

# Health and Safety Guidelines for leading a school visit on a peatland site

The following information is sent in advance to all schools and groups visiting bogs.

- 1. Visit preparation** - The facilitator and school should work closely together to secure all permissions necessary including access to the local peatland habitat.
- 2. Location** - The facilitator should ensure the Principal or designated teacher/secretary has the GPS location of the peatland site, contact numbers of teachers and approximate departure/arrival times.
- 3. Clothing and lunch** - The facilitator should liaise with the school to ensure all are informed to wear appropriate outdoor clothing and dress for the weather ie. hiking boots/wellies, rain jacket, sunscreen, sun hat, waterproof trousers. Avoid chill while outside especially on the bog. Dress in layers. Advise school groups of the danger of midge, mosquito and horse fly bites while on the bog. Sensitive children should use insect repellants. Advise the school to ensure all students have a packed lunch and drink to bring on the peatland visit.
- 4. Weather** - Check weather the day before school visit in the event of storms, heavy rainfall or extreme weather. Do not be afraid to cancel a school visit due to unsuitable weather.
- 5. Biosecurity** - Wash all equipment including nets, basins, boots etc. prior to site visit to reduce the spread of pathogens and invasive species from one site to another.
- 6. Preparation for departure from school** - Ensure all students have used the bathroom before departure (especially the younger students). Discuss with teachers regarding medical requirements for students with asthma, epipen etc to ensure a safe trip to the local peatland. Ensure teachers and facilitator have the schools phone number and that their phones are fully charged. Keep hands free on the trip. Students should store lunch, worksheets, equipment and keys in ruck sacks so that their hands are free. We recommend supervision of at least 1 teacher for every 12 students. Facilitator should wear a hi-visibility jacket and carry a First Aid kit. Count the number of students prior to leaving the school.
- 7. Travel and managing groups outdoors** - If walking to a local peatland, students should walk in a sandwich formation with facilitator in the lead to monitor traffic on public roads and teachers to the rear. Do not get distracted walking down country roads and stick to the right side facing oncoming traffic. If travelling by bus, the facilitator/teachers should be conscious and prepared for students prone to travel sickness. Do not get distracted while getting on and off the bus or out of a car. Watch out for hazards in the countryside. On bogs these could be wet holes, pine stumps, soft bare peat and shrinkage cracks concealed by heather at the edge of the bog. Appoint a partner for walking, working and climbing on the trip.
- 8. Equipment** - Seek assistance from students to help carry equipment. Show how to carry nets the correct way and remind them to be careful with live animals. Have a checklist of equipment to ensure nothing is left behind on the peatland.
- 9. Managing groups on peatlands** - Advise the use of boardwalks to reduce trampling if one is positioned on site. Set boundaries if sending students on excursions. Be vigilant near areas of open water. Keep students away from open water, deep ponds or drains where possible. If walking along open water eg. canal, the facilitator/teachers should position themselves

between the water and the students. Safe areas on the bog are generally where heathers are found. Unsafe areas are the bright green patches of wet bog moss. Advise students to try to fall forwards with arms outstretched, calling for help if the ground is soft where they walk. Daisy flower circle formation for instructions and discussions while on field work. This means that the students stand in a circle around the tutor so that each one can see what is being demonstrated or to hear instructions being given.

10. **Accidents** - Inform teachers/guardians of any incident immediately and provide first aid kit where necessary.
11. **Departure from peatland habitat** - Remove all equipment taken on the trip from the place of study and check all equipment is accounted for. Count the number of students to ensure all are present prior to leaving the site. Do a quick survey of the site to ensure no litter is left behind. Follow leave no trace principles.
12. **Follow the Country Code**
  - a). Respect the rights of landowners. Seek permission before crossing fields to get to study sites.
  - b). Close gates securely if you open them.
  - c). Do not damage hedges, fences or walls.
  - d). Absolutely no fires.
  - e). Leave no litter.
  - f). Do not pick plants or disturb wildlife animals and birds or their nests on any peatland site.
  - g). Peatlands can be dangerous places. Never visit them alone.
  - h). Peatlands are fragile habitats, please take care when undertaking field work to minimise the impact of your investigations on the bog.
13. **Hygiene** - Wash your hands thoroughly after the field trip and for biosecurity clean all equipment.