

The Brow Hike - Advice for Competitors

The following advice is no substitute for experience, and those who have completed or taken part in the hike before could probably think of other items to include. We are always happy to hear from anyone with additional ideas.

1. Equipment

The booklet contains the list of equipment, but remember that this is not an exhaustive list—some element of common sense is expected.

Keep the weight down – there is nothing clever about carrying a ridiculously heavy pack. Discuss with your Leaders and other members of your group ways in which you can minimise the weight of your pack.

Mark everything – having spent a fortune on your own equipment or group equipment, it's a pity to lose things. Each year we end up with at least a bin bag full of untraceable lost property. If items are marked we can go through the entry forms to trace the owners.

Rucksacks – should ideally be around 65 litre capacity with a top and lower compartment. A waist strap is essential to reduce the weight carried on the shoulders. Line the inside with a black bin bag to ensure your gear stays dry. When it is packed, try the rucksack on and adjust it correctly to your size. Adjusting rucksacks when you are hiking is a lot of trouble and a waste of valuable walking time.

Stoves and Fuel – “Trangias” are probably the best for this event, either with the spirit burner or a gas conversion kit. Although these are not cheap, they have their own pans and windshield built in. Small Gaz or gas stoves are acceptable but these do need a windshield as our campsite can be very bleak and exposed, and the wind can sweep heat away quickly. Solid fuel stoves and petrol stoves are not suitable for the Brow Hike. If you are using meths or similar fuel this must be carried in a suitable fuel bottle.

Tent – the heaviest item on the kit list. Dome tents are ideal as they need less pegs, poles are lightweight, they are easy to put up and often have a porch for storage. Ridge tents are also fine provided they have a sewn in groundsheet and a flysheet. You must carry with you a tent (or tents) large enough to accommodate your whole team of 4 and your packs. The campsite is an exposed, hillside location where it can be wet and wild in adverse weather conditions. You will ideally need a 3-4 season tent to be able to withstand these conditions should the weather be bad.

2. **Clothing**

Don't buy new boots a week before the hike. Make sure your boots are properly worn in to prevent blisters. Blisters are probably the most common reason for competitors to retire from the hike. If you know that you are prone to blisters, strap your feet up with zinc oxide tape or similar before you start the hike, and make sure you know how to treat your blisters if they do occur.

Socks next to the skin are better if they are cotton as it does not cause friction and sweating the same as nylon, which softens the skin causing formation of blisters. Many hikers find a combination of a thin cotton sock and a thick woollen sock the most comfortable.

Keep sweaters light and thin. Build up thin layers of clothing as this improves air circulation between the layers which keeps you warmer. You can also add and remove layers as required to maintain a comfortable body temperature.

Spare clothing is required. If you get wet on the first day it is not nice to have to stay wet all evening and the following day.

Hiking in camouflage clothing is not ideal—wear something that makes you visible to motorists as there is some road-walking on the route.

Wear a hat in cold conditions as there is a great loss of heat from the head.

Outer garments need to be waterproof, and if money will allow, breathable, to reduce sweating.

3. **Food and Drink**

Water is available at some checkpoints and at camp but you should carry a water bottle containing 1 litre of water with you to keep you hydrated when walking. Water bottles can be filled at St Paul's on the Saturday morning.

Bring suitable high-energy snacks to eat whilst walking and perhaps a packed lunch for Saturday. Packed lunches are best eaten "on the go" as there is no allowance in the walking times for a lunch stop. You won't need a packed lunch for Sunday as a cooked meal is provided on completion of the hike.

Evening meals need to be substantial – a pot noodle is not sufficient. More substantial dehydrated meals are fine provided they are reconstituted properly and heated/cooked adequately. Better still, though more expensive, are "boil-in-the-bag" hike meals (Wayfayrer or similar) provided you have enough to feed your whole team (one pack for each member).

You will be expected to have a hot drink with your evening meal, and again with your breakfast on the Sunday.

A good cooked breakfast is needed for the Sunday morning. Again the “boil-in-the-bag” type are ideal if your budget will stretch far enough. Porridge makes an ideal accompaniment for a few extra marks.

4. **Mapping Skills**

Teams are expected to know how to navigate using map and compass. Just learning the route is not enough. New navigation tests have been introduced to ensure that all teams are competent with map and compass and can read and understand 6-figure grid references.

The 1:25,000 map scale is ideal for the hike. The whole of the route is on the current Ordnance Survey Explorer OL21 map, although older maps showing the area are also fine.

Make sure the published checkpoints are plotted on your map before you arrive on Saturday morning.

Teams will be given quiet time on Saturday morning away from their parents, Leaders and other team members to plot the routes for the navigation tests on their maps from a list of 6-figure grid references. All team members will need to know how to do this as to meet the time restriction you will need 2 members to plot the route for Navigation Test 1, while the other 2 work on Navigation Test 2.

Maps will then be checked to ensure all the checkpoints are marked in the correct locations, and the navigation test routes have been correctly plotted. Once checked, the marked routes will need to be copied across onto both of your teams’ maps.

Practice setting a map outdoors. Practice taking compass bearings outdoors. Both of these skills should be practiced until you can do them in no more than 20 seconds. This will save you time in the long run.

5. **Hiking Skills**

Set your map at all route direction changes if you have any doubt.

Practice how long it takes you to hike a given distance and estimate how long you will need to walk until the next change of route direction. That way you will quickly know if you have gone too far.

Keep up a steady pace, walking at the pace of the slowest team member. Running sections of the route is fine, but only run if all members of the team are physically capable of doing so and agree to it. Use your training hikes to determine what pace your team can walk at and sustain for the whole day. That way you can make sure you set off at the right speed. Over the years, many teams have set off too fast and found themselves tired out well before they reach camp.

If you think you are lost, try to work out your position using map and compass and get off high ground as soon as possible. If you are unable to work out your position, ring control from a mobile phone, call box or a local house or farm. We can then find you and get you back on the right route without penalty. If in doubt, walk on the roads and we will find you.

Follow your route rather than blindly following other teams. They may not be on the right path. If walking on a road where there is no footpath, walk so as to face the oncoming traffic. This enables you to get out of the way if they do not see you.

6. Practice

Hikes – Start with a short route and carrying just a small pack, and build up the distance and the weight you can carry on each hike you go on. Use routes with plenty of turns for navigation practice and try walking North and South as it is different. A 2 hour practice hike is better than 10 hours learning navigation in your HQ.

Camping – Make sure you know how to put up your tent correctly, and also how to take it down and get it back in the bag. Make sure you can do this without the help of your parents or Leaders. They will not be there to help you on the day! Spend a night camping out, even if it is just in your garden. Were you warm enough? If not you may need to change what you wear at night, or even get a better sleeping bag.

Cooking – Use your stove to cook some food and eat it. Try it in windy conditions to see how much harder it is. Be careful over hygiene, ensure you have clean hands. Using anti-bacterial hand gel is a good idea.

Packing – Pack your own rucksack, you will have to do this on the Hike after kit check and on the Sunday morning at camp. Make sure you can get your sleeping bag back into the stuff sack without assistance.

7. Fitness

Feet – Your feet take the most punishment on the hike. Care for them and try to keep them dry.

Exercise – If you take part in sports at school or you are a member of a swimming club etc. then you will be fit enough to complete the hike without intensive physical training. Practice hikes are the key to making sure you are fit and ready to take on the hike.