

Suggestions for Outing Leaders

The outing leader is the club's primary representative for helping ensure that each participant experiences desirable levels of enjoyment, comfort, health, and safety during an outing. Although club members accept responsibility for risks associated with outings, the outing leader is commonly expected to assist participants in maximizing the pleasures and benefits of outings and in minimizing problems.

Different outing leaders use different approaches for accomplishing those goals, but certain practices are shared by the approaches of many experienced leaders. This document presents suggestions which can usually help enhance the pleasures and benefits of outings and reduce problems.

Know as well as possible the trail, cycling route, or body of water where the outing will take place; and communicate to potential participants in advance the attractive and challenging features of the location and eventually of the predicted weather.

- At least once before the actual outing, hike the trail, ride the cycling route, or paddle the river or lake section with one or more club members who know the location well; and try to become familiar with portions where participants should be alerted to conditions requiring special attention, such as slippery rocks, dangerous intersections, or tricky but unavoidable rapids.
- In the outing description for the *Trailmarker*, provide enough information about the location for potential participants to be aware of its major attractions and of unusual challenges that can be bases for informed decisions about participation and about assembly of attire, equipment, and food and drink for the outing. For strenuous outings and ones with special demands or risks, state in the outing description that each intended or possible participant should contact you in advance for details.
- If the capabilities of a requesting participant are not known to you, be candid in presenting the demands of the outing by phone or email and seek information about the individual's preparedness for those demands. Discourage or disallow participation by individuals deemed inadequately fit or insufficiently experienced for your outing, but encourage participation in less demanding outings appropriate for those individuals.
- Monitor the predicted weather for the outing location; and alert intended participants the day before the outing if possible inclement conditions might influence their final decisions regarding participation or regarding assembly of attire, equipment, and food and drink for the outing.
- Cancel, postpone, or move an outing if the predicted weather conditions—for example, lightning, bitter cold, or extreme heat—present significant safety or health risks.

Use the gatherings at carpooling locations in Greensboro and Winston-Salem to help ensure that participants are prepared for the outing and that they understand they must take primary responsibility for their comfort, health, and safety during the outing.

- If the preparedness of any of the participants or their knowledge of the outing location is questionable, reiterate to the group the special demands of the outing and the importance of self-confidence about capabilities for handling those demands. If specific participants appear inappropriately attired, improperly equipped, or insufficiently provisioned for the outing, point out your concerns separately to those individuals so that they or you can make final informed decisions regarding their participation in the outing.
- Make certain that everyone allowed on the outing reads the club's outing release form and fills out the required information.
- Ensure that the names of new club members and new outing participants are known to the veteran participants in order to facilitate carpooling decisions and to encourage veterans to begin providing helpful advice and support for first-time participants.

Use the gathering at the outing starting point on the hiking trail, cycling route, or body of water to help ensure that the group during the outing functions amicably, supportively, and effectively as a group.

- Have everyone in the group introduce herself or himself, making certain that the names of first-time participants and their towns of residence are known to veterans.
- Take a headcount and make certain that everyone in the group has heard the number so that all can participate in ensuring that everyone is accounted for during the outing.
- Either identify yourself as the rear hiker, rider, or paddler for the group or designate another well-equipped, knowledgeable veteran for that role and make certain that the individual has known information about any relevant limitations of specific participants in the outing.
- Either identify yourself as the lead hiker, rider, or paddler for the group or designate another knowledgeable veteran for that role. If other participants are also familiar with the hiking trail, cycling route, or body of water, make certain those individuals are identified by first-time participants as possible resources during the outing.
- To all participants, announce regrouping points where everyone can gather together at least briefly to ensure that all are accounted for and are handling the outing satisfactorily. Often a morning snack break, the lunch break, and an afternoon water break are used partly for regrouping.

Have available in your equipment or accessible to you during the outing a variety of items for helping deal with small emergencies, and make certain participants are aware of the availability of emergency items.

- Carry extra water, a source of nutritional electrolytes, pain reliever tablets, and bandages and antibiotic ointment for small wounds.
- Carry an extra pair of socks and, during cold-weather outings, other extra clothing, such as gloves, a headband, a ski cap, and a fleece.
- Carry a cell phone or know which other individuals in the group are carrying theirs.

Following the outing, make certain that all participants are at the ending point, are provided available assistance they might need, feel appreciated for their participation, and have functioning transportation home.

- Count participants as they arrive and identify stragglers in order to anticipate possible problems.
- Make a special effort to confer with first-time participants in order to identify needs that can be met at that time and to show appreciation for their participation.
- Make certain that all vehicles are functioning adequately for the return to the Triad.

At home after the outing, use some time to reflect on information gained from the activity and to communicate with any participants who might benefit from a message from you.

- Reread the *Trailmarker* description of the outing and think through any comments you made about the hiking, cycling, or paddling route to participants prior to the activity that might have influenced decisions by them or by non-participating club members regarding participation in the outing. If you might lead the outing again in the future and you think you could have provided more helpful information about the hiking, cycling, or paddling route, write a revised description for possible use with a repeat offering of the activity.
- If a participant had an experience, such as dehydration or a tumble, which might make her or him reluctant to participate in a similar outing in the future even though you consider the individual capable of such an activity, communicate briefly with the participant to show your interest in her or his well-being and to offer suggestions which couldn't be made during the outing. If you learned during the outing or through the follow-up communication that the participant's experience led to a physical problem of some duration, inform the PHOC president of the incident and of its known repercussions for the participant.