

A Guide for Hike Leaders (and those who hike with them)

Everyone is nervous the first few times they agree to lead a club hike. This guide was prepared to help answer questions about what a hike leader is expected to do. It can also serve as a refresher for people who have already led many hikes. The leader of a hike has extra burdens that the other hikers that day do not have. Even if you aren't leading a hike, knowing what the leader needs to do may help you make the leader's job easier.

Plan the hike. In many cases, the hike may have already been specified in the quarterly bulletin. Even so, you may wish to change the scheduled hike to something else. Weather, road, or trail conditions might make the scheduled hike undesirable or even not possible. Scouting out the road and trail conditions before the day of the official hike may be prudent although it is not required. You may wish to consult books and maps to increase your knowledge of the trail. Typically the leader also sends out an email notification about the hike to the club's group email list several days before the hike to remind people what the hike is and possibly provide more detail than was written in the quarterly newsletter.

Take calls and emails from hikers who wish to sign up for your hike. Answer any questions about what the hike will be like if asked by people potentially interested in signing up. If you don't know the person who is calling (for example, prospective members who have never or hardly ever hiked with us) be sure they know what type of equipment to bring, how long the hike will be, and whatever else you can think of to be confident that they will show up for the hike reasonably prepared for the day. If the hike is unusually challenging you can suggest that the individual try some other club hikes first. If you have serious concerns you have the right, and indeed the responsibility, to tell an individual that they cannot go on the hike. Write the names of everyone who signs up onto the signup form. If for some reason you decide to cancel the hike (poor weather perhaps) this list is also useful so you know who all to contact about the cancellation. Some individuals may wish to start a hike earlier than the time the leader has designated. This would allow them more time to hike slower while still doing the entire hike, or linger for photography without holding up the group, or whatever reason. Leaders should encourage and support these individuals by offering to collect names of any other individuals who sign up for the hike and also want to start earlier. These individuals can then arrange to form their own sub-group for the hike, picking their own meeting time, etc. Sub-groups should have a designated leader and the primary hike leader should know who that person is. The leader of the main group cannot be responsible for the safe return of these early starters since the leader could conceivably not see anyone from that sub-group all day and may not know who all in that group actually went on the hike.

Discussion at the meeting place and/or trailhead. Bring the signup sheet with you to the meeting place and have everyone sign in. This sheet helps you keep track of whom to expect and gives you a written record of how many are hiking with you. If there are any new or fairly new hikers, having everyone say their names is appreciated. And finally, make sure everyone has a ride and that the drivers all know how to get to the trailhead. Tell hikers what the plan is for the day, talk about any specific things to be watching for on the trail, possible hazardous spots and particularly discuss what intersections will be encountered and make sure people know which way to turn at them. Depending on the trail you may wish to ask people to wait at intersections to make it easier to keep track of everyone and ensure they don't wander off in the wrong direction. It can also be useful to ask how many people are unfamiliar with the trail as this will give you a better sense of how much trail description is needed. You can also ask who has walkie-talkies with them to assist you in keeping track of where everyone is.

Be safety conscious. Try to keep track of approximately where everyone in your group is. Ask people not to wander off by themselves and to tell you if they wish to depart from the planned route. Anyone straying from the group should be with at least one other person unless they've cleared their solo sojourn with the leader. Try to not have the last person on the trail hike by themselves, particularly on the way back to the trailhead, as they could have a problem and no one would know about it for possibly a long time.

Make decisions when necessary. Typically the hike will go smoothly with no issues to deal with. However, if an issue or problem comes up that does need to be handled, the leader is in charge. The leader is encouraged to

ask for the opinions of the group but the leader is the one who makes the final call and everyone on the hike is to abide by this decision.

Ensure that everyone returns safely from a hike. Usually this means the leader doesn't leave the trailhead to go home until everyone has returned from the hike. However, if a small sub-group wishes to go further or linger longer on the hike than the leader has planned and they don't want to make the leader (and everyone in the same car as the leader) wait for their eventual return, with mutual agreement, the leader can go home without that group having safely returned. This assumes that the leader feels confident that the sub-group will be okay. This mutual consent to allow the leader to go home could even be made via walkie-talkie if the sub-group is late getting back to the trailhead but can convince the leader that all the as yet unreturned hikers are together and there are no further hazards that might prevent their safe return.

Return the signup form. If there were any incidents or issues on the hike that the club should be aware of that might help future hike leaders, write them on the hike sign-up form. Whether or not you have any comments, return the sign-up sheet to the person or address listed on the form.

Checklist for Hike Leaders

Communication at Carpool Location:

- ☐ **Introductions:** get the attention of the group and form a circle (more or less) and have everyone give their name if hikers don't all know each other.
- ☐ **Sign in:** make sure non-members sign the second page of the form and give emergency contact information; members sign the front.
- ☐ **Equipment:** if there's any doubt about preparedness or conditions may be harsh, ask hikers, especially new ones, if they have the proper equipment with them (enough water, extra clothing, traction devices if needed, etc.); if a hiker lacks appropriate food, water, clothes, or other gear, the leader is authorized to decline participation in that day's hike.
- ☐ **Rides:** See that everyone has a ride and drivers are familiar with the route to the trailhead. With large groups or groups with new people, remind drivers and passengers that they should return in the same vehicle after the hike unless very clear and specific arrangements are made and communicated to the leader.

Communication at Trailhead:

- ☐ **Plan:** Identify who is new and who will be hiking with them; discuss who will stay in which group; designate a sweep if needed; designate regrouping location(s) if needed (e.g. at an intersection of trails); give a turn-around time if all not hiking together.
- ☐ **Problems:** discuss any unique aspects of the hike or potential hazards (e.g. confusing intersections, log crossings) and how they will be dealt with.
- ☐ **Safety reminders:** Remind that hiking safety is ultimately the responsibility of each hiker but emphasize importance of hiking in a group, staying in touch (walkie-talkies, regrouping at designated locations), staying on the trail, and what to do if lost (stay put and blow whistle). If planning to use walkie-talkie radios to communicate, confirm that radios are working and set to channel 4, sub-channel 04.
- ☐ **Courtesy:** remind hikers that dawdling, not sticking to the plan, or any behavior that makes other hikers wait or worry is, at the least, not good hiking etiquette.
- ☐ **Going home:** leader ensures that all hikers return to cars and all cars depart trailhead.