



Wessex
Rivers Trust



WATERCRESS &
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Location
Risks
Safety
Equipment

How to Plan a River Visit

A guide for Teachers and Group Leaders

Location

When deciding on where to take your group, consider the following:

- Is the site local to your children? If you can walk to site, you won't have to arrange transport which can be costly. Using a local site will encourage children and young people to develop or strengthen a sense of belonging to their local community, and may even open up their eyes to a well visited location in a different light.
- Do you have landowner permission? This is essential, even if you are using a site that is open to the public. If you're not sure of the landowner, check any onsite signage or contact your local Parish, Town or City Council.



- Is there public access? Consider other site users, your location may be well used by walkers, dog walkers, cyclists or fisherman - if you're bringing a large group they will take up a lot of space!
- Is there mobile phone reception? You may need to get in touch with the school, parents or the emergency services on the day.
- Is there parking available? This is particularly relevant if children are being dropped off by parents or the group is travelling to site by minibus or coach - remember to consider the space required for a large vehicle to turn around. If walking to site, you may want a car nearby in case of emergencies or to drop off equipment.
- Traffic? Consider how your group will get from the parking or drop off area to the site, as well as your route there if you are walking - how many roads will they have to cross? Can you minimise these? Are the crossing points safe? Make sure you walk the route beforehand - you could combine this with your site pre-visit.
- Is there emergency vehicle access? Check road names, post codes and access points before the visit, use What3Words to pinpoint the closest vehicle access, your specific river dipping location and parking areas and make sure you have these to hand on the day, in case of any emergencies.
- How will you access the river? Consider how the group will get into and out of the river, look for a gentle sloping access or an easy step down. When choosing a site take a stick or broom handle with you and use this to test the river bed, if it's soft and silty the broom handle will sink in and you are likely to do the same! If your access point is grass or bare ground, it may get slippery when wet.
- How deep is the water? Only river dip when the water levels are low. Choose a shallow spot with a relatively even river bed - avoid any areas where the bed drops away quickly. Do not go deeper than the depth of your ankle bones and stay out of fast currents. Remember, the ideal location may look very different after heavy rain!
- Can you see the whole group at the same time? Consider your view of the group when they are in and out of the river, do you need to position any staff or parent helpers in certain places? Can you use any natural features e.g. trees as boundary markers? Do you need to stay on the bank and have other adults in the river to enable a clearer view?



- Is there a suitable open space close to the river? You will need space for any equipment and space for the group to spread out to do any activities. You will also need enough space for them to be able to see you in the river whilst you run through how to river dip. You may find you have a footpath between the equipment and the riverbank - you could place signs at either end of the space you're using to highlight the group's presence.
- How close are the nearest toilets? Consider how long to stay out for if the closest toilets are back at school, you may need to limit your session length to the age and needs of the group. You could see if there's a café or pub nearby and enquire beforehand - remember the local pub may not open until midday or early afternoon.



Risks

Deep Water

- How deep and how fast is the water?
- Do you have enough adult support for the age and number of children? Check your governing body's guidelines for working by water if you are unsure of this.
- If the river is too deep for the group, is it shallow enough for an adult in taller wellingtons? If so, the children could stay on the bank and one or two adults could do the catching or measuring.
- If the water is fast flowing and above knee depth, do you have a life jacket and throwrope? Consider covering water safety with the group and accompanying adults before the visit.



Weather

The right clothing is hugely important, our suggestions for the children and young people (and accompanying adults!) are below, but it's always worth taking extras just incase. Remember, once in the river children are likely to get wet regardless!

Cold or Wet

Wellies

Waterproof jacket

Waterproof trousers

Woolly hat

Gloves

Spare clothes, socks and shoes for afterwards

Hot

Wellies or beach shoes
(clogs and old trainers are also fine, but flip flops or sliders are not ideal - never go in barefoot)

Sun hat and sun cream

Clothing that covers legs and arms to minimise stings and scratches

Spare clothes, socks and shoes for afterwards

Consider how the following may affect the site, you may have to re-schedule in the event of bad weather:

- high winds - are there trees or power cables overhead?
- electric storms
- heavy rain, contributing to higher flows and / or muddy and slippery surfaces

Weil's Disease

Leptospirosis, or Weil's Disease, is an infection you can get from animals, in particular rats. It causes flu like symptoms.

- Cover all open cuts and scratches with waterproof plasters
- Practice good hygiene and make sure participants wash their hands with soap and water before eating
- You can find out more here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/leptospirosis/>

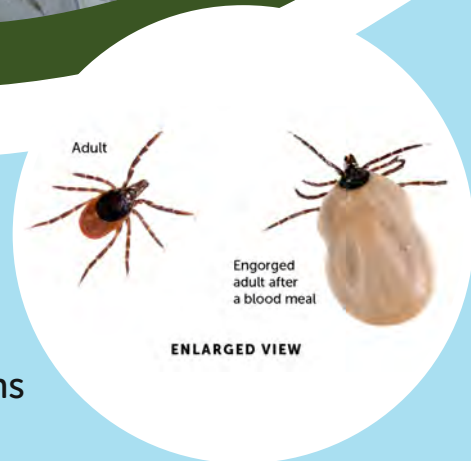




Lyme Disease

Lyme Disease is a bacterial infection that can be spread to humans by infected ticks. Early symptoms are flu like, look out for a characteristic 'bullseye' rash.

- Encourage children to wear clothing that covers their arms and legs
- Try to avoid walking through long grass
- Check clothing at the end of the session to make sure you're not taking the wildlife back with you - encourage them to brush themselves down using their hands
- You can find out more here: <https://www.lymediseaseaction.org.uk/resources/to-download/>



Other potential risks to be aware of:

- Slips and trips on uneven ground
- Plants, in particular Hemlock water dropwort, stinging nettles, berries and fungi
- Fencing, look out for rough edges, splinters and sharp wire
- Members of the public
- Dogs, may not be on a lead or under control
- Dog poo, carry poo bags and check the site beforehand
- Landowners, ensure you have permission
- Farm machinery
- Livestock



Safety Equipment

We recommend the following items are in your leader's bag, along with anything else required by your organisation or governing body:

- Charged mobile phone
- Risk assessment
- First aid kit
- Throw rope
- Survival bag
- Dog poo bags
- Spare clothes
- Towel
- Spare water
- Hand sanitiser



Useful Links

River dipping equipment for schools and groups can be borrowed from:

For more river resources visit:

<https://www.wessexrivers.org.uk/education.html>



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