



## **SOUTH WEST MOUNTAIN AND MOORLAND**

### **LEADER TRAINING SCHEME**

#### **Guidance Note – River Crossings July 2019**

##### **1. Purpose of Guidance Note**

The SWMMLTS recognises that rivers present a significant hazard and therefore potentially a risk to life.

This guidance note replaces the previous guidance (August 2011).

##### **2. Context.**

This guidance is intended for use in a moorland environment. In the moorland areas of the UK, there are no conceivable conditions where the hazards of river crossings cannot be controlled. It is always possible to mitigate the risk via a suitable control measure e.g. diverted route, a bridge or a crossing point where the risk of drowning or being swept away is no longer present.

*“The considered view of Mountain Training England is that river crossings should be planned out where possible. Young people should not be contemplating or attempting any crossing that incurs serious risk. People falling into rivers should really only be contemplating getting wet -not being injured or drowned.”*

*Guy Jarvis, Executive Officer, Mountain Training England, 2019.*

##### **3. Avoidance of significant hazards.**

If the consequence of ‘falling in’ is likely to result in the participant being fully submerged (depth of water) or swept away (strength of flow) then it is an unacceptable risk and therefore the wrong place to cross, as the consequences of both are potentially fatal.

##### **4. Risk management**

- a) Leaders should make reference to river crossings in their written risk assessments including what training/instructions are given to participants.
- b) Where possible, routes should be planned to avoid crossing rivers.
- c) Where the above is not possible, leaders should plan routes that cross rivers via acceptable crossing points; bridges, shallow fords, stepping stones.

- d) Where river crossings are planned leaders should be aware of the topography and have a working knowledge of the crossing point in different conditions including heavy rainfall.
- e) Leaders should train participants on how to decide on a safe crossing point. Participants must be able to make a reasoned judgement of the potential of the river to cause harm; its depth and speed of flow.

Participants must be able to evaluate the risk; “what will happen if I fall in?”  
Are they at risk of drowning? Will they be swept away or fully submerged?

- f) Leaders should train participants in safe crossing techniques.
- g) Part of the written risk management plan and on-going dynamic risk assessment is deciding whether it is necessary for leaders to be positioned at planned crossings to assist participants or to divert participants to another, more suitable crossing point.

## 5. Remotely supervised groups

Remotely supervised groups must be given appropriate training and clear instructions on what actions to take if conditions make a river un-crossable. It is about teaching hill walking skills not completion of a planned route at all costs.

Remotely supervised groups should have the navigational skills to avoid unacceptable river crossings, particularly in/after heavy rainfall.

## 6. Choosing a crossing point

- a) A bridge
- b) A shallow ford (below knee depth)
- c) Stepping stones or boulders suitable for the whole group
- d) A narrow channel crossable in one stride

## 7. Practical measures for crossing a river

If a decision has been made to cross a river, action should be taken to control the risk to an acceptable level.

This is best done by training (modelling) by an experienced and qualified leader.

- a) **Good balance;** crossing should be a controlled activity whereby participants have good balance. It may be preferable to walk through a ford or shallow water rather than using slippery stones, the risk of wet feet being more favourable than a fall. Use of trekking poles can be used to provide additional balance.

- b) **Safe stride;** narrow channels or crossings using stepping stones or boulders should require no more than a large stride or a number of strides from safe place to safe place. Participants should not need to jump, as this greatly increases the risk of falling in or impact injury. A crossing place should be found where all members of the party feel confident in their ability to cross.
- c) **Rucksacks;** Rucksacks should be secure and stable. Ill-fitting or loosened rucksacks are likely to result in a participant being less stable and more likely to cause a fall.

Practice amongst some leaders has been to loosen rucksack straps, believing that this will make them easier to remove if the participant falls in.

As above, if the consequence of falling in is simply getting wet then an emergency jettisoning of a rucksack is unnecessary. **If participants think that an emergency jettisoning of a rucksack is necessary to avoid drowning or being swept away then they are crossing in the wrong place.**

- d) **Removing/throwing rucksacks;** If participants believe that wearing rucksacks is a barrier to safe crossing then they are crossing in the wrong place. **Rucksacks should not be thrown across rivers.**

Further reading;

Hillwalking (Third revised edition, 2014)

The official handbook of the Mountain Training walking schemes.

Remote Supervision (revised 2016)

Guidance on the supervision of groups operating independently