



Cross Country Leadership Seminar

Foothills Cross Country Skiing Committee



Objectives

- Understand the roles and objectives of a leader in the Mountaineers
- Understand the expectations and best-practices of organizing and managing a trip
- Learn leadership best practices and apply them in scenarios
- Review next steps to become a Leader for the Mountaineers

Leadership Roles and Expectations

for Cross Country Ski Leaders



Why Lead?

- Choose the where, when, what and pace for trips
- Gain experience with group and people leadership skills that will carry over into other aspects of your life
- Expand your role in the Mountaineers community and “pay it forward”

Above all, Leadership is a shift from a focus on individual success to a focus on group success. Leaders should love helping people achieve their goals and learn new things.



Role of the Leader



- Plan, organize, and execute activities
- Ensure your participants are capable and prepared to succeed on the posted itinerary
- Be a positive and responsible role model of courteous trail behavior and “leave no trace” principles
- Represent the Mountaineers, a 110 year old brand, by leaving your participants and those you meet on the trail feeling great about their experience.

Authority and accountability for the **SAFE RETURN** of your group.

Requirements for Leaders

- Current member, at least 18 years old
- Caring, service-focused, respectful, empathetic, safety-oriented
- Have gone on 2-3 Mountaineers Cross Country Ski trips
- Must demonstrate working competence in:
 - *Group Leadership: trip planning, group leadership and communication*
 - *Technical Skills: Basic Cross Country Ski Badge or equivalent, skills including gear, ten essentials, trail etiquette appropriate for the activity*
 - *Navigation: Route finding, use of maps, and tools to 'stay found'*
 - *Mountain Safety: Identify and mitigate or avoid common hazards. Foothills Leaders need the Avalanche Awareness badge, at a minimum*
 - *First Aid and Emergency Preparedness: Ability to handle common on-trail first-aid and emergency situations. Leaders need to have current First Aid (WFA) certification*
 - *Knowledge of Standards and Policies: Mountaineers and land management agencies*

Requirements for Leaders (2)

- Can show working competence through:
 - Completion of this seminar and a mentored trip
 - Other Mountaineers leader badges or demonstrated leadership experience with other organizations
 - Course completion/certifications (e.g. Red Cross first-aid, Wilderness First Aid, Staying Found, Wilderness Navigation, etc.)

More about next steps at the end of the seminar

Legal Considerations

- Even as volunteers, we have a legal **DUTY OF CARE** to follow the **STANDARD OF PRACTICE** in our industry to keep participants safe and deliver what we promise.
- Volunteers are protected from individual liability by Federal and state statutes and Mountaineers insurance as long as they are not 'grossly negligent' – but the club can be sued based on your actions (or lack of)
- Know and follow Mountaineers guidelines and policies at all times. (e.g. A Cross Country ski trip should be a Cross Country ski trip and not a backcountry ski trip!)

Managing Risk & Controlling Liability



- Don't lead until you have the basic competencies
- Communicate the hazards in writing to participants before the trip and make sure they have signed and understand the waiver
- Ensure that your participants are prepared, capable, and understand the risk and their responsibilities
- Review the hazards in a safety briefing before you set out, and along the way
- Understand crisis management and how to manage an incident successfully within your level of training using Mountaineers emergency procedures including properly documenting what happened
- Bring your participants home safely

Running a Trip

Foothills Cross Country Ski Leaders



“Cross Country Ski” Definition

- Also called “Nordic” or “XC” trips
- Club-sponsored ski trips
- Restricted to **non-glaciated, non-avalanche** terrain on trails/roads groomed and or managed for cross-country skiing
 - Sno Parks and State Parks
 - Commercially-operated Cross Country ski areas
 - Some USFS roads are appropriate destinations when closed in winter
- Party size:
 - Minimum party size is 3 (safety)
 - Maximum party size is 12 (agency rules) unless lower limits apply.
- If posted on the website and led within these rules, the Mountaineers provides you and your participants with liability protection (given that you are not grossly negligent)

Mountaineer's Difficulty Ratings



Difficulty (Route)

	Rating	Mileage	Elevation Gain	Effort	Skills
N1	Nordic Basic	4-8 mi	minimal	Easy	Beginner
N2	Nordic Advanced Basic	6-10 mi	500-1,000 ft	Moderate	Balance, kick & glide, snowplow, braking
N3	Nordic Intermediate	7-12 mi	1,000-1,500 ft	Strenuous	N2 skills plus kick turn, traverse & side slipping
N4	Nordic Advanced	>12 mi	>1,500 ft	Very strenuous	N3 skills plus reliable turns & control

Leader Rating

Easy

Moderate

Challenging

Rate trips conservatively, based on the average casual skier....not based on how easy it would be for YOU.

Regardless of the rating, once on the trail you must manage your trip for the success of the slowest/least skilled participant.

Leader Checklist

1. Before the trip
2. At the meeting place
3. At the trailhead
4. On the trail
5. In case of emergency
6. After the trip

Before the Trip (2 -3 weeks)

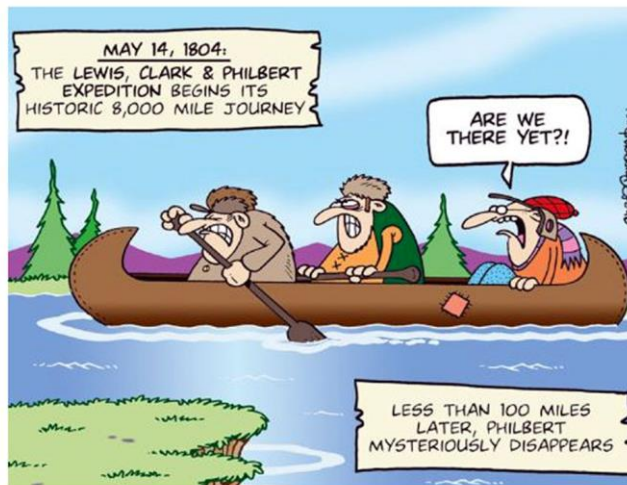
- Choose a safe destination given the conditions
- Post the ski trip on the website, with clear/concise description of the route, difficulty rating, pace, hazards, physical and gear requirements, as well as cost for trail pass
 - This detail is essential to the self-screening and preparedness of your participants and avoiding issues on the trip
 - Include some highlights e.g., stunning views, as well as items that increase the degree of difficulty such as hills, trails without regular grooming or only groomed for snowmachines

Choosing a Destination: Advice

- Avoid snowmobile trails on weekends and holidays. They can be crowded and loud, making it hard to lead a pleasant/safe trip.
- Be aware of changing condition and have a back up plan. What will you do if it snows 2 feet and the trails aren't groomed overnight? How about if it rains the prior day and the trails freeze overnight?
- Avalanche dangers are red/high everywhere?

Before the Trip (3 – 7 days)

- Check roster – screen participants for conditioning, gear, and experience to be safe and have fun given the route and planned pace
 - You have the right and obligation to remove someone if they are not prepared for a safe trip



Screening Applicants



Most problems on ski trips reflect poor match of participant capabilities/interests with the planned activity.

- Set expectations with clear activity descriptions and pre-trip communications - help participants self-screen
- If your trip requires certain skills and/or conditioning and you don't know a person on your roster:
 - Consider 'Leader Permission Only' option
 - Check their activity and course history on the website
 - Ask detailed but considerate questions to ensure that they are capable. (email, phone call)
 - *Recent activities they've been on? Who led? Pace? Types of skis they use? Style of skiing?*
 - *If they don't know their pace, ask how long it took them to complete a recent trip*

Screening Applicants (Cont'd)



It can be awkward and frustrating, but don't hide from this. It has a big effect on trip success and safety!

- *Be fair and as inclusive as possible. Can you find ways to accommodate a slower pace within your schedule? Can you enlist a co-leader to allow you to split the group?*
- *Be caring and respectful* – explain that you want to be sure everyone will have fun, be successful, and stay safe. Suggest an alternate activity if yours isn't a fit.
- Decide based on relevant facts, not demographics or hearsay.
- If a person never responds or isn't prepared, you have the right to turn them down or cancel them from your roster.

Before the Trip (3 – 7 days)

- Check the weather forecast, road and trail reports – adjust destination or gear and skill needs; change destination if needed
- Send out ‘hello skier’ email(s) to confirm meeting time & place, hazards and demands of the trip, review the route (and highlights), re-enforce gear requirements, and facilitate carpooling
 - Communication is key and always welcomed by participants. Invest the time to write a clear, well-structured note.

Leader Responsibilities: Ten Essentials

- The leader should always know how to use and carry all of the essentials – and some extras of especially critical items.
- Emphasize critical items in description and pre-trip communications – ***and check for them before you leave the meeting place (e.g. rain jacket, trail map, water, etc.)***
- Not required to check everyone for all ten essentials before every trip. Teach and lead by example, but don't be more rigid than the circumstances require for safety.
 - *If someone shows up without a piece of critical gear, see if someone else can share or decide if it's truly essential before leaving someone behind. That could be the last Mountaineers trip they choose to take. Be a teacher – help them succeed.*

Leader Responsibilities: Ski Gear/Repair



- The leader should always remind participants to check their gear before the trip. Bindings and boots should be compatible. Skis should be waxed with proper wax in advance, if needed. All gear should be in good condition
- Make sure that your emergency kit is prepared for winter. Do you have the items you would need to repair a binding or pole in the middle of a trip?
- Additional leader or group gear items for a winter trip could include: full-length sleeping pad (in case of injury), hot water or the ability to make hot water (combat hypothermia), extra hand warmers, heavier duty bivy sack

Leader Responsibilities: Carpooling



- Liability risks mean leaders and staff *CANNOT assign or require* carpools.
- Leaders *CAN encourage* carpooling and *facilitate* by sharing contact info (if authorized by member – check & respect privacy settings on profile)
- Willing drivers are a **precious** resource.
 - Remind people that it's an important courtesy to reimburse their driver. You can suggest a common reimbursement rate (\$0.12/mi in Foothills) and factor in Sno-Park passes (> 100/year for a groomed pass)
 - Tell participants the round-trip mileage to trailhead



Leader Responsibilities: Winter Carpooling



- Do you need a Sno Park Pass?
- Drivers must have the ability to transport skis and poles, potentially drive through poor conditions (AWD or chains—have they installed the chains before?) and be comfortable in those conditions
- If you don't get enough drivers, you might need to drop people from the roster. **Recruit drivers early in the process.**
- Consider canceling or rescheduling the trip if conditions could be unsafe.
- Extra important in the winter: make sure all the drivers can start their cars and get out of the parking lot before you leave. Think about the return drive and conditions as you set turn around times.



Leader Responsibilities: Youth



- Youth:
 - Special requirements for leaders and supervision for anyone under 18 (applies even with their parents on the trip)
 - <https://www.mountaineers.org/youth/volunteer-with-youth>

At the Meeting Place

- Mountaineers legal responsibility starts at the trailhead – participants' are responsible to get themselves there
- Be sure that everyone has directions to the same trailhead and the right permits!
- Check the roster – make sure everyone is accounted for
- Check for essential equipment before people leave their vehicles and switch to carpools!

At The Trailhead



- Begin by emphasizing that Mountaineers travel as a group – we will make decisions as a group if possible, but as the leader you reserve the right to make the call for safety
- Ask for a volunteer to be first-aid leader and sweep
 - Trip leader and first-aid leader should be different so you can manage a crisis
 - Explain what that person's responsibilities are
- Review the map – route, junctions, hazards, handrails, rest stops, water sources, lunch, turnaround time (and stick to it!)
- ***YOU ARE NOT A TOUR GUIDE! Each person is responsible to know how to get back to the trailhead if they get lost!!***



At The Trailhead (Cont'd)



- Communicate explicit expectations about:
 - How you intend to manage the pace, when and where to wait for the group to catch up
 - Procedure for 'bio breaks'
 - ***Safety first! Will turn around if you judge conditions to be unsafe.***
 - Encourage communication of safety concerns, any illness or injury as you go along – why this is so important
 - Explain everyone's responsibility to one another as part of a Mountaineers group. ***We all finish together and watch out for each other!***
- Get this communication right and you will avoid many common issues on the trail!***



During The Trip

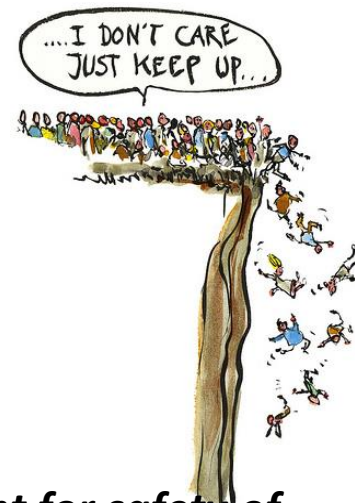
- Manage the pace for safety and morale of everyone in the group
 - Decide based on experience, conditions and trail hazards whether to keep the group together or let them spread out. Always maintain line of sight.
 - YOU are responsible for safety. If someone pushes hard or gets frustrated, bring it back to everyone's responsibility to the whole group.
 - Participants should wait for the leader at all junctions, significant stream crossings or hazards.
- Stay vigilant for participant, weather, or route issues. Stop and help struggling participants.
 - Look for fatigue clues and adjust as needed.

Lead for the whole group's success! Don't go beyond the capabilities of the weakest or least skilled members.

During The Trip (Cont'd)



- If conditions change or the route proves more difficult than the weakest member can complete safely, ***find a safer alternative or turn around.***
 - Lead the trip you posted.
 - Gather the facts, listen, discuss alternatives, but also be decisive and confident. Explain your rationale and relate it to the safety of the group.
 - Draw out the quiet people. Watch for the 'herd mentality'.
 - "Majority rule" or consensus can work in some situations, but not all.



Don't be afraid to make an unpopular call if YOU believe it's important for safety of the group! YOU are responsible for the group's SAFE RETURN to the trailhead!

A Few Leadership Basics

Good Leaders Create Good Participants



- Healthy Communication & Clear Expectation Setting
 - Open, honest and humble communication (in both directions)
 - Clear expectations pre-empt most (non-emergency) issues
- Expedition Behavior: NOLS concept of group oriented behavior
 - Care for the group & Care for yourself
 - “How can I support you?”
- Inclusive Decision Making
 - Leverage group’s knowledge and concerns
 - Engaged participants “own” the trip success
- Be Engaged with your Group!



Leadership Styles

- **Pacesetting** – “Here we go! Follow-me like this!”
- **Authoritative** – “I’m the expert and this is what we should do”
- **Coaching** – “Try this approach”
- **Democratic** – “What do you think?”

No one right style. You will have a “default” style, but use them all as needed. Think about these and how/when to use them to maximize group success.

Conflict Management

Always assume good intent!

- Be proactive
- Don't put someone on the spot or humiliate
- Stay calm and manage your emotional state
- Start by building a common bridge
- Listen to their issue/concern with an open mind
- Reflect their comments back
- If you can accommodate safely, do so



Crisis Management

- Prevention is the best approach!
- Stay calm and keep the group calm! Don't make the situation worse!
- Crisis Management Cycle
 - Assess the Situation
 - Make a Plan
 - Implement the Plan
 - Re-assess
- Maintain focus on the big picture
- Keep the group together



In Case of Emergency

Be prepared with basic skills and knowledge for how to handle basic first aid and other emergencies in the field.

- Mountaineers emergency procedures – ‘Seven Steps’ – <https://www.mountaineers.org/about/safety/safety-web-pages/during-an-emergency>
- Trail Emergency Preparedness evening class (free to Foothills leaders!) and Wilderness First Aid (WFA) classes available
- Complete incident report when you close your trip

Putting It Into Practice

Foothills Cross Country Ski Leaders



Scenarios

Injuries or trip problems often result from system failures or leader decisions that can be examined and addressed to prevent recurrence.

- Next we'll explore in greater depth how to respond to some common 'judgment' situations using what you've learned today
- Discussion groups with a facilitator
- Discuss your scenarios, choose one for report out to the group
- Listen, consider and take notes from the other groups' report outs



Next Steps

**Foothills Cross Country Ski
Leaders**

Next Steps

- Leaders must be approved on the leader roster for a sponsoring ski committee to post and lead a trip.
 - You can lead for any Mountaineers branch that has a ski committee, regardless of your 'home branch'.
 - Select a committee from the branch near your home if you want to participate in committee activities, events and local leader training; otherwise choose the committee that runs the activities you most identify with.
 - The branch ski committee you plan to lead for must approve your application and qualifications and put you on their roster.

When you're ready....



- Arrange your mentored ski trip with an experienced Mountaineers leader
 - *Email your committee chair for help to find a mentor,*
 - *or you can choose any experienced leader you are comfortable with (ok'd with committee in advance)*
 - *You will post the activity, do all the pre-trip planning and communication, manage the roster, run a safe and enjoyable trip, and close the trip afterwards – your mentor is there to answer questions and provide help.*

And Finally.....



- If you need additional training or experience, we'll work with you to get it
- If you are a new Mountaineers member with mostly outside experience, you'll be asked to participate in a few Mountaineers Cross Country ski trips before becoming a Mountaineers ski leader.
- Even if you are already a Mountaineers climb or scramble leader, we'll ask that you do your first Cross Country ski lead with a mentor because of the very different pool of people and challenges you may encounter.

Resources



- Sno-Park Passes: <https://parks.state.wa.us/130/Winter-recreation>
- Northwest Avalanche Center (NWAC): <https://www.nwac.us/>
- Avalanche Awareness Seminars at The Mountaineers:
https://www.mountaineers.org/activities/activities#b_start=0&c4=Avalanche+Safety&c16=Seminar
- Road conditions on WA passes: <https://www.wsdot.com/traffic/passes/default.aspx>
- Central Cascades Winter Recreation Council (trail maps, grooming conditions, information about passes and Sno-Parks):
<https://www.snowrec.org/>
- Information on different types of cross-country ski gear: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/crosscountry-ski-touring-gear.html>

A close-up photograph of pine needles heavily coated in white frost or snow, creating a dense, textured background.

QUESTIONS?

Acknowledgements



Seminar Materials developed by Danielle Graham in 2018

Current version: November 16, 2021