

Be River Safe

Planning a Trip

Fact Sheet

PLANNING A TRIP

If you are going to do any activity in, on or around a river you need to do some preparation. You need to make a plan for doing the activity. When you are completing the activity you need to either keep to the plan or assess what is happening and make and carry out an alternative plan.

Before we set out – initial planning

Before you set out to do an activity you need to plan:

- what the activity will be and where it will take place
- what you want to achieve by doing the activity
- what you will take
- who will go
- how people will know what you are doing
- how you will get to and from the river
- what could go wrong and how you will deal with it
- what roles individuals in the group will have e.g. leader, first aider, supervisor and participant.

Selecting an activity

You need to select an activity that your group can do safely and enjoy doing:

- in the area of river you have selected
- within the time you have set aside for completing the activity
- with the gear you have available
- with the level of skill, confidence and river experience your group has.

Your group, or someone in the group, needs to have recent experience of completing the activity in that area of the river.



Be River Safe ... *plan your trip*

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Fact Sheet

Competence of all group members

Your group needs to consider if all the people in your group can do the planned activity safely and competently. Competently means that they have the:

- skills (swimming, survival swimming skills)
- confidence
- experience on rivers

to do the activity safely.

Check if anyone in the group is over-confident or not assessing their skill and experience level accurately.

Check if everyone in the group can do the activity without over extending themselves or putting themselves at risk.

Assign roles to people in the group and be sure they have the competence to carry out those roles e.g. a first-aider has first aid training and the leader has led groups doing this activity on this river before.

Gear

Your group needs to:

- consider what personal, group, technical or safety gear you need to take, and assemble the gear
- check that the gear is in good condition and works
- check that everyone has suitable personal and safety gear (e.g. people have correctly fitting pfd's (personal floatation devices) or have warm clothing with them as well as protection from the sun).

Communication

Your group needs to:

- consider how you are going to tell people where you are and what you are doing
- consider how you communicate with people during the activity or if something goes wrong when you are doing the activity
- check that communication devices like mountain radios, vhf radios, cell phones (if applicable) or epirbs and pelts are working
- check that someone knows where you are going and what you are planning to do before you leave to begin the activity.



Be River Safe ... *take and use the right equipment*

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Initial assessment of the river and the weather

Prior to setting out to do the activity the group needs to do an initial assessment of the river and the weather.

Your group is likely to consider the following questions.

- Is the river level and flow likely to be suitable for the planned activity?
- How will recent weather have affected the river level and flow of water?
- What is the weather forecast?
- Will the weather be suitable for the activity we have planned?

Getting to the river

Organising safe transport

The group needs to get to the site of the activity.

Your group is likely to consider the following questions.

- How will we get ourselves and all our gear there safely?
- If we enter the river or river area at one point and leave at another have we organised suitable transport?

At the river

Pre-activity assessment of the river

When you reach the river the group needs to complete an assessment process and check that it is safe to begin the activity.

Your group is likely to consider the following questions.

River conditions

- What is the condition of the river?
- What is the river level or depth of the water?
- What is the river flow like, how can we test it?
- What is the colour of the water?
- What is the nature of the river bottom?
- Is there any debris on the bottom of the river?
- Are there any visible features like rapids, strainers or obstacles like boulders we need to consider?
- Can we check the whole river area we will be using from the bank?
- What is upstream or downstream of where we will do our activity?
- Can we enter and exit the river safely?
- If something goes wrong, are there other safe exit points further down the river?
- If we want to use an existing feature like a rope or track to a jump point, is it safe?



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Weather

Your group is likely to consider the following questions.

- What is the weather like by the river?
- Are there any indications that weather conditions might change and make the activity unsafe?

Group participation

Your group is likely to consider the following questions.

- Now we are by the river and can see what the activity will be like, does everyone still want to do the activity?
- Does everyone believe they are competent to do the planned activity?
- Do we need to recognise people's ability and change our planned activity?
- How are we managing supervision and support for each other?
- What operating and safety rules do we need?

What could go wrong and how would we deal with it?

Your group is likely to consider the following questions.

- What could go wrong while we are doing this activity?
- What are the risks and how will we manage them?
- Are their risks we cannot manage? Does this mean we should not do the activity?
- Do we have any doubts? Should we be river safe and if in doubt STAY OUT?

In or on the water

During an activity you need to assess how the activity is going and change your plans if necessary.

Questions your group may ask during the activity include the following.

- Is the activity going as planned?
- Is everyone comfortable and safe?
- Does everyone have the skills, confidence and experience to complete the activity?
- Is anyone hurt or unwell or pushing themselves past their limits and likely to get exhausted?
- Is everyone warm or is someone in danger of becoming cold and developing hypothermia?
- Are the river or weather conditions changing?
- Do we need to change supervision or offer more support for some group members?
- Are their new rules or ways of operating that we need to introduce?
- Is it time to stop and take stock of how the activity is going?
- Can we complete this activity safely or do we need to make a decision NOW and change our plans?
- What is going wrong/has gone wrong? What do we need to do NOW?

After completing the activity

After you have completed the activity your group will want to review how it went to see if there are things you would change when you plan to do the activity again.

Be River Safe ... *if in doubt STAY OUT*