

**BIRKBECK COLLEGE**  
**Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences**  
**Fieldwork Safety Code of Practice**

**1. General**

The following applies to independent and group fieldwork study undertaken by students in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences as a supplement to the College Statement of Safety Policy ([www.bbk.ac.uk/departments/Safety](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/departments/Safety)).

**2. Risk Assessment.**

All fieldwork is subject to the process of risk assessment by the module leader. This Code will cover the hazards associated with most aspects of fieldwork but certain identified hazards and activities will require a supplementary risk assessment.

**3. Responsibilities**

**All persons employed** by the College (full-time and part-time) have a duty to take reasonable care to avoid injury to themselves and/or others resulting from their acts or omissions.

**Students** should make every effort to sustain the College's good name and reputation. In particular you should have consideration for others in the field, hotel and any other accommodation and should avoid actions which may compromise the safety, well-being or enjoyment of others.

**A student who fails to maintain a reasonable standard of behaviour, or who compromises safety, will be dismissed from the field class and referred to the College Authorities.** We reserve the right to refuse admission to the field class if we consider that safety will be compromised by a student attending the module.

**4. Medical considerations.**

Students must inform their lecturer of **any medical condition** that might affect their ability to undertake fieldwork. All such information will be treated in the **strictest confidence**.

All persons planning to engage in fieldwork must be physically fit and able to cope with the conditions likely to be encountered. Most Easter fieldwork involves some hill/mountain walking. Even modest walking can be unsuitable for those suffering from certain conditions. If in doubt, students should consult their doctor in advance of agreeing to take part in fieldwork.

Medical conditions that require **special diets** need to be revealed to the responsible officer of the department in advance of any fieldwork in order that adequate provision can be made available.

Medical conditions that require **medication** to be taken on a regular basis must be revealed to the responsible officer of the department and students must agree to take such medication whilst on the Field Class. Students should ensure they have a suitable supply of medication as some of the Field Class locations are remote and may not have sufficient local supplies. The responsible officer has the right to exclude a student from the Field Class where they suspect that regular medication has not been taken and the safety of other students is compromised as a result.

For fieldwork in the U.K. it is essential to have had a course of Tetanus injections.

For trips abroad there may be specific inoculation requirements.

Birkbeck reserves the right to request medical confirmation of fitness to participate in a field trip (eg a letter from a GP).

### **5. Travelling in private vehicles.**

Staff and students using private vehicles for travel to fieldwork sites whether as drivers or passengers should check that they are adequately covered by insurance.

### **6. Accidents/First aid.**

A qualified first aider must accompany each field class and take a suitable first aid kit with them on all expeditions into the field. Prompt treatment must be obtained for all injuries. All accident, incidents and near misses must be reported to the College Safety Office on return to the College. Failure to report an accident could jeopardise an insurance claim.

### **7. Clothing**

Adequate clothing and footwear for the type of weather and terrain likely to be encountered must be worn. Lecturers may, at their discretion, exclude students whom they consider inappropriately dressed.

Warm clothing, preferably in several thin layers which can be adjusted to conditions, a brightly coloured waterproof, windproof outer shell jacket, good socks and strong boots with rubber soles are essential. Walking boots with mountaineering soles are essential for rough terrain. Ensure that footwear is 'broken in' and waterproof. Wellington boots are NOT suitable for extended walking. 'Trainers' or other shoes with thin soles are NOT suitable. Adequate waterproof outer ware must be taken on all outdoor visits. Always carry warm headgear and gloves, plus protective headgear for sun protection.

Students are required to supply their own Safety helmets (to BS 5240) and these **must** be worn in quarries and around cliffs and screes and wherever there is a risk from falling objects and on any occasion directed by the lecturer or person in authority.

Safety goggles are also required when using a hammer to sample rock.

### **8. Insurance**

Although the College has appropriate statutory insurance cover for employers' liability and for public/ products liability, this does not extend to health, travel or property insurance for yourself as a module participant. The College insurance does not cover you for death, injury, illness or disease, or for loss or damage to your property. Thus, personal insurance is recommended for fieldwork in the U.K. (e.g. personal risk insurance) and is considered essential when going abroad (travel and health).

### **9. Country Code.**

The Country Code must always be observed and the law obeyed with respect to the countryside.

### **10. Rocks, cliffs and slopes.**

Care must be taken near cliffs, slopes and quarry edges. Avoid loosening rocks on slopes and shout 'BELOW' if you accidentally dislodge a rock however small. Do not work directly above or below any other person. Wear a safety helmet.

### **11. Wetlands/Offshore work**

Especial care must be taken in wetland habitats or when working offshore. Avoid being trapped by tides – consult tidal charts prior to any shoreline work and identify headlands and promontories that may cut off an exit with incoming tides. Beware of rip tides and undertow.

After wet and stormy weather sea cliffs become more unstable and prone to landslides.

Water is not to be ventured upon unless appropriate buoyancy aids such as lifejackets are worn. Small boats should only be operated by experienced/qualified and authorised persons.

### **11. Specimens.**

Specimens must not be collected without permission from an authorised person. When breaking rock while collecting geological specimens protective glasses or goggles (ordinary spectacles are inadequate) must be worn.

### **13. Entering property.**

The law of Trespass and the regulations of the Occupiers Liability Act 1984 require permission, preferably in writing, to enter private property in England and Wales. For industrial sites such as quarries follow recognised procedures for visits and be careful to report that you are leaving after completion of visit.

### **14. Entry into hazardous areas.**

Entry into hazardous areas such as MOD ranges, mountains, cliffs, steep slopes, road and railway cuttings, caves, mines, quarries, etc may only be made if the party is led by a person familiar with the hazards to be encountered and the precautions to be adopted to minimise risks. Such a person may be an employee of the MOD, mine or quarry or an expert guide on the natural features or the module leader if suitably experienced. The party leader will issue instructions on the safety procedures to be adopted and all members of the party are to strictly comply with such instructions.

Safety helmets are required for entrance to mines, quarries, cliffs, caves.

### **15. Remote areas.**

The present location on a map must always be known – a GPS is a useful tool in this respect. All staff and students must know how to use a compass and which is the nearest route to safety.

In mountainous terrain be aware of the hypothermia risk: With increasing elevation temperature decreases and wind chill increases. At 1000m and a temperature of 3°C with a wind speed of 35 mph the wind chill factor will be –16°C. Check media for local weather forecasts but remember they often do not apply to the local mountains where the weather can be more variable. Avoid steep areas prone to rock falls and avalanches.

Students are advised to carry a small first aid kit and learn how to cope with minor accidents, grazes, blisters, stings etc. Parties must be equipped with a means of signalling eg. whistle, torch, flares. The international distress signal is six blasts of a whistle (or torch flashes) repeated after a pause of one minute. The answering signal is three whistle

blasts. All members of parties must carry a reserve of warm clothing, high energy food, matches and a survival bag to counter the effects of exposure if incapacitated.

In remote areas local drivers tend to drive fast, so they may not be prepared for a group of students walking across the road. Avoid working or crossing near or close to road bends.

Ensure a responsible person takes up the rear of a group to avoid losing stragglers. Avoid marching ahead beyond sight of the full group.

### **16. Mobile Phones.**

In theory these can be used for communication with the emergency service. However in more remote regions there will probably be no signal thus it is important not to rely solely on this form of communication. Make sure you know where is the nearest habitation as a point of contact for any potential emergency.

### **17. Solo fieldwork**

Solo fieldwork should be avoided. We advise all students and staff to work in pairs or to have a field assistant. Ensure that you have fully appraised yourselves of local hazards and risks, noting which areas of high risk (disused mineshafts, caves, unstable slopes) to avoid.

Identify the location of local emergency services, telephones and nearest residences prior to any excursions. Identify possible shelters in case of extreme bad weather.

A route card or itinerary should be left at the local lodgings together with contact numbers in case of any emergency.

If students have been split up to work in small groups, arrange a suitable rendezvous point and time for everyone to meet.

### **18. Looking after yourself in the Field**

Field Classes are both an important learning experience and a chance to socialise with lecturers and fellow students. However, please remember that the Field Classes are part of the academic requirement for your course. Daytime work, which can be very demanding both physically and mentally, should be your first priority.

Please consider the effect of late nights and alcohol on your ability to carry out work in the field, as well as on your behaviour towards other members of the group.

Field Classes last for around two weeks, during which time you will be a long way from home with limited opportunities for communication. The night before leaving for a Field Class is not the best time to have an argument with your loved ones! You should make sure that someone at home has the contact details for the hotel and you may also want to consider calling home at the first possible opportunity to let them know that you have arrived safely.

Keeping yourself physically comfortable is a priority – weather conditions can never be guaranteed and field work will need to be completed in the time available. Keeping warm and dry is important, as is making sure you have enough sleep. Small “luxury items” may help to make an unfamiliar shared hotel room feel more like home.

## College/ Department contacts:

Birkbeck College Safety Officer  
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Dr Charlie Bristow  
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Department Safety Officer  
Dr Andrew Beard  
Tel: 020 7679 2378  
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## Publications

CHUGD/Geological Society – Safety in Geoscience Fieldwork. 1994.

Geologists Association - A Code for Geological Field Work

Natural Environment Research Council - Safety in Fieldwork, 1992

AUCL - Guidelines and Code of Practice for Fieldwork, 1994

Mountain Safety: Basic Precautions. Climber and Rambler, Perth PH1 5TT *or* 36 Fleet Street, London EC4

Safety on Mountains (1975). British Mountaineering Council, Crawford House, precinct Centre, The University, Manchester M13 9RZ *or* Cordee, 249 Knighton Road, Leicester.



**STUDENT DECLARATION**

Name:

Address:

Telephone No.

***Next of Kin/Contacts:***

Name:

Address:

Telephone No.

Name:

Address:

Telephone No.

**Medical Conditions:**

e.g. diabetes, heart conditions,  
epilepsy, allergies including penicillin, vertigo.

I acknowledge I have received and read the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences  
Safety code of practice.

Signature: ..... Date: .....