

New Hike-Backpack Leaders Workshop

Foothills Hiking-Backpacking Committee

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New Hike-Backpack Leaders Workshop

Objectives of this seminar

- Know the kinds of trips you want to lead, and how to attract participants who have the same interests and capabilities.
- Be prepared to carry out the roles and expectations of a hike or backpack leader for the Mountaineers.
- Be prepared and confident to handle common challenges you will encounter leading groups on the trail.
- Be ready to take the next steps to become a hike or backpack leader for the Mountaineers.

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Why become a Mountaineers activity leader?

- Choose your own destinations, hike dates and types-pace of trips.
- Teach and assist less experienced people to experience the wilderness safely...*pay it forward.*
- Learn how to lead people and effectively handle a range of challenging situations--skills that carry over into other aspects of life.

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Who do you want to be as a leader?

- Post trips that will give you lasting satisfaction and enjoyment.
 - Workouts? Photography? Naturalist? Social? Summits?
 - After-hours? Mid-week? Hike with dogs? Backpacking?
 - Long, steep, challenging? Or leisurely & relaxed?
 - Teaching? Conservation? Youth and families?
- Describe your planned trip clearly so that participants can self-select based on similar interests.
- Be open to broadening your range of offerings over time – will broaden the rewards!

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What is a Mountaineers “hike”?

- Club-sponsored walking trips > 2 miles
- Restricted to trails/roads (maintained or unmaintained) with some exceptions:
 - Snow OK unless potential for uncontrolled slide
 - Off-trail OK unless unreasonably hazardous terrain
 - Depends on the skills of each particular group
- 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 negligent)

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Role of the Leader

- Plan, organize and run fun and safe activities
- Authority and accountability for the SAFE RETURN of your groups. **Getting your group back safely is your top priority!**
- Ensure that your participants are capable and prepared to succeed on the posted itinerary.
- Be a positive, responsible role model of courteous trail behavior and 'leave no trace'
- *You are the face of the Mountaineers, a 110 year old brand. Leave your participants feeling great about their experience!*

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Requirements for Hike & Backpack Leaders

- Current member, at least 18 years old
- Caring, service-focused, respectful, empathetic, safety-oriented
- **Must demonstrate working competence** in:
 - 1: Group Leadership: Trip planning, group leadership and communication
 - 2: Basic hiking/backpacking skills: Including gear, ten essentials, trail and camp skills
 - 3: Navigation: Use of map and tools to 'stay found'
 - 4: Mountain Safety Skills/Knowledge: Common hazards, how to recognize and avoid or mitigate them
 - 5: First Aid and Emergency Preparedness: Basics to handle common on-trail first aid and emergency situations
 - 6: Knowledge of Standards and Policies: Mountaineers and land management agencies

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Requirements for Hike & Backpack Leaders

Can show **working competence** through:

- Application (required)
- Completion of this seminar and a mentored hike or backpack (required in most cases)
- Other Mountaineers leader badges or group leadership experience with other organizations
- Course completion/certifications (such as Red cross first aid, "Staying Found" or Wilderness Navigation class, Wilderness First Aid or Trail Emergency Preparedness class)
- Take-home quiz or conversation/interview with committee chair

More about next steps at the end of the seminar

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Hike Leader Responsibilities: Leader Checklist

- Before the hike
- At the meeting place
- At the trailhead
- On the trail
- In case of emergency
- After the trip

Review the handout and be familiar with the expectations at each stage. We will cover a subset here.

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Leader Responsibilities: Before the trip:

2-3 weeks in advance (or more if needed):

- Research trail conditions, recent trip reports to select a destination
- Identify any reservations or permits required. Make arrangements for your group or tell your group what they need to do. Arrange paid shuttles if needed.
- Post the hike on the website, with clear and concise description of the route, difficulty rating, pace, hazards, physical and gear requirements.
- The detail you provide in the activity description about the demands and risks of the trip are essential to the self-screening and preparedness of your participants.**

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Mountaineers Difficulty Ratings

Difficulty (Route)

Easy (E)	Up to 8 mi. RT with <1,200 ft elevation gain
Moderate	Up to 12 mi. RT or 1,200 – 2,500 ft elevation gain
Strenuous (S)	Up to 14 mi. RT or 2,500 – 3,500 ft elevation gain
Very Strenuous (VS)	Over 14 miles RT or over 3,500 ft elevation gain

Pace (How leader plans to cover the route)

Easy	Less than 1.5 mph (average with rest stops)
Moderate	1.5-2 mph average
Challenging	>2 mph average

Rate each trip conservatively, based on the average casual hiker....not based on how easy it would be for YOU.

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

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Leader Responsibilities: Before the trip (continued)

1 week to 3 days in advance:

- Check roster – screen participants to be sure that everyone is conditioned and experienced to be safe and have fun on your hike at the planned pace
- Check the weather forecast, road and trail reports – adjust destination or gear and skill needs; change destination if needed
- Send out 'hello hiker' email to confirm meeting time & place, hazards and demands of the trip, gear requirements, facilitate carpooling

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Before the Trip: Screening Participants

Most problems on hikes or backpacks 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?
 - If they don't know their pace, ask how long it took them to complete a recent trip

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Before the Trip: Screening Participants

- **It can be awkward and frustrating, but don't hide from this. Can have 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? (Co-leader?)*
- **Be caring and respectful**—explain that you want to be sure everyone will have fun and be successful. Suggest an alternate activity if yours isn't a fit
- Decide based on relevant facts, not demographics or hearsay.
 - Even if past leaders have reported problems, give the person the benefit of the doubt – ask what happened, be objective based on the facts now. *Stand in their shoes.*
- If a person never responds, you have the right to turn them down or cancel them from your roster.

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Hike Leader Responsibilities: Pre-trip preparation – The Ten Essentials

1. Navigation (map & compass)
2. Sun protection (sunglasses & sunscreen)
3. Insulation (extra clothing)
4. Illumination (headlamp/flashlight)
5. First-aid supplies
6. Fire (waterproof matches/lighter + flammable material)
7. Repair kit and tools
8. Nutrition (extra food)
9. Hydration (extra water)
10. Emergency shelter

Why Carry All This Stuff?
 * Stay safe and well even if conditions change
 * Get back safely to the trailhead after dark, or even spend a night out, if you had to because of being lost or injured

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Leader Responsibilities:
Pre-trip preparation – The Ten Essentials

- The leader should always 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**
- It's 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.*

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Leader Responsibilities:
At the Meeting Place, At the Trailhead

- Be sure that everyone has directions to the same trailhead, and the right permits!
- Check the roster – make sure everyone has a ride
- Introductions
- Ask for a volunteer to be first-aid leader, sweep – explain what that person's role is
- Describe the route and trail conditions, hazards to watch out for
- Review the map – route, junctions, handrails, rest stops, water sources, lunch, camp, turnaround time

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Leader Responsibilities:
At the Trailhead (continued)

- 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, needs, any illness or injury as you go along – why this is so important to everyone's safety

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Leader Responsibilities: 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
 - YOU are responsible for safety. Don't back away from doing the safe thing just because someone pushes hard or gets frustrated. Bring it back to everyone's responsibility to the whole group.
 - ALWAYS require that participants wait for the leader at all junctions and significant stream crossings or hazards.
- Stay vigilant for participant, weather, route issues. Stop and help struggling participants.
- **Don't take your group beyond the capabilities of the weakest or least skilled members.**

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Leader Responsibilities: During the Trip (continued)

- If conditions change or the route proves more difficult than the weakest member can complete safely, find a safer alternative or turn around.
 - Avoid 'mission creep'. *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'.
- Don't be afraid to make an unpopular call if YOU believe it's important for safety of the group!**
- "Majority rule" or consensus can work in some situations but not all.

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Leader Responsibilities: Know basic navigation to Stay Found

- Always carry a good topo map of your trail - know how to orient to north, read the scale, lines and symbols
- Review route in advance – note junctions, handrails, water; expected time to reach key points; lunch, turnaround time
- Review the map regularly as you go along to "read" the terrain, route and distance you've traveled
- Learn how to use watch, compass, altimeter with your map to figure out where you are
- DON'T RELY ON GPS ALONE. Batteries, satellite links can fail.

Check out our hands-on 'Staying Found' navigation class for hikers and backpackers! **Free for Foothills leaders!**

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Leader Responsibilities:
Emergency Preparedness

Before the trip:

- Leave your itinerary with a trusted friend or family member, along with when you'll be back and what to do if you don't return by that time.
- Bring emergency contact numbers for your participants
- Carry emergency procedures with you; adapt based on the particular hazards of a given trip
- Bring along an accident report form and pencil
- Check your first aid kit – be sure it's stocked
- Plan out your emergency communication options

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Leader Responsibilities:
Emergency Preparedness

Scene Management:

1. STOP. Stay calm, get the group calm.
2. Protect yourself and your group members.
Allow no new victims!!!
3. Reestablish primary leader and first aid leader
4. Survey the scene (*What happened? Remaining hazards or new ones? Other injuries/issues?*)
5. Give everyone something to do.

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Leader Responsibilities:
Emergency Preparedness

Provide patient care / First Aid *within your level of training!*

1. Get consent to help the patient. (unconscious=consent)
2. Use protective barriers (gloves, breathing device)
3. Check the **ABCs** and address life-threatening problems
 - **Airway:** Is the patient's airway clear?
 - **Breathing:** Is the patient breathing?
 - **Circulation:** Is there life-threatening bleeding?
4. Do a secondary survey and record patient information (use **Accident Report Form**)
5. Stabilize patient and scene *before* sending for help

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Leader Responsibilities: Emergency Preparedness

Plan Your Evacuation

- How are you going to safely get help?
 - Consider urgency, distance, terrain, group strength, route, communication options.
- Write down and share the plan with everyone.
- Don't let anyone leave unless you've assigned them to go get help.
 - Evacuating a person can take multiple people!
- Never leave someone alone or send someone out alone.

After any rescue is initiated, contact the Mountaineers via emergency line: 206-521-6030

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Leader Responsibilities: Lost Hiker?

Keep group in view and count noses regularly to prevent lost hikers!! But if you lose someone:

- Determine when and where hiker was last seen.
- Plan a search – review where searchers will go on the map (everyone must have a map!)
- Don't send anybody out alone; nobody should be waiting alone while group searches. People should bring their pack and gear.
- Designate a time and place to reassemble all search groups
- If hiker is not found, contact local search and rescue via 911.

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Leader Responsibilities: Emergency Preparedness

Review the '7 Steps for Emergency Preparedness' handout from Freedom of the Hills.

Check out our "Trail Emergency Preparedness" class for hikers and backpackers! *Free for Foothills leaders!*

- Also very valuable to take a Red Cross First Aid-CPR class – often held at local fire stations, inexpensive
- To go further, the Mountaineers offer multiple sessions of the 16-hour 'Wilderness First Aid' class

Report any accident or important safety incident in the post-trip safety report – encourage participants to provide feedback.

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Leadership Decision Making Discussion

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
- Break into groups of 3-5 people plus facilitator
- You will be given a scenario – discuss, answer the questions, be ready for informal report out to the group
- Listen, consider and take notes from the other groups' report outs

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Special note on 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 hiker)
- 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 (12c/mi in Foothills)
 - Tell hikers the round-trip mileage to trailhead.

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Youth, Pets

- Special requirements for leaders, supervision for anyone under 18 (even with their parents on the trip).
 - For more information: www.mountaineers.org/forms/working_with_youth_faq.pdf
- Hikes with dogs:
 - Establish this in advance as part of trip posting – don't 'spring' it on the other participants after they've registered.
 - Follow posted trail rules!!
 - Don't bring dogs in active wildlife areas.
 - Be sensitive to dogs in camps with other people.

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Next steps to become a hike or backpack leader

- Review all the class reference materials
- Indicate your interest on signup sheet at the back
- Submit application form – find it at link sent with pre-class materials (Foothills Hiking Committee site)
- We'll work with you to arrange the appropriate next steps in a timely fashion.
 - *We can help you find a mentor for your mentored hike or backpack, or you can choose any experienced leader you are comfortable with (ok'd with committee in advance)*
 - *If you need additional training or experience, we'll work with you to help you get it*
 - *Foothills branch members who are active hike or backpack leaders have access to free or subsidized 'core-skills' training*

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Next steps to become a hike or backpack leader (continued)

- Leaders must be on the leader roster for a sponsoring hike/backpack committee to post and lead a trip.
 - Select a hiking committee 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.
- You can request additional mentoring or post hikes with a co-leader at any time.
- Backpack leading has special skill requirements and demands.
 - We recommend becoming a Mountaineers hike leader before leading backpacks
 - A mentored backpack will usually be required

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