

# The need for ‘late back’ procedures

by Sandy Paterson

WE can all imagine it I am sure, that worst case scenario: you are immobile (badly twisted ankle, broken leg or whatever) and you have no phone signal. You could be sitting there thinking it is OK because your wife/husband/friend will soon realise that you are not back home and raise the alarm because they know what your plans are and when you would aim to be home. Or you might be sitting there thinking: ‘If only...’ If only you had left them some info about where you were going and when they should expect you back.

Having a ‘late back’ procedure in my mind is vital, no matter if I am out playing or with clients, and it can be simple to do and cause no extra hassle to the day’s prep. In its simplest form it is basically the information of where you have gone for the day, when you hope to be back and when to worry and what someone should do if they have not heard from you.

## Information needed

**Who we are:** Who is in the group? Obviously, your contact person is going to know it is you, however any rescue team will want to know who else is there, so names and ideally dates of birth will be helpful.

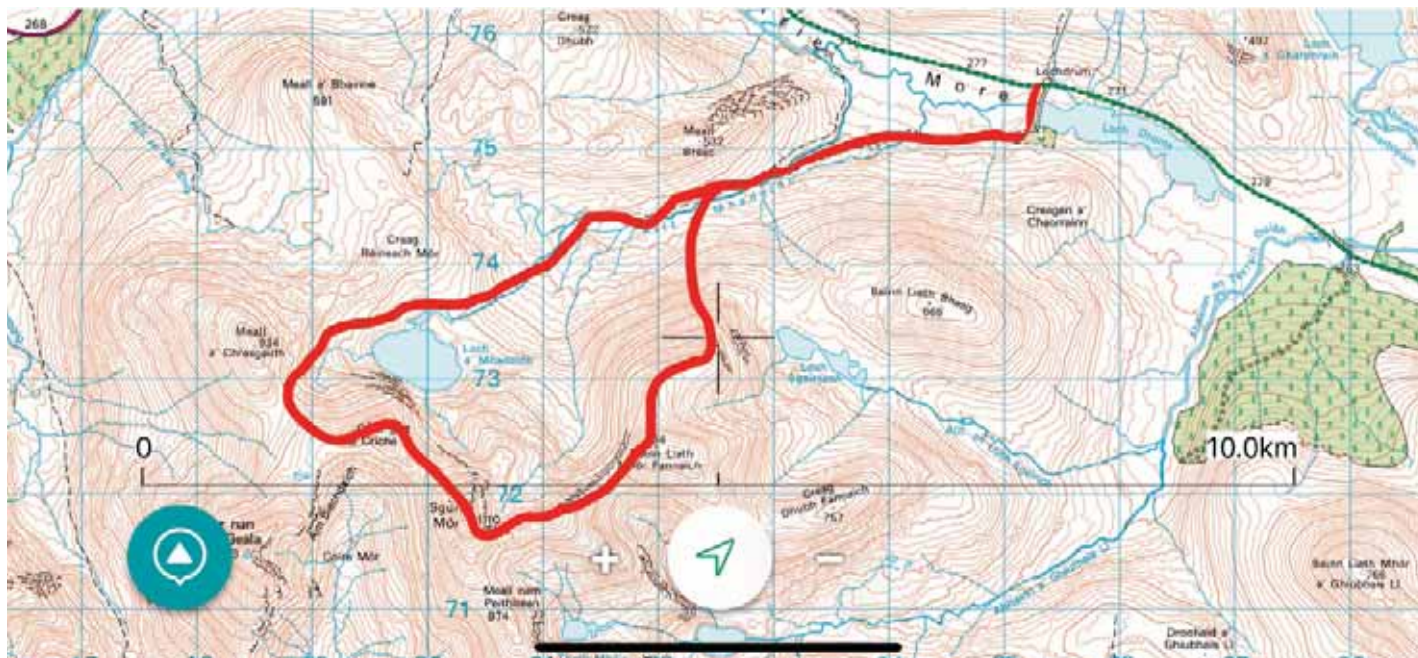
**Where we are going:** You can leave this information

however you want: in written form, photos of guide books etc. My preference is to either draw on a laminated map or, more often now, annotate my Viewranger map on my phone and send a screenshot to my late back contact. See the basic example pictured.

**Why we are going there:** What is the plan for the day? Is it to practice navigation, climb a route etc? It is always useful for rescue teams to know what your aim for the day is; it will help them start to piece together where you might be and what might have gone wrong.

**What equipment do we have:** This is not a whole packing list, but what safety equipment you have (group shelter, First Aid, blizzard bag) and also any other significant equipment like tents etc.

**When to worry:** This is the time that you want your contact to start trying to get hold of you, giving your mobile a call or anyone else who is with you. For me this is not a fixed time (for example two hours after my due back time) as the weather and my activity for the day will dictate the time. If it is good weather and I am out teaching navigation in a friendly area, I may be late because I have done extra; if it is a wild winter day and I am climbing I would try not to be later than necessary



and, if something has gone wrong, the sooner I get help the better.

**Who to contact:** You might think that the procedure is to go straight to phoning Police/Mountain Rescue. This is not my system: my wife is my 'late back' person and I like to think she has an emotional connection with me! She is also not a mountain person, so her task is to phone one of a few people who are all friends and mountain people who can make more informed decisions. It takes the stress of organising off her and hands it over to someone else, who can potentially think more logically and make a more informed decision.

**How to record info:** As mentioned above the route and location is often drawn/annotated onto a map. However, the group names, kit and timings are on a laminated sheet of A4 that has certain info/questions permanently added and then blanks to be filled in each time I am out. See the example sheet shown.

**Where to leave the info:** The key thing here is that the info is left in a visible place, so the contact person does not forget about it! In our house the info goes on the fridge so it will be clearly visible while dinner is being prepared, the normal time for returning home.

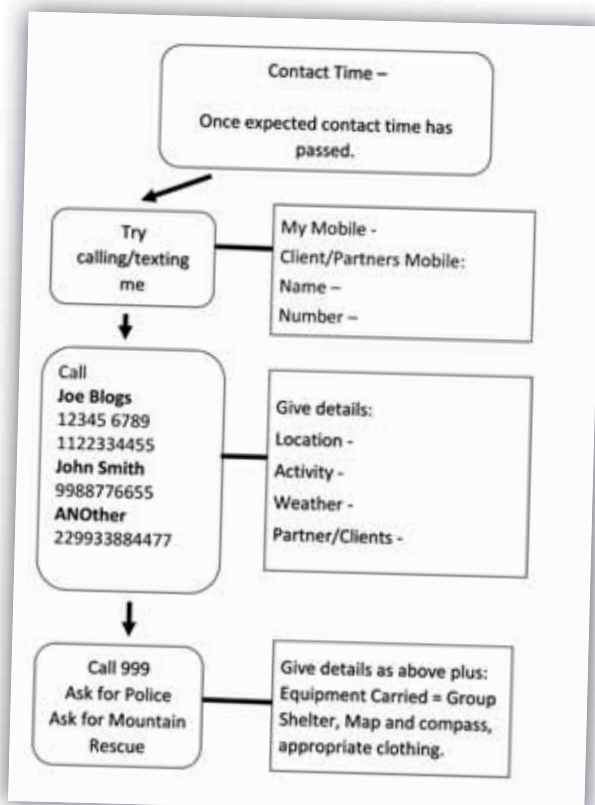
This is just one example of a 'late back' procedure that works well for myself and my work and homelife. It may not work for you, but there will be some system that does work and I can't stress enough the importance of having some sort of 'late back' procedure in place. Hopefully you will never have to use it, but you will be so glad you had it ready if it is ever needed.



Marking your proposed route on a map, as above, is a useful way to leave information



Your late back procedure and information about you and your group can be entered in a templated form



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