

Wales Outdoors – Risk Assessment for Guided Walks & Cross-Country Hikes in Wales

Activity: Guided walks & hikes on footpaths, trails, upland terrain, and cross-country routes

Led by: Qualified Mountain Leader (ML / HML / IML)

Location: Various locations across Wales including national parks, open countryside, coastal paths, forests, moorland, and mountain areas

1. Activity Description

Wales Outdoors delivers guided walks and hikes across Wales on designated footpaths, national trails, and open-access land, as well as occasional cross-country travel over rough, pathless ground. Activities involve participants walking on varied terrain, often remote, sometimes exposed, and subject to rapidly changing weather.

2. Participant Details

Participants may be of mixed ability, age, and fitness. Leaders are qualified Mountain Leaders trained in navigation, emergency procedures, group management, and dynamic risk assessment.

3. Hazard Identification, Risk Likelihood & Control Measures

Below, *L* = Likelihood, *S* = Severity, *R* = Residual Risk after controls (Low/Med/High).

A. Terrain & Environmental Hazards

1. Slips, trips, and falls on uneven ground

- **Risks:** Sprains, fractures, bruising
- **Controls:**
 - Leader conducts route briefing and dynamic hazard identification.
 - Encouragement of appropriate footwear with ankle support and good grip.
 - Pace adjusted for group ability.
 - Avoidance of known high-risk zones in poor conditions.

- Use of trekking poles encouraged for stability.
- **R:** Low–Medium

2. Steep slopes, scree, loose rocks

- **Risks:** Falls, falling debris, injury
- **Controls:**
 - Route planning that avoids unnecessary steep/unstable ground.
 - Leaders position themselves at vulnerable points for spotting.
 - Group spacing maintained to reduce rockfall risk.
 - Alternative routes used during or after heavy rain/freeze-thaw.
- **R:** Medium

3. Cross-country (pathless) terrain

- **Risks:** Hidden holes, bogs, uneven ground, navigation errors
- **Controls:**
 - Leaders trained in terrain selection and off-path navigation.
 - Participants briefed on rough ground hazards.
 - Group kept tighter in low-visibility or tussocky terrain.
- **R:** Medium

4. Water hazards: rivers, streams, coastal edges

- **Risks:** Slips, cold water immersion, strong currents
- **Controls:**
 - No river crossings except at safe bridges or shallow recognised fording points.
 - Coastal walks planned around tides; tide timetables checked.
 - Leaders monitor hydrographic and weather conditions.
- **R:** Low–Medium

5. Weather: wind, rain, cold, heat, lightning

- **Risks:** Hypothermia, heat exhaustion, dehydration, lightning strike
- **Controls:**

- Weather forecasts checked prior to the event.
- Leaders carry appropriate safety equipment (group shelter, spare clothing, map & compass, emergency kit).
- Participants briefed to bring waterproofs, layers, water, sun protection.
- Walks modified/cancelled if weather exceeds safe parameters.
- **R:** Low–Medium

6. Low visibility (fog, heavy rain, winter conditions)

- **Risks:** Navigation errors, separation of group
- **Controls:**
 - Leaders proficient in poor-visibility navigation.
 - Group kept close together; buddy system if needed.
 - Frequent head counts and regrouping points.
- **R:** Low

B. Participant Condition & Group Hazards

7. Variable fitness levels

- **Risks:** Fatigue, inability to complete walk
- **Controls:**
 - Clear pre-event information on walk difficulty.
 - Leaders adapt pace and route.
 - Rest stops built into itinerary.
- **R:** Low

8. Medical conditions

- **Risks:** Illness or medical emergency
- **Controls:**
 - Participants asked to disclose conditions confidentially.
 - Leaders carry first aid kit and ML first-aid training.
 - In case of serious issue: evacuation via 999/Mountain Rescue.

- **R:** Low

9. Dehydration or inadequate nutrition

- **Risks:** Fatigue, dizziness, heat issues
- **Controls:**
 - Participants required to bring sufficient food & water.
 - Leaders check supplies before the start.
- **R:** Low

10. Behavioural issues / poor group control

- **Risks:** Increased accident risk, group spread
- **Controls:**
 - Safety briefing at start of walk.
 - Clear communication and expectations.
 - Participants removed from activity if unsafe behaviour persists.
- **R:** Low

C. Environmental & Wildlife Hazards

11. Livestock encounters

- **Risks:** Trampling, defensive behaviour (especially with calves/lambs)
- **Controls:**
 - Avoiding direct approach; giving livestock space.
 - Keeping group calm and together.
 - Dogs only allowed under strict control (if at all).
- **R:** Low

12. Insects, ticks & allergic reactions

- **Risks:** Bites, Lyme disease, anaphylaxis
- **Controls:**
 - Participants advised to check for ticks after walk.

- Leaders carry first aid kit including allergy management basics.
- **R:** Low

13. Falling trees or branches (forests, high wind)

- **Risks:** Injury
- **Controls:**
 - Avoiding forest routes during high wind warnings.
 - Dynamic assessment on the day.
- **R:** Low

D. Equipment & Operational Hazards

14. Inadequate personal equipment

- **Risks:** Exposure, injury
- **Controls:**
 - Kit list sent to clients in advance.
 - Leaders check equipment visually at meeting point.
 - Spare hats/gloves/emergency layers carried by leader.
- **R:** Low

15. Navigation error leading to prolonged exposure

- **Risks:** Fatigue, hypothermia, late finish
- **Controls:**
 - Leaders qualified and experienced in Welsh terrain.
 - Redundant navigation methods (map, compass, GPS).
 - Pre-planned escape routes.
- **R:** Low

16. Emergency situations

- **Risks:** Delay in help, worsening injury
- **Controls:**

- Leaders trained in incident management.
- Communication plan: mobile reception checks, power bank, emergency contact numbers, Mountain Rescue procedures.
- Emergency shelter carried.
- **R:** Low

4. Emergency Procedures

- Leader to assess situation using dynamic risk assessment.
- Administer first aid where appropriate.
- Move group to safe location / shelter.
- Contact emergency services if required: **999** → **ask for Police** → **ask for Mountain Rescue**.
- Provide accurate location using grid reference, GPS, What3Words, or local landmarks.
- Record incident details for post-event reporting.

5. Supervision & Leader Competence

- All walks led by certified **Mountain Leaders** with valid outdoor first aid certification.
- Leaders maintain CPD and familiarisation with Welsh upland environments.
- Ratios adjusted depending on terrain and conditions, typically **1:8** or **1:10** on low-risk routes.

6. Safeguarding

- Children only permitted with parent/guardian or within regulated group policies.
- DBS-checked leaders provided when required.

7. Insurance

- Wales Outdoors holds:
 - Public liability insurance

- Professional indemnity coverage
- Employer's liability (if applicable)

8. Residual Risk Summary

With experienced leaders, correct equipment, and robust dynamic risk management, the residual risk for guided walks and hikes is **Low to Medium and acceptable for this type of outdoor activity**.