

Hike Leader's Guide

As a hike leader, you want your hike to be a success. This means that each person who goes on your hike becomes a part of the whole group, has a good time as well as exercise, learns something about the area, returns safely without mishap en route and decides to hike with you again. This will not just happen. It will depend on what you, the leader, have done in preparation for the hike, how you manage the details, and whether you have a good time yourself.

A. Preparation for the Hike

1. **Where to hike:** A hike may be held in any type area; however, most hikers think in terms of a rural area. Hikes may be held in city, county and state parks. Hike may have a scenic viewpoint, historical perspective or simply provide exercise. Consult with other members or the Hike Coordinator. Read about the area in brochures if possible. You may want to choose a co-leader if you haven't led a hike before.
2. **Scouting the hike:** Locate your hike area on a road map. If available, get a map of the hike area—park, county or U.S. Geological Survey map. Determine whether the hike will be a loop hike (circling back to the starting point), an out-and-back hike (retracing the route to return to the starting point) or a shuttle hike (requiring drivers and car transport from the meeting place to the start of the hike). When you scout the hike, check for a safe parking area. Walk your proposed route and note:
 - a. **Condition of the trail.** Is it wet, dry, rocky, etc.? Remember, it may change with the seasons.
 - b. **Possible problem areas.** If necessary, mark the trail using materials that can be removed or are natural.
 - c. **Possible “separation” area.** Note places that can be used for a “separation,” i.e., a bathroom break, women in one area, men in another.
 - d. **Lunch spot.** If you plan to stop for lunch on your hike, if possible choose a place where hikers can sit on park benches, fallen trees or large rocks.
 - e. **Nearest emergency facilities.** Is there a park office or ranger station? If so, you should have its phone number. The leader should carry a cell phone and a simple first aid kit with gauze bandages, ace bandages, wash-and-dries, and aspirin or ibuprofen.
 - f. **Private property on the route.** If the route goes across private property, check to see if permission is required from the owner.
 - g. **Estimated mileage and time to complete the hike.** People don't like signing up for an “8 mile” hike and having to hike 12 miles. They also don't like hiking after dark.
 - h. **Possible dangers.** Does the route go near cliffs? Does it cross fast-running streams? Is hunting allowed in the area?

B. Conducting the Hike

1. Preliminaries

- a.** Get to the meeting point early.
- b.** Have hikers sign in as they arrive. Don't forget to sign your own name. Each person must sign in for himself or herself.
- c.** Evaluate the hikers. Do they have the necessary clothing and footgear? If you have any doubts, discuss them with the hiker.
- d.** Select a capable person as your "sweep," who will remain behind the last hiker and make sure that no one wanders off the trail or turns back alone. The sweep should have a whistle to warn the leader if there are problems or delays at the back of the line.
- e.** A few minutes before the starting time, gather the group in a circle and have each person introduce himself or herself. Make any announcements relating to hike conditions and identify your sweep. Get a final head count before starting out!
- f.** Hikes should begin 15 minutes after the scheduled time announced for the hike, to allow some leeway for those who get lost on the way to the starting point.

2. During the Hike

- a.** Set a steady pace that can be maintained by all hikers.
- b.** Schedule breaks as required by weather, trail conditions and abilities of the hikers. Give all hikers a chance to rest. Count heads at all breaks.
- c.** Check frequently to be sure that there is contact from the front to the back of the line of hikers. Be attentive to all calls for a halt.
- d.** Let the entire group gather at points of interest, hazardous spots, and wherever there is a significant change of direction. These are good opportunities for a head count.
- e.** Check with the sweep for suggestions.
- f.** Check with the hikers occasionally for comments and conditions.
- g.** At the completion of the hike, make a final head count and be sure that all hikers are well.