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Introduction

This guidance is for people organising or thinking of organising GOC events that involve an overnight stay. These range from short weekends not too far from home to longer trips in remote areas of the UK. There will be further issues to consider if you are organising a trip abroad, but most of this guidance will still be relevant.

Although the work required to organise an event may seem a bit daunting, remember your group co-ordinator and others should be able to help - you don't have to do it all yourself.

Venue and accommodation

When choosing a venue and accommodation, the main issues to consider are:

- What are you aiming to get out of the trip?
- What location would be good for the activities you have in mind?
- Do you want to go somewhere new or somewhere familiar?
- Has there recently been a similar GOC event in the area?
- How accessible is the location by public transport?
- How accessible is the location by car?
- Are you going to book group accommodation or leave it to individuals to book their own?
- How affordable is the accommodation?
- Will the accommodation provide the level of comfort that the potential participants require?
- Is there suitable accommodation for both men and women?
- What arrangements will there be for breakfasts, lunches and evening meals?
- Is there somewhere that the whole group can get together in the evening, e.g. a youth hostel common room or local pub?

There may also be other minor issues to consider, such as parking arrangements and whether dogs are allowed.

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A location that is more easily accessible is likely to be better attended, e.g. a camping weekend in the Peak District may prove more popular than one in the far north of Scotland, but if your aim is to go somewhere remote, then the latter location could be the right one.

In some cases it may be appropriate to let people book their own accommodation, e.g. at a campsite outside school holidays or in a village with a range of accommodation options and a pub where the whole group can get together in the evening.

Adventure Out and Transpennine groups regularly use YHA¹ and SYHA² hostels because these have all the facilities required by walkers, including drying rooms. The main disadvantage is that these hostels are usually too big to be booked for exclusive use of GOC and therefore the group must share with other guests, although they may be in a GOC-only dorm. Advice about booking YHA and SYHA hostels is provided below.

Independent hostels and bunkhouses can also be a good option and in many cases have the advantage of being small enough to be booked for exclusive use. However, the quality of the facilities can be very variable. In the more basic bunkhouses guests must bring their own sleeping bags. Not all of them have drying rooms and some do not provide tea towels, washing up liquid etc. You will need to give clear information to participants about what is provided and what they need to bring themselves.

It is wise to find out as much as possible about an independent hostel or bunkhouse before booking it, by reading online reviews and checking with the owner/manager what is and is not provided and ideally visiting the accommodation. Beware of out-of-date information: a place that was great a few years ago may no longer be so and vice versa.

Bear in mind, however, that not all GOC members are prepared to 'rough it' and so an event based at a hostel, bunkhouse or campsite will not be suitable for everybody. You may therefore consider booking more luxurious accommodation or letting participants book their own.

Support from group co-ordinator, Events Officer and others

The role of group co-ordinators is to facilitate GOC events in their geographical area or specialised area of activity, such as climbing. The relevant co-ordinator will usually be your first port of call for advice and the person who puts information about your event on the website. You should contact him or her at an early stage to discuss your proposal and modify it as appropriate to maximise the chances of the event being a success. The co-ordinator might for example, suggest a change of date to avoid a clash with a similar event.

¹ The Youth Hostels Association of England and Wales

² The Scottish Youth Hostels Association

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The Events Officer can also provide advice and put information on the website and will be happy to do so where there is no group co-ordinator able or willing to support your event.

Group co-ordinators and the Events Officer can be contacted through the website. See: <http://www.goc.org.uk/contact>.

Other experienced members of the club may also be able to help especially if they have organised a similar event in the past.

Booking and paying for accommodation

Unless participants are booking their own accommodation, you will need to think about how you are going to pay for it, collect contributions from participants and ensure that costs are covered.

You could either:

1. Collect contributions before booking the accommodation or
2. Book and pay for the accommodation upfront if you are reasonably sure there will be sufficient attendees to cover costs.

Option 1 is the safest financially, but is often not practical because you need to book further in advance than participants are prepared to commit. A good example is Adventure Out's annual 'Highland Hogmanay' where the accommodation usually has to be booked a year in advance.

If choosing option 2 you need to consider the degree of risk and how you will manage it. Adventure Out and Transpennine groups reduce the risk by using YHA and SYHA hostels and booking places for the minimum number of people likely to attend. Others are then free to make individual bookings later, but are likely to have to share a dorm with non-GOC people. In other cases the risk is low because a similar event has proved popular in the past, e.g. East Kent have for some years been running an annual event where they have exclusive use of a small hostel or bunkhouse, which tends to get filled.

When making a booking with the YHA for six people or more you should be able to obtain members' rates for the whole group under GOC's group membership. Our membership number is 0100006535. Otherwise you may assume that the participants are all individual members of the YHA, but advise them that they may have to pay a supplement on arrival if they cannot provide proof of membership. At the time of writing members get a discount of £3 per night.

Unless the booking conditions give you a specific right to a refund you will normally be required to pay for all the places you have booked in a hostel or bunkhouse. The YHA gives percentage refunds depending on how much notice you give of cancellation. See Section 7 of their booking terms and conditions: <http://www.yha.org.uk/terms-and-conditions>.

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Please note that at some venues there may be an additional charge if participants arrive before or leave after the specified check-in and check-out times. There may also be an additional charge if required cleaning tasks are not carried out.

The club has recently agreed that it will consider underwriting events that are likely to be financially viable and meet GOC objectives. If you would like the club to provide a loan for and/or underwrite an event that you are proposing, please contact the Events Officer or the Treasurer. See: <http://www.goc.org.uk/contact>.

Collecting contributions

Participants' contributions should normally be collected through the website. For this to happen you will need to arrange with the Events Officer for online booking to be enabled. The money will then go into the club's bank account.

If you have paid for the accommodation and/or other costs out of your own account, you will need to arrange for the Treasurer to transfer the funds to you. This can take some time, because there is a delay before the funds reach the club's account. However, as explained above, you can apply for upfront funding from the club.

An alternative method, which may be more convenient, is to ask participants to pay you directly. However this may have the effect of excluding people who do not know you and are not prepared to trust a stranger with their money. There is a risk of fraud and therefore it is not our preferred method, but it has worked well in practice, with no example of misuse of participants' money in the club's 42-year history as far as we know.

People who sign up for an event may ask for a refund if they cancel. It is therefore best to make the refund policy clear in the Event Details on the website, e.g. 'Refund policy: We make no profit on this type of event, we aim just to cover costs. If the event is under-subscribed then GOC can make a loss. If you need to cancel your booking, we can only offer you a refund if the event is fully subscribed AND someone else can take your place.'

Travel

Members who do not have cars should not be excluded from events. Ideally the location should be accessible by public transport. If this is not the case, then as the event organiser you should encourage drivers to offer lifts to others and try to facilitate this as much as you can.

When giving advice to participants about public transport, please note that:

1. Bus and rail timetables tends to change in the spring and autumn.
2. Rail services are often affected by engineering works, especially at weekends.

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So you should recheck timetables and rail connections shortly before the event is due to commence and/or advise participants to do so.

Information about rail services can be found at: <http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/>. General information about public transport connections can be found on Traveline: <http://www.traveline.info/> or on local Traveline services, links to which can be found at: <http://www.traveline.info/about-traveline/traveline-services/>.

It is essential to give participants very clear instructions about the location of the venue. In remote areas a postcode may not be sufficient for people to find the location using satnav. The Event Details form on the website asks you to put in a grid reference and you should ensure that this is correct. If in doubt please ask the group co-ordinator or the Events Officer.

Meals

Options for meals include:

- Individual self-catering
- Communal self-catering
- Paying for meals provided at the accommodation
- Eating out at a pub or restaurant.

Generally it is a good idea to get participants to eat together, if practical, as this helps with group dynamics and makes new people feel more welcome.

In youth hostels and bunkhouses it may be better to organise communal self-catering than have individuals competing for limited kitchen facilities. The custom at Adventure Out's Highland Hogmanay, for example, where self-catering is often the only option, is for the event organiser to arrange a communal breakfast and for the participants to take it in turns to do the meal each evening, typically in groups of about six. Of course you need to be aware of any special diets and dislikes when planning communal meals, e.g. some people won't eat anything that contains chilli.

Most YHA and some SYHA hostels provide evening meals, breakfasts and packed lunches. Usually these can be booked by individuals at short notice (e.g. up to 6.00pm for a meal the same evening), but it is a good idea for you as event organiser to check this with the warden and advise if a large number of GOC people are likely to be ordering meals.

Where the group is relying on the local pub for an evening meal, it may be advisable for you to book a table, especially if there are no other places to eat nearby.

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Arrival

Ensuring that everyone arrives at the venue without too much hassle is critical to the success of the whole event.

It is important to check when and how participants can get access to the accommodation, and ensure all of them are aware of this, especially if you as event organiser are not going to be the first to arrive. There may, for example, be a door code. Note that at many YHA and SYHA hostels you cannot check in until 5pm and access to the hostel between 10am and 5pm is limited. At some of these hostels the members' kitchen and common room can be accessed during these hours, but at others there is access only to an entrance hall or similar space to shelter from the weather.

You should try and get a rough idea of when participants expect to arrive and give them a phone number to contact you if they are delayed or having difficulty finding the venue. In remote areas, where mobile reception may be poor, it may be advisable to make an arrangement with the owner or manager to take calls on a landline.

Organising activities

In a location where a choice of activities is possible, it may not always be appropriate to pre-plan each day's activity, especially in areas like the Lake District and the west of Scotland, where the weather is very unpredictable. Other factors, such as how well they have slept the night before, may also affect participants' appetite for more or less demanding activities.

While flexibility may be necessary, it is a good idea for you as event organiser to obtain a weather forecast and discuss options with the group the previous evening rather than just waiting until the morning to see what happens. Mountain weather forecasts for areas like the North West Highlands and Snowdonia can be found at <http://www.mwis.org.uk/>. It is also a good idea to be clear about the time and place people should assemble in the morning to join a walk or other group activity, even if plans have to be changed.

Not all participants may wish to join in the main group activity. Some may prefer to do a different walk, either as part of a smaller group or on their own, or they may just feel like pottering around for the day. Your role as event organiser is to try and ensure that everyone is happy either joining in with a group or doing their own thing and that no one feels excluded.

GOC's general advice about walking and, where relevant mountain walking, applies of course to walks taking place as part of a weekend or longer event.

In addition to the outdoor activities taking place during the daytime, you may also wish to consider arranging some activity for the evening. This could just be a group meal or visit to the pub as discussed above. Alternatively, especially for

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bigger events, you could consider arranging some kind of entertainment, such as a quiz or ceillidh. Bear in mind, however, that not everyone may want to join in.

While GOC events usually consist of self-organised activities, in some cases they may include paid-for activities such as canoeing. Where that is the case, you may need to book and pay for these in advance, and the same principles will apply as set out above for booking accommodation in advance.

Insurance

Information about GOC's insurance policy can be found at:

<http://www.goc.org.uk/information/organising-an-event/insurance>.

Some activities, such as canoeing and rock climbing, are not covered unless stringent conditions are met, notably that the activity is led by a qualified person. If you are in any doubt about whether the event you are proposing is covered, please contact the Events Officer or Secretary.

Appendix - Checklist of information for participants

The following is a non-exhaustive list of information you may need to provide to members taking part in a GOC event that involves an overnight stay. The information should be provided at the appropriate time: in the Event Details on the website, in an email sent out a few days before the event or during the event itself.

General:

- Participants to contact you if they have any queries
- How to book
- Cost and what is included and not included

Transport:

- Public transport connections and advice to check in case of timetable changes or engineering works
- Encourage drivers to offer lifts
- Car parking arrangements
- Satnav advice, e.g. if postcode will not suffice.

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Accommodation:

- Name, address, postcode and grid reference
- Instructions about how to get there, e.g. 'look for sign to McRobbie's Farm and follow the track to the end'
- The earliest time that the accommodation can be accessed on the first day
- How to access the accommodation on arrival, e.g. door code
- Sleeping arrangements, e.g. bunkbeds in four-bedded rooms
- What to bring, e.g. sleeping bag, towel
- Facilities provided at the accommodation, e.g. self-catering kitchen
- Facilities not provided at the accommodation, e.g. lack of a drying room
- Any cleaning the group is expected to do on the final morning
- Time by which accommodation must be vacated on the final day
- Link to the website for the accommodation.

Arrival:

- Participants to contact you if expecting to arrive later than a given time
- Participants to contact you if they are delayed or unable to find the venue
- Your mobile number and/or warden's landline.

Meal arrangements:

- Any plans for communal self-catering and if this will be covered by money already collected through GOC website
- Facilities for individual self-catering
- Availability of paid-for meals at the accommodation and how to book them
- Opportunities for eating out in the vicinity, e.g. local pub, and any plans to book a table for the group
- Options for packed lunch, e.g. bring your own, nearby shop, buy one from hostel.

Activities:

- Link to any walks or other activities listed as separate events on GOC website if relevant
- Indication of likely options, e.g. coastal walk, visit to National Trust property
- Advice about what to bring for different activities, e.g. trunks/costume and towel for swimming opportunity
- Facilities (or lack of them) en route, e.g. toilets, shop, ice-cream kiosk
- Details of any planned evening activities and entertainment.