although the early systems are very expensive and have been reported to have unsatisfactory response in typical bushwalking locations.

Similarly, emergency position indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs) are not a substitute for bushcraft and navigation skills or party

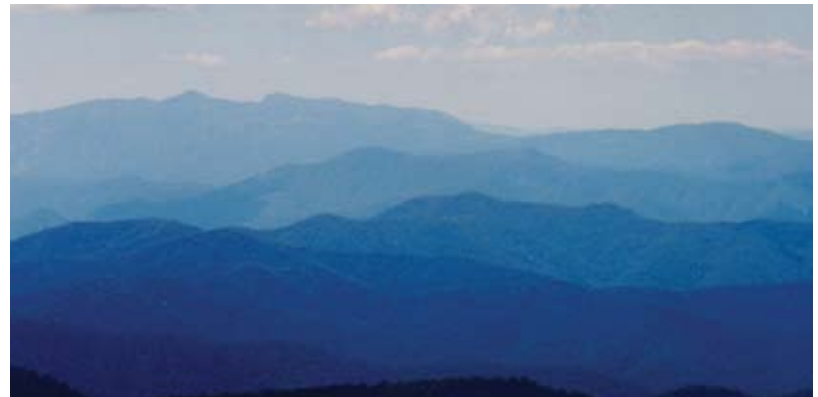


numbers. They are a device that should only be considered as an extra safety margin for a venture which is properly resourced in all other respects. They should only be used as a last resort in a situation posing grave and immediate danger to lives. In addition, the beacon signal is not reliably received from deep valleys or densely forested terrain, nor does it allow transmission of any information by voice.

# lost

### Recognition

When features on the ground do not agree with those on the map, STOP and assess the situation before a temporary disorientation becomes a major loss of position.



## Action

### STOP. DO NOT PANIC.

Stop and think. Your brain is your best survival tool. Stay together and pool your knowledge and expertise. Identify your last confirmed position and estimate your present location. Except in specific areas of known magnetic anomalies, believe your compass and remember that modern topographical maps have few major errors, although logging tracks are notoriously time dependent.

If possible, retrace your steps to where you were comfortable that you knew your position. Alternatively, if possible, proceed on a course which **MUST** bring you to a known feature in a reasonable time, such as a road

or stream. Otherwise, remain where you are and make phone contact with police if possible. Keep calm, warm and seek shelter whilst waiting for assistance. Be prepared to devise ways to attract the attention of searchers in the air or on the ground. This may require moving to a location above the tree line, into a clearing or an open section of a creek. Place any brightly coloured items to form a block of colour to attract attention from the air. VicWalk sells bright plastic bags as pack liners that could be used to this effect. Lighting a smoky fire is another way to attract attention to your location.

Listen for calls or whistles from ground search parties. Remember that ground searchers are listening as well as looking so attract attention to your location using the recognized distress signal of three regularly spaced calls. The "three calls" can be made by whatever means possible such as shouts, whistle blasts or even banging a spoon on a billy. At night use three torch flashes. This signal sequence should never be misused.



# but

in the unlikely event of becoming separated

# separated

## Prevention

> Always regroup at track junctions and maintain sight contact on untracked or poorly marked routes.

With larger groups use an appointed whip. It is generally safer to encourage slower members to walk toward the front of a group, and special care is needed with children who inevitably like to run ahead.

## Action

If your party becomes separated, a search should be undertaken in the immediate area and the location where the missing persons were last seen or likely to have made a wrong decision. However, if they are not found within 3-4 hours (longer in a remote area) it is unlikely that your party will have the resources to undertake a full scale search and you will need to seek external assistance. If communication by phone is not possible, a competent subgroup should be sent for the nearest help, with others remaining as visible as possible near the last point of contact.

The police are responsible for all search and rescue operations in Victoria, and should be the first source of contact for assistance in an emergency.



# but

in the unlikely event of a major accident

# accident

## Prevention

Match difficulty of a walk with the ability and experience of the group. Be adequately equipped.

## Action

Apply appropriate first aid with resources available. Keep patient warm and as comfortable as possible. Calmly assess the full situation with respect to the seriousness of the injury, the urgency and availability of any external assistance required and the resources of the group. If communication by phone is not possible, a competent subgroup carrying written information regarding the nature of the injury or illness and the detailed location of the party should seek the nearest help.

V

The police are responsible for all search and rescue operations in Victoria, and should be the first source of contact for assistance in an emergency.



# but

in the unlikely event of exposure to extreme heat



## heat

Bushwalking in hot and humid weather interferes with the normal body cooling process of evaporation from the lungs and skin, and may lead to heat exhaustion. If this state is not recognized and treated promptly it may progress to the more serious and potentially fatal condition of heat stroke in which the body temperature rises due to failure of the heat regulating centre in the brain.

### Prevention

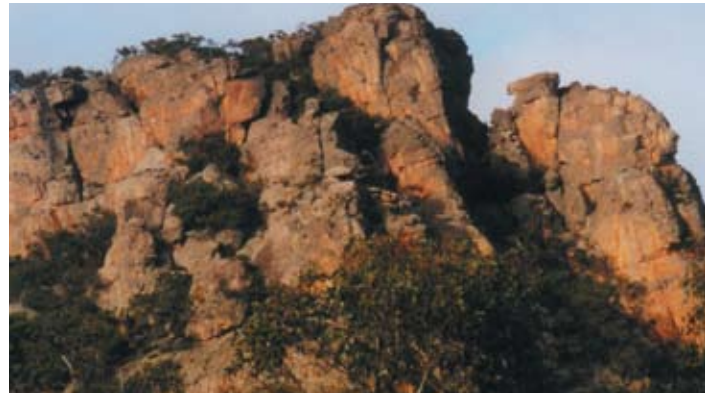
- When walking in hot weather, drink plenty of water.
- Avoid activity in the hottest part of the day by planning to rise early, take a midday siesta or reduce the distance to be covered during the day.
- Plan mid summer trips near watercourses and do not overextend the party.
- Wear a hat and avoid sunburn.
- Drink plenty of water before commencing the day's walking.

### Recognition

Early symptoms are thirst, muscle cramps and weakness, headache, feeling hot, faint, giddy and nauseous. The victim develops rapid pulse and breathing accompanied by excessive sweating. As the dehydration becomes more severe, the skin becomes hot and dry, with headache, nausea, vomiting and mental disturbance common prior to collapse and unconsciousness.

### Treatment

- Assist the victim to rest in a cool and shaded area.
- Remove unnecessary clothing, sponge with cool water and fan the victim.
- In extreme cases immerse the victim in water or if this is not possible, cover with a wet sheet or tent.
- Give frequent cool drinks.
- Gently stretch any cramped muscles.



# but

in the unlikely event of exposure to extreme cold



# cold

The gradual onset of the effect of exposure to extreme cold may be overlooked in the early stages. When the body loses heat faster than it can create it and the core temperature is lowered, the condition is known as hypothermia. It is responsible for several deaths each year in Australia.

## Prevention

- Carry and wear suitable clothing to ensure you always have adequate protection from the cold particularly when combined with wet and windy conditions (see clothing)
- Ensure a regular intake of food (high calorie) and drink. Do not drink alcohol which accelerates heat loss.
- On overnight walks be self sufficient and do not rely on reaching mountain huts for shelter.
- Avoid physical exhaustion by walking within your party's capabilities.
- Take particular care when walking with more susceptible people, such as young children, slightly built, weak or less fit individuals.

- Take into account that long stops or immobilisation due to injury increase susceptibility.
- Be aware of the early signs of hypothermia.

## Recognition

The early warning signs of tiredness, shivering and lagging behind and stumbling are a signal to assess the situation and take preventative action with respect to clothing, food, drink and rest. Difficulty unwrapping a sweet such as a barley sugar is a simple test for loss of usual co-ordination.

As body temperature continues to fall, mental and physical performance declines rapidly, often unbeknown to the victim.

The danger signs requiring prompt action to prevent a potential fatality are uncontrollable shivering or a cessation of shivering, pain in the limbs, unusual or irrational behaviour, poor judgement, apathy, lack of co-ordination, exhaustion, confusion, hallucinations, slurred speech and blurred vision. The victim will feel cold to touch and is usually pale. Untreated they will collapse, pass into a stupor, unconsciousness and death.



## Treatment

The basic principles of first aid and resuscitation apply, in addition to the following measures to prevent further body cooling.

### • STOP IMMEDIATELY

- Protect the victim from the cold environment by finding a nearby or improvised shelter from the wind and the wet, and insulating the body from the ground.
- Put on extra layers of clothing and a sleeping bag if available, remembering to cover the head.
- Enclose in a waterproof layer, such as a large plastic garbage bag pack liner, bivvy bag, ground sheet or safety blanket.
- Huddle together to warm the victim by body heat from other party members.
- **DO NOT** attempt to restore body heat by massage, warming beside a fire or hot water bottles. External heating that is too rapid may actually cause the core temperature of the victim to drop.
- Give warm sweet drinks and easily digestible food if conscious.
- **DO NOT** give victim alcohol, cigarettes, coffee, tea or hot drinks.
- Ensure other party members are adequately clothed and not in similar danger.



# but

## in the unlikely event of snakebite

# snakebite

Snakebite is more a fear than a reality.

Whilst estimates of the incidence of snakebite throughout Australia is several thousand a year, of these only about 300 require antivenom treatment and on average 1-2 cases a year result in death. Bushwalkers are not identified in the statistics as a high risk group.

### Prevention

Unprovoked, snakes rarely attack humans. Therefore, do not disturb a snake in your pathway, simply alert the other members of your party to give it a wide berth. Always wear stout footwear and be observant. Take particular care in warm weather, long grass, hollow logs, near water or rocks in sunny positions.

In areas where snakes are prevalent it is wise to wear long trousers and/or gaiters.

Although snakes cannot hear they can detect vibrations in the ground, so walk heavily to encourage them to instinctively flee from your path. When camping, use a tent with an integral floor and always zip up the doors. Use a torch at night.

### Recognition

Victims usually know they have been bitten. Symptoms may appear 15 minutes to 2 hours after the bite and may be mild or severe, depending on the species and the bite.

Symptoms include: double vision, headache, nausea and vomiting, sweating, faintness, diarrhoea, chest pain, difficulty swallowing or breathing, swollen lymph glands in groin or armpit, drowsiness.

### Treatment

The principle of the treatment of snake bite is to reduce the amount of venom that reaches the blood stream by applying firm pressure over the bitten area and minimizing movement by the victim.

The lower leg is the most vulnerable to snakebite when bushwalking. If a member of the party is bitten:

- Immediately apply firm pressure over the bite site.
- Lay the victim down and keep them calm and at complete rest.
- Apply a broad firm bandage to the bitten area and around as much of the limb as possible, without removing clothing if this means moving the limb. Bandage as tightly as for a sprain and work up the limb to include the joint above the bite site.

- Immobilize the limb with a makeshift splint.
- Constantly observe the patient for shock and respiratory failure.
- Dispatch other member/s of the party with knowledge of your location to bring outside help to transport the patient.
- If external help is unavailable, the best option is probably to rest for a day or two, and then proceed to the nearest civilization taking care to minimize stress to the patient.

**DO NOT** deliberately disturb a snake.

**DO NOT** walk in sandals or thongs.

**DO NOT** cut or wash a bite – venom on bandages can be used to identify the snake, which is required to ensure the correct anti-venom is used.

**DO NOT** apply an arterial tourniquet.



# but

in the unlikely event of severe electrical storm...



## Action

- > Avoid high ground, isolated objects such as a tree in a clearing, overhanging cliffs or caves.

If possible, insulate yourself from the ground by sitting on your pack. Members of a party may sit together but should not be in contact.

or a bushfire

## Prevention

The best way to avoid danger from a bushfire is to avoid walking at high risk times and locations. Before leaving home, check the weather forecast and fire restrictions. Minimize the use of campfires at any time and always take extreme care when lighting fires.

## Action

If caught walking in the path of a bushfire:

- Walk quickly, preferably downhill, looking for possible shelter.
- Seek shelter from radiant heat which is the killer in a bushfire. Look for a stream or pool, a hollow in the ground such as

an eroded gully or roadside drain, rocky outcrops or large log, a hut or building, or a large cleared or recently burnt area.

- Cover any exposed skin with clothing (preferably cotton or wool), earth or thick bark.
- Lie face down and breathe the cooler, less smoke filled air close to the ground. Drink water regularly to avoid dehydration.
- Stay in your chosen shelter until the fire front has passed.
- As a last resort, you may be able to run through low flames onto burnt ground.

# storm/ bushfire



# but

in the unlikely event of flooded rivers



## Prevention

Consider changing your route before setting out on a trip involving river crossings where there has been heavy rain in catchment areas. Check with local authorities if there is a possibility that bridges may have been damaged by flood waters.

DO NOT attempt to cross a dangerous river.



## Action

Be prepared to spend time and energy looking for a safe crossing place. Be aware of possible dangers downstream if someone were swept away whilst crossing. Be prepared to wait for a swollen river to subside, or more realistically, use an alternative route.