

How to do a Recce

Recce is another term for reconnaissance.

At its most basic reconnaissance is preliminary surveying or research.

We try and avoid the term “reconnaissance” due to its military association. Recce is much softer and almost sounds FUN! (rec-reational!)

The success of every action is in the planning and the detail. As Benjamin Franklin said “If You Fail to Plan, You Are Planning to Fail”.

A good recce can make or break an action. A bad recce (or no recce) can potentially put people in danger.

There are three types of recce:

- Route (if bringing in vehicles or a march)
- Zone (a specific target - junction, building, infrastructure)
- Area (wider context)

Sometimes you need to do Multiple Area Reconnaissance (all 3) - for example the [Pink Table](#) required a recce of the junction, a recce of the march route, a recce of the vehicle route and then a recce of the wider area to think about the impact of the occupation. It also required a night time recce to evaluate late night risk - partygoers, proximity to nightclubs, etc.

Why do we recce?

Essentially, a recce is important for us to plan how to execute an effective action. This means we don't want to just turn up on the day and hope for the best!

We want to...

- Gather information
- Look out for Problems
- Check police presence
- Identify accessibility of the space
- Make a decision about going or not going!
- Help identify plan B or C
- Ensure safety

- Most importantly, to ensure success!

Sometimes seeing a location in the flesh will help trigger more ideas. It's sometimes easier to visualize the action once you're in the space, you have a better sense of scale.

Every action needs a recce (of sorts).

Before the in-person recce

Determine what kind of recce you need to do:

- Route (if bringing in vehicles or a march)
- Zone (a specific target - junction, building, infrastructure)
- Area (wider context)
- Multiple Area Reconnaissance (all 3)

Do a Digital Recce

Check the location via Google Maps and Google Streetview to get a feel for it (**Be security conscious! Make sure you are using a VPN or the Tor browser when using google or use paper maps instead!**)

Advantages of a digital recce in advance:

- Good for identifying one way systems.
- Great for planning traffic and people movements.
- Aerial views will give a holistic wider context.
- Identify access routes you're not aware of.
- Great for evaluating wider impact on traffic.
- Great for assessing areas that need more investigation.
- Will help you create a cover story if needed.
- Great for getting around quickly.
- Perfect for finding local resources.
- Good for checking the proximity of hospitals and fire stations and alternative routes.
- Good for finding parking spots or possible holding locations.

Limitations of digital recces

- Often out of date.
- Site lines are different in summer and winter.
- Buildings pop up and disappear.
- Barriers pop up.
- One-way systems change.
- Inaccurate measurements.

- It's hard to get a real sense of scale.

Prep to make your recce smooth and successful

- Download an offline map app like [Guru maps](#) that allows you to drop pins and make notes on exact locations. Guru maps stores information locally on your phone and not in the cloud (unless you want it to).
 - Download [What 3 Words](#) to help share exact pinpoint locations
 - Download a AR measuring app like <http://armeasure.com> Newer iPhones have a standard AR measuring tool.
 - Use a laser measuring tool.
 - If planning actions in Central London you can use [this website](#) to check traffic hotspots everyday at the time of your action at the location.
 - Plan a route if needed and make a note of it.
 - Make a list of everything you need to check on the recce.
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Who should do the recce?

The three C's - Competent, Confident and Careful

- Important that the person doing the recce knows what kit will be used on the action.
 - Someone who has a good understanding of the plan.
 - It's best to do a recce with another person. You get to discuss stuff, bounce off ideas, and they might see something that you would have missed.
 - A couple holding hands is less suspicious than two masked hoodlums.
 - Someone people who can trust to get the job done.
 - If in London probably best that "well known" activists don't do recce's due to FRT (facial recognition technology).
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What to take on your recce?

- Your checklist of what to check!
- Phone (with a good camera with a wide angle lens, what three words, measuring tool, notes app).
- Laser measuring tools.
- Decoy / disguise (binoculars, also useful).
- Torch.

Be Incognito

- Have a cover story ready in case someone asks you what you are doing.
 - Having a good reason for being there – birdwatching, inspecting the fire alarms, tourist.
 - Importance of clothing that blends into the environment – high vis, lanyards, clipboards etc – hiding in plain sight.
 - Looking at a phone pretending to be lost while looking around works?
 - Be careful! Don't be too obvious about what you are doing, don't point at stuff, and don't stare too much.
 - In London be aware of facial recognition technology (FRT).
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When to do your recce?

- Doing a recce weeks before on the same weekday and at the same time the action will take place AND immediately before in case things change, like roadworks, weather, or police presence.
- This means that if your action is set to deploy on a Friday morning at 6am, you need to be there at 6am on ideally more than one Friday in advance of the action, and also at 5am on the day of the action. A cycle scout is a really useful role to fill as they can ride through the site immediately before the action kicks off and notify the team of any unexpected changes.
- Bear in mind security patrols are likely to differ at weekends, different times of day etc. You may also be looking for shift changes in security personnel.
- If a recce is needed over an extended period of time (e.g. how many HGVs enter/leave a site in a 12 hour period) in an urban environment you can look for a cafe or pub with seats in the window. In a rural environment you could consider using some tech, e.g. a spy cam hidden in a rock with wifi allows remote viewing.
- Whilst on the subject, there are other bits of tech that can be invaluable. We've used drones with cameras in the past to get accurate detailed photographs. You'll need to be mindful of detection, skills required and drone licenses - especially if near any no fly zones, for example airports.
- Other affordable tech is available - like spy glasses that record - though wouldn't be much use for people who already need glasses!
- The last minute recce is invaluable in making the decision whether to go or not go. Don't be afraid to call off a team/element of the action/the whole action if the situation is really different to what you expected.

Ongoing, live, on ground reconnaissance in the lead up to and during the action can be done via several people on site using a Whatsapp chat using live location to track vehicle positions. This can be used to communicate Plan B to all key players if needed!

During the action, especially longer actions/occupations, ongoing information gathering is essential for potential moves to a plan B or plan C, or to develop escalation of the action. A cover story that allows all areas access can be helpful, e.g. a photographer/live streamer, or a hand sanitiser dispenser.

Recce Checklist / Things to consider

Traffic & Access

- How many entrances and exits are there to the junction?
- How does the traffic flow in and out?
- Is there a one way system?
- How wide are the roads? If possible pace them out, but always double check on Google Maps with its measuring tool or with your phone measuring app.
- Make notes with time stamps if you do a longer recce, this helps us get a feeling for the movements of people and vehicles: What time do workers arrive (if it's not 24hours), when are the busiest/quietest times?
- What is the traffic flow like?
- Is it all buses, taxis and white vans?
- Is emergency access needed?
- Is there an alternative route for emergency services?
- Are there traffic lights nearby that can be used to stop traffic to create space to get into the road?
- How will you clear the junction of traffic?
- Are there any accessibility issues? Noise, obstructions, steps?
- Are gates locked? What time do they lock them?
- Can you get vehicles in?
- Can you get lock-ons in? How?
- How wide are the pavements?
- Don't use action vehicles to recce due to Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR).
- Are there transport links nearby, how are people going to get there?

Buildings and Infrastructure

- Get a feel for it.
- Is there an opportunity to use the street furniture as part of the blockade/action?
- Do you see infrastructure like water supply boxes outside that could be useful to know about?
- Is there a way to get on to the roof of the building? How high is it roughly? Do you see any steps going up? Do you see a door/entrance onto the roof that could be accessed from inside?
- What physical security measures are in place? Barriers? Heras fencing? Electronic gates. How do staff get in?
- Where are the entrances and exits (don't muddle them up)?
- Is there more than one entrance/exit?
- Are entrances and exits emergency exits?
- Are there any safety concerns for rebels (warning signs, dodgy looking infrastructure, moving vehicles)?

Security/Police

- Do you see any police? If so, how many?
- How close is the nearest police station?
- Do the police hang out in the same place everyday?
- Does the building have security? How close are they based? Could security intervene?
- Do you see any cameras? What area are they covering? At what point will they see us coming?
- How is the site secured? Fences, gates etc.? Do they go all around the place?
- Is the fence electric?
- Which direction will the police come from? Does it matter?
- Would street furniture obstruct police van access?

Beacons / Tripods

- Is there a good drop-off location nearby that's secure?
- Is there a field/open space/dead road nearby to assemble?
- Time the way (slowly walking) from the drop-off to the assembly location and from there to the final location of the blockade. If there is more than one option, time all of them! Decide later.
- Check if there are any obstacles we would have to lift the beacon over. How high are they?
- Are the paths wide enough to carry beacons through?
- In the location where the beacons will stand, are there any solid objects you could tie down to in case of high winds?

Workers & Community

- What workers and businesses will be impacted by your action?
- In what ways would the local community be affected if we block roads / make noise / set-up camp?
- Are there hospitals / fire station nearby, will you be blocking emergency services?
- If your action is staying overnight, are drunk people around?
- Where could you do outreach?

Miscellaneous

- How close is the closest police station? (and nearest police cells)
- Where will you take the "money shot" from (photography)?
- Is there an aerial view once you're in place?
- How exposed to the weather (heavy winds/rain) would the action be?
- Are there any health and safety issues?
- If camping, what might disturb you?
- Are there good vantage points for coordinators to observe from?
- Where's the nearest cafe for internet, press, meetings?
- Where's the nearest toilets, shops, facilities?
- Are there muster/rally points nearby?
- Where can you conceal infrastructure nearby?

- Some actions require tide times and weather reports - does yours?
 - Space - is the area big enough for all the rebels?
 - How does your chosen location fit with the narrative?
 - Does your location maximise publicity?
 - Does it cause effective disruption if that is your aim? Who are you disrupting?
 - Will disruption be to influential people more than public; is it an influential area?
 - Which parts of the area / terrain are public, or private, or a highway?
 - Are you blocking any emergency service access, e.g. near to a hospital or fire- station? (Don't!)
 - Do you need to time any distances (walking or driving)?
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After you Recce

- Don't let too much time pass before processing your collecting information.
- Look at your notes.
- Double-check your findings with Google Maps & Streetview.
- Look at the land registry to find out who owns the lands - this will determine some likely charges (e.g. trespass vs. obstruction of the highway).
- What legal implications will the location incur? Is there a byelaw in place?
- What different criminal charges could there be depending on exactly where it happens?
- Check in with your team to discuss the plans.
- Sense check everything... twice... maybe three times
- Check the internet to see if any other protests, events, road closures, marathons, etc are happening the same day as your action.

Recce Packs/Briefing Docs

- Create a briefing document if needed.
- Maybe create a map with important information on it (traffic flow, exact locations, etc).
- Brief your rebels.
- Make sure everyone is clear.

Some aligned actions might require a recce pack; the [Black Friday Amazon occupations](#) are a good example. A recce pack was pulled together to advise on the areas that should be investigated at each specific Amazon depot. This pack helps ensure that those doing the visit cover all the appropriate requirements.

Links

[Information on Security Staff](#) whose job is to identify threats from activists.

Information on [Facial Recognition Technology](#).
