

This Good Practice Guide is offered as informal material. It comprises well-intentioned advice but does not obviate the need to pay particular attention to your safety procedures or advanced planning.

There can be hardly any doubt as to the value of beaches and foreshores for challenging, enjoyable and educational excursions and that Orkney has some of the finest. It is accepted that many Orkney Youth Groups and Schools use beaches in a safe way.

The problem for the Service has been the separation of SAFE beaches from those which may contain unsafe zones. In an attempt to offer some flexibility, the Service now provides the following 10 definitions to assist in the evaluation of a SAFE ZONE on a beach – the beach being defined as a threshold to the sea.

1. A Safe Zone should include only sand, lightweight gravel or pebbles, short vegetation or a mixture of these; it should not normally extend to flat rocky areas, owing to the possibility that cracks, short drops or invisible traps may be present.
2. For the purposes of risk management and approval, large areas of dunes or a mixture of dunes and long or 'difficult' vegetation should be considered as moorland or wilderness (Level 3).
3. A Safe Zone must not contain running water, either sea or fresh. *Activity beside fresh water streams running through safe sand is therefore not allowed in Level 2.*
4. Therefore, when or where there is a possibility that a party member may get wet feet in the sea, the beach is considered to be Level 3. This will also apply to rock pools where there might be a danger from the water or terrain.
5. Where there are cliffs or steep rocks likely to be encountered by group members, then it is Level 3.
6. Beaches where there are boulders (rocks) which may, if wet or weed covered, increase the risk of injury to group members, are also defined as Level 3. Gravel and small pebbles are not included in this definition and may be level 2; however, steep sections of gravel or pebbles created by storms, or shifting topography, may contribute to injuries and therefore are considered to be level 3.
7. Beaches away from *fairly* immediate professional assistance - judged by distance, communication or terrain difficulties - should be considered as level 3.
8. Beaches where additional dangers are created by holes, dips, or abrupt changes in level, any of which may contribute to an injury or loss of inter-visibility, are considered to be Level 3.
9. Beaches where buildings, constructed platforms, tunnels, pits, agricultural or wartime debris, may add to risk of injury, are considered to be level 3.
10. Beach areas containing enclosed cattle, but perhaps not sheep, should be considered generally unsafe without stringent supervision. Areas of this sort should NOT be used for level 2 activity.

It is quite possible for a Safe Zone to be rendered **UN**safe by rising or descending tides and also by changing weather conditions.

This is not a definitive list and leaders faced with difficult choices should ALWAYS err on the safe side and assume that prior approval from the Service is required.

Prior approval for beach visits, safe or not (Level 2 or 3), MUST ALWAYS be obtained from the Head of Establishment.

If ANY beach is to be used safely, then the leader-to-party-members ratio must be suitable for the activity, the prevailing conditions and the beach environment. Party members must be in sight at all times and anyone leaving the beach must also be supervised. If the party is spread out, for instance in paired investigations, then they must be briefed carefully and supervised adequately.

It is also essential that Heads and leaders understand that it is possible to supervise youngsters in a safe beach zone, yet still stray into hazardous situations. Inter-visibility (leaders being unable to see all group members at all times) often creates potentially hazardous situations. >>**continued**>>

Darkness, for instance during barbeques (when the fire itself may render a Safe Zone dangerous), will almost certainly present additional problems of security and safety. Likewise inclement weather, including high wind, driven spray or sand, may increase the dangers, making otherwise Safe Zones potentially unsafe or insecure.

Beaches and foreshores make excellent classrooms for any leader intent of showing the effect of waves, wind, water and of the delights of rock pools or, even, washed up international debris. It is therefore quite acceptable to use beaches for these and other activity, provided early approval is sought from the Service and that risk assessing is carried out efficiently.

Before a visit, and whenever possible before the approval application, there should be an advanced visit by a leader who will make an appraisal of the whole location – from access, through parking, toileting and a debris audit to such things as shelter for briefings and demonstration points. All these would be points and issues to raise with other leaders and eventually, say just before the visit, with group members.

#### **A few more general points –**

- visits to, or activity on, beaches or foreshores (other than the Safe Zone covered in the first of ten definitions) and all coastal walks are classed as LEVEL 3 activity and must be the subject of an approval application to the Service. Any doubts about complete and overall safety in even a Safe Zone, must be addressed during the application for approval
- tides, rips, streams, boulders, wind-blown particles, rock pools, sandbanks, marram grass, glass, fire-pits, barbed wire and sewage outflows etc. are all potential hazards
- everyone **MUST** be made aware of any warning signs and flags
- clearly **DEFINE** the Safe Zone – perhaps using flagged canes for this purpose and then, preferably, walk the boundary with party members
- entry and exit routes, to and from the Safe Zone, should always be checked by a leader
- leaders to group-member communication must be sustainable, especially in windy weather
- establish a safe and visible base (rendezvous) to which members of the group may return
- some recreational time on the beach could be allowed but only after a specific briefing
- the local coastguard unit may provide information and advice on the nature and location of hazards
- tidal and weather information for the day **MUST** be known.
- even small cliff bases and tops can be highly dangerous places, so everyone must maintain a safe distance from cliff edges and bases at all times
- **there must always be a first-aider present during beach activity**

It is very sensible to keep group members away from, and out of, the water but you should not forbid a paddle or dabble in shallow water, provided that sensible precautions are taken and that the whole activity is pre-planned and approved by the Service. You **MUST** define the times and place when and where anyone may enter the water and under what **exact** circumstances. You should read **Good Practice Guide 2 (Swimming Paddling or Wading)**

Below and overleaf is written a hypothetical plan for a visit to a beach. It serves to highlight some arrangements and planning requirements; it also gives examples of a risk management strategy, a generic risk assessment, a resource file, a good practice guide and a location risk assessment – **all in one!**

---

*In April each year the Scapa Youth Group visits the beach and foreshore at Scapa Bay to collect bruck. Whilst to critics it may appear to be a marginally dangerous and potentially dirty excursion, it should be pointed out that the trip undertakes a valuable public service, giving opportunities for staff to practise the art of supervision for a potential Level 3 activity and group members an opportunity to be 'out and about'.*

**>>continued>>**

There are four potential danger areas –

- the half mile walk from the Community Centre, 450m of which are on a public road
- sea rise, waves, slippery rocks and small pools
- the potential hazards of discarded pollutants, sharps and other disagreeable debris
- difficulties of changeable weather.

**Risk Assessment (INCOMPLETE)**

**Scapa Youth Group – Bag the Bruck**

Significant hazard/Risk	Control Measures	Likelihood			Further Action Required
		High	Med	Low	
Getting Wet	Warning and vigilance	H			Remove to Royal Oak shelter. Dry clothes
Injuries	Show examples of potential dangers	M			First aid kit. Marking procedures
Dangerous flotsam	Specific warnings/examples	M			Call for leader check
Weather/sea change	Forecasts. Tide tables	L			Check with coastguard
Getting cut off	Check tides. Agree & FIX times	L			Phone coverage check?
Missing person	Regular head counts. Buddies	M			Buddies allocated. Safety partnerships *
Obnoxious/dangerous items	Mark with flags (10 taken)	M			Leader decision
Everyone is affected by above	Everyone participates in above				Produced by Ian Flett 16 March 2007

\* Mr Abrahams to write a **missing person action procedure – please involve some group members in the compilation**

*Over the years we have come to ‘master’ the travelling arrangements but there should be no complacency, as traffic and local industry seems to increase year on year. There will **always** be a briefing, compulsory for all participants (register), the day before the event. Unique (to this excursion) and useful notes for this briefing are in resource files under both ‘Briefings’ and ‘Bruck Day’. There are three aspects for the briefing – the walk to the beach, possible dangers and behaviour during activity. On the day in question everyone, including leaders, will wear a bright bib – even on the beach. One senior staff member will be in the lead and one at the back. Other helpers may be interspaced within the party. The trip will **not** go ahead without two leaders. Difficult, dangerous or obnoxious items will be marked for leader’s attention (take cane flags and robust gloves).*

*The weather forecast plays a vital role so the Excursion Leader, in consultation with Harbourmaster’s Office, Scapa or HM Coastguard, will decide a few days before if the weather pattern is suitable. On the day before the activity the Head will decide if the activity is to go ahead – alternative activity or arrangements will always be planned*

**Please assist in the building of resource files for coastal visits.**

**Please record, in the book provided for this purpose, incidents occurring during ALL visits**

There is more to a beach visit or seaside walk than a grant of approval and a few risk assessments. Quality and thoughtful supervision is the key to enjoyment, fulfilment and party safety. It is advised **most strongly** that as many additional leaders as can be mustered be with the group and that their duties be formally defined before starting activity.

Any water activity must be undertaken with a great deal of caution; there must always be a thorough briefing, lots of rules applied and a safe zone clearly defined. **Carefully read Good Practice Guide 2.**

Leaders will need to be alert to any over-enthusiasm displayed by group members but should not spoil the occasion by the imposition of unnecessary rules like, for instance, the wearing of buoyancy aids because of the proximity of water. A few spare pairs of socks and additional wind-proof clothing, together with an appropriate first aid kit which includes strong antiseptic solution and protective gloves, could be very useful items to add to the group safety gear.

Walks along cliff tops, to be treated as Level 3 wilderness walks when planning, need to be executed very carefully with the application of full protective rules. Again it is recommended that the leader-to-party ratio should be high. Walks of this type **MUST** be treated as Wilderness Activity – level 3 or 4.

The Good Practice Guide GP 5 contains a very useful model of a resource sheet, using a different beach visit as an example.

**~ Deliberately left blank ~**

**~ Deliberately left blank ~**