

# Users Guide to the Australian Walking Track Grading System

The Australian Walking Track Grading System has been developed by the Walking Tracks Grading and Improvement Project and funded by 'Go for your life' - a Victorian Government initiative aimed at developing stronger, healthier communities through promoting healthy eating and increased participation in physical activity.

The Australian Walking Track Grading System has been endorsed by Parks Forum as a voluntary industry standard and will be promoted for adoption amongst its members.

## Australian Walking Track Grading System

This booklet shows you how to apply the Australian Walking Track Grading System.

The Grading System is essentially designed to assist people who are not regular or confident bushwalkers to experience walking by providing helpful information about walking trails.

### Why do we need an Australian Walking Track Grading System?

The Australian Walking Track Grading System answers one question – is this walk suitable for me?

Track grading is a primary means of informing people about the features of walking tracks and assists in the marketing and promotion of walking as a leisure activity. By providing a standardised level of difficulty or track grading users are able to gauge whether a particular track is suitable for them. Currently there is no nationally consistent system to grade the level of difficulty of the track walking experience and then to clearly communicate that information to the public.

The lack of an agreed Australian track grading standard is limiting the accessibility and use of walking tracks for recreation and physical activity.

### Does the Australian Walking Track Grading System ask the right questions?

97.3% of respondents felt the Australian Walking Track Grading System enables them to decide if a walk is the right level of difficulty for them.

The Grading System has been developed after a three year program of extensive research into domestic and international walkers' information needs.

Three major studies and nearly 1900 consumer interviews were commissioned to answer one question.

*What information do people considering going walking actually want?*

The more criteria used to grade a walk, the more complex the system becomes to apply. Consequently the system is designed to be simple – easy to apply and easy to use.

### Using the Australian Walking Track Grading System

The application of the Australian Walking Track Grading System is a two step process.

The first step is a technical grading of the walk. The land manager determines a walk's grade of difficulty using descriptors taken from the *Australian Standard 2156.1 - 2001 Walking Tracks - Classification and Signage*.

The second step is to communicate to the public why a walk has received its grading – in essence translating the technical grading into 'plain English language'.

## Technical and public descriptors: Grade One walk

A Grade 1 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 1 track

	Technical Description for Land Manager use	Walk Description for Public Information	Generic Description for Public Information
<b>Grade of walk</b>	Grade 1	Grade 1	Grade 1
<b>Symbol</b>	Symbol	Symbol	Symbol
<b>Distance</b>	Total distance of track must not exceed 5km.	Total distance of track to nearest 100 metre (eg 4.2km).	No bushwalking experience required. Flat even surface with no steps or steep sections. Suitable for wheelchair users who have someone to assist them. Walks no greater than 5km.
<b>Gradient</b>	Grades in accordance with the AS 1428 series. (AS 2165.1) A ramp at 1:14 (7.14% slope or 4.1degrees) is the maximum slope/gradient suitable for a person in a wheelchair.	Flat.	
<b>Quality of path</b>	Broad, hard surfaced track of path suitable for wheelchair use. Width: 1200mm or more. Well maintained with minimal intrusions. (AS 2165.1)	Well formed track.	
<b>Quality of markings</b>	Track head signage and route markers at intersections.	Clearly sign posted.	
<b>Experience required</b>	Users need no previous experience and are expected to exercise normal care regarding their personal safety. (AS 2165.1)	No experience required.	
<b>Time</b>	30 minute increments (eg 1-1.5hr) or if the predicted time is less than an hour in 15 minute increments (eg 30-45 minutes).	Time needed to complete track to nearest half hour or nearest 15 minute increment (eg 1-1.5 hours or 30-45 minutes).	
<b>Steps</b>	Steps allowed only with alternate ramp access. (AS 2165.1)	No steps.	

## Technical and public descriptors: Grade Two walk

A Grade 2 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 2 track

	Technical Description for Land Manager use	Walk Description for Public Information	Generic Description for Public Information
<b>Grade of walk</b>	Grade 2	Grade 2	Grade 2
<b>Symbol</b>	Symbol	Symbol	Symbol
<b>Distance</b>	Total distance of track must not exceed 10km.	Total distance of track to nearest 100 metre (eg 4.2km).	No bushwalking experience required. The track is a hardened or compacted surface and may have a gentle hill section or sections and occasional steps. Walks no greater than 10km.
<b>Gradient</b>	The gradient is generally no steeper than 1:10 (or 10% or 5.7 degrees). (AS 2165.1).	Gentle hills.	
<b>Quality of path</b>	Generally a modified or hardened surface. Width: 900mm or more. Well maintained with minimal intrusions. (AS 2165.1).	Formed track.	
<b>Quality of markings</b>	Track head signage & route markers at intersections.	Clearly sign posted.	
<b>Experience required</b>	Users need no previous experience and are expected to exercise normal care regarding their personal safety. (AS 2165.1). Suitable for most ages and fitness levels.	No experience required.	
<b>Time</b>	30 minute increments Time needed to complete (eg 1.5-2hrs) or if the predicted time is less than an hour in 15 minute increments (eg 30-45 minutes).	Time needed to complete track to nearest half hour or nearest 15 minute increment (eg 1-1.5hrs or 30-45 minutes).	
<b>Steps</b>	Minimal use of steps. (AS 2165.1).	Occasional steps.	

## Technical and public descriptors: Grade Three walk

A Grade 3 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 3 track

	Technical Description for Land Manager use	Walk Description for Public Information	Generic Description for Public Information
<b>Grade of walk</b>	Grade 3	Grade 3	Grade 3
<b>Symbol</b>	Symbol	Symbol	Symbol
<b>Distance</b>	Total distance of track must not exceed 20km.	Total distance of track to nearest 100 metre (eg 4.2km).	<p>Suitable for most ages and fitness levels. Some bushwalking experience recommended. Tracks may have short steep hill sections a rough surface and many steps. Walks up to 20km.</p>
<b>Gradient</b>	May exceed 1:10 (or 10% or 5.7 degrees) for short sections but generally no steeper than 1:10. (AS 2165.1).	Short steep hills.	
<b>Quality of path</b>	Formed earthen track, few obstacles. Generally a modified surface, sections may be hardened. Width: variable and less than 1200mm. Kept mostly clear of intrusions and obstacles. (AS 2165.1).	Formed track, some obstacles.	
<b>Quality of markings</b>	Track head signage and route markers at intersections and where track is indistinct.	Sign posted.	
<b>Experience required</b>	Users need no bushwalking experience and a minimum level of specialised skills. Users may encounter natural hazards such as steep slopes, unstable surfaces and minor water crossings. They are responsible for their own safety. (AS 2165.1).	Some bushwalking experience recommended.	
<b>Time</b>	Hours/days (eg 9hrs) or if the predicted time is less than an hour in 15 minute increments. (eg 45 minutes).	Hours/days or if the predicted time is less than an hour in 15 minute increments.	
<b>Steps</b>	Steps may be common. (AS 2165.1).	Many steps.	

## Technical and public descriptors: Grade Four walk

A Grade 4 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 4 track

	Technical Description for Land Manager use	Walk Description for Public Information	Generic Description for Public Information
<b>Grade of walk</b>	Grade 4	Grade 4	Grade 4
<b>Symbol</b>	Symbol	Symbol	Symbol
<b>Distance</b>	Total distance of track may be greater than 20km. Distance does not influence grading.	Total distance of track to nearest km.	<p>Bushwalking experience recommended. Tracks may be long, rough and very steep. Directional signage may be limited.</p>
<b>Gradient</b>	May have arduous climbs and steep sections. May include long steep sections exceeding 1:10.	Very steep.	
<b>Quality of path</b>	Generally distinct without major modification to the ground. Encounters with fallen debris and other obstacles are likely. (AS 2165.1) Walkers may encounter natural obstacles (eg tides).	Rough track, many obstacles.	
<b>Quality of markings</b>	Track head signage and route markers.	Limited signage.	
<b>Experience required</b>	Users require a moderate level of specialised skills such as navigation skills. Users may require maps and navigation equipment to successfully complete the track. Users need to be self-reliant, particularly in regard to emergency first aid and possible weather hazards. (AS 2165.1).	Experienced bushwalkers.	
<b>Time</b>	Hours/days (eg 9hrs) or if the predicted time is less than an hour in 15 minute increments (eg 45 minutes).	Hours/days or if the predicted time is less than an hour 15 minute increments.	
<b>Steps</b>	Steps N/A (AS 2165.1) Steps do not influence grading.	-	

## Technical and public descriptors: Grade Five walk

A Grade 5 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 5 & 6 track

	Technical Description for Land Manager use	Walk Description for Public Information	Generic Description for Public Information
<b>Grade of walk</b>	Grade 5	Grade 5	Grade 5
<b>Symbol</b>	Symbol	Symbol	Symbol
<b>Distance</b>	Total distance of track may be greater than 20km. Distance does not influence grading.	Total distance of track to nearest km.	Very experienced bushwalkers with specialised skills, including navigation and emergency first aid. Tracks are likely to be very rough, very steep and unmarked. Walks may be more than 20km.
<b>Gradient</b>	May have very arduous climbs and steep sections. May include long steep sections exceeding 1:10.	Very steep and difficult.	
<b>Quality of path</b>	No modification of the natural environment. (AS 2165.1).	Rough unformed track.	
<b>Quality of markings</b>	Signage is generally not provided. (AS 2165.1).	No directional signage.	
<b>Experience required</b>	Users require previous experience in the outdoors and a high level of specialised skills such as navigation skills. Users will generally require a map and navigation equipment to complete the track. Users need to be self-reliant, particularly in regard to emergency first aid and possible weather hazards. (AS 2165.1).	Very experienced bushwalkers.	
<b>Time</b>	Time Hours/days.	Hours/days.	
<b>Steps</b>	N/A (AS 2165.1). Steps do not influence grading.	-	

### How do I grade a walk?

The key to grading a walk is to describe it so that a person doing the walk gets a good idea of what to expect. This means:

- Walks should be described as they actually are; and
- A walk gets its grading from its hardest component.

Therefore, a walk will often have components that are easier than the walk's ultimate grade.

The application of the Australian Walking Track Grading System is a two step process.

### Step 1 – Technical grading of a walk

The person grading the walk uses technical descriptors, based on *AS 2156.1 Walking Tracks – Classification and Signage*, to determine the walk's level of difficulty.

### Step 2 – Translating the technical grading into a plain English grading

Using the 'Walking Track Grading System Decision Matrix for the public' the technical grading information is translated into plain English.

### How much information should you provide?

Land managers wanting to get the best out of the grading system should provide the full suite of information.

If it's not practical to provide the full suite of information at the start of the track, and in supporting material, the minimum information you should provide is the grade of walk (difficulty), identifying symbol and the actual distance.

#### Minimum information

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<b>Symbol</b>					
<b>Distance</b>	x km	xx km	xx km	xx km	xx km

#### Recommended information

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<b>Symbol</b>	Symbol	Symbol	Symbol	Symbol	Symbol
<b>Distance</b>	Distance to complete walk. x km.	Distance to complete walk. xx km.	Distance to complete walk. xx km.	Distance to complete walk. xx km.	Distance to complete walk. xx km.
<b>Gradient</b>	Flat.	Gentle hills.	Short steep hills.	Very steep.	Very steep and difficult.
<b>Quality of path</b>	Well formed track.	Formed track.	Formed track, some obstacles.	Rough track, many obstacles.	Rough unformed track.
<b>Quality of markings</b>	Clearly sign posted.	Clearly sign posted.	Sign posted.	Limited signage.	No directional signage.
<b>Experience required</b>	No experience required.	No experience required.	Some bushwalking experience required.	Experienced bushwalkers.	Very experienced bushwalkers.
<b>Time</b>	High and low estimate of time needed to complete track (eg 1.5-2hrs).	High and low estimate of time needed to complete track (eg 1.5-2hrs).	Time needed to complete track (hours/days).	Time needed to complete track (hours/days).	Time needed to complete track (hours/days).
<b>Steps</b>	No steps.	Occasional steps.	Many steps.	N/A	N/A

## Example: Wineglass Bay Lookout Walk

### Wineglass Bay Lookout Walk

This short walk offers visitors one of Tasmania's most celebrated views over the beautiful white sands of Wineglass Bay. The track is a short, fairly steep climb to the saddle between Mt Amos and Mt Mayson, two of the imposing granite peaks of the Hazards. From the saddle, a side track leads to a lookout with spectacular views over Wineglass Bay.

The track and Wineglass Bay are located within Freycinet National Park in Tasmania.

In this example the technical assessment of the components distance, quality of path, quality of markings and experience required are all Grade 1 or 2. The gradient and steps are Grade 3. Therefore, as the Wineglass Bay Lookout Walk has one or more Grade 3 components the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service have graded the walk at Grade 3.

#### Grade 1:

Distance	Total distance of track must not exceed 5km. Wineglass Bay Lookout Walk 2.4km.
Quality of markings	Track signage & route markers at intersections.
Experience required	Users need no previous experience and are expected to exercise normal care regarding their personal safety. (AS 2165.1)

#### Grade 2:

Quality of path	Generally a modified or hardened surface. Width: 900mm or more. Well maintained with minimal intrusions. (AS 2165.1)
-----------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

#### Grade 3:

Gradient	May exceed 1:10 (or 10% or 5.7 degrees) for short sections but generally no steeper than 1:10. (AS 2165.1).
Time	Hours/days (eg 9hrs) or if the time predicted is less than an hour to the nearest 15 minute interval (eg 45 minutes). Wineglass Bay Lookout Walk 1.5 hrs.
Steps	Steps may be common. (AS 2165.1)

## Example: Wineglass Bay, Tasmania

The technical assessment of the Wineglass Bay Lookout Walk is then translated into plain English. NOTE: Time is the land manager's best estimate of the amount of time a person of average fitness, walking in good conditions, will take to complete the walk. Time does not describe difficulty. Because this is a Grade 3 walk a high/low estimate is not required.

#### Grade 1:

Distance	Distance to complete walk is 2.4km.
Quality of markings	Clearly sign posted.
Experience requires	No experience required.

#### Grade 2:

Quality of path	Formed track.
-----------------	---------------

#### Grade 3:

Gradient	Short steep hills.
Time	Time needed to complete track (hours/days) 1.5hrs.
Steps	Many steps.



**Wineglass Bay Lookout walk could be described to the public as:**

**Wineglass Bay Lookout Walk. Grade 3.**

Symbol	<b>Distance:</b>	2.4km
	<b>Gradient:</b>	Short steep hills
	<b>Quality of path:</b>	Formed track
	<b>Quality of markings:</b>	Clearly sign posted
	<b>Experience required:</b>	No experience required
	<b>Time:</b>	1.5hrs
	<b>Steps:</b>	Many steps

## Glossary

### AS 2156.1-2001 Walking Tracks - Classification and Signage

The Australian Walking Track Grading System benchmarks to AS 2156.1-2001.

- A Grade 1 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 1 track
- A Grade 2 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 2 track
- A Grade 3 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 3 track
- A Grade 4 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 4 track
- A Grade 5 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 5 and 6 track

### Descriptions

Walk features are described as they exist. For example the description of a Grade 2 walk gradient is *gentle hills*. However if the walk is flat it should be described as flat.

### Distance

The distance given is the actual distance travelled to complete the walk.

- one way if the walk is promoted as a walk from one point to another (Point A – Point B);
- return if the walk is to a point and back (Point A – Point B – Point A); or
- circuit or loop if the walk is a loop.

For Grades 1-3 distance is given to the nearest 100 meters (eg 4.2km)

For Grades 4-5 distance is given to the nearest kilometre.

- Grade 1 - Up to 5km
- Grade 2 - Up to 10km
- Grade 3 - Up to 20km
- Grade 4 - N/A
- Grade 5 - N/A

### Experience required

Experience required refers to the degree of bushwalking experience required to safely complete a specific grade walk.

Bushwalking experience required benchmarks to AS 2156.1-2001.

- A Grade 1 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 1 track
- A Grade 2 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 2 track
- A Grade 3 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 3 track
- A Grade 4 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 4 track
- A Grade 5 walk corresponds to AS 2165.1 Class 5 and 6 track

**Gradient (or slope)**

The Australian Walking Track Grading System uses text to describe gradient to the public. Technical descriptions (eg. ratios or degrees) are used to technically grade the walk.

**Grade or Level of Difficulty**

The grade of the walk is determined by its hardest characteristic. Specific symbols are assigned to each grade.

- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5

**Steps**

A structure with a series of risers (steps) which provides pedestrian access from one level to another.

**Time**

For Grades 1 and 2 time is specified in a range given in 30 minute increments (eg 1-1.5hrs) or, if the predicted time is less than an hour, in 15 minute increments (eg 30-45 minutes).

For Grades 3 – 5 time is given as hours or days or, if the predicted time is less than an hour, in 15 minute increments.

Determining approximately how long an individual walk will take to complete is the responsibility of the agency describing the walk.

**Track (or trail)**

The choice of the term *track* or *trail* is determined by local usage.

For further information on the Australian Walking Track Grading System please visit <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/walking>.