**Foothills Hiking and Backpacking – Leader Resources**

**Recommended Leader Checklists**

Use these at your option to avoid forgetting anything important!

**Week Before the Trip:**

* Check your roster, review to be sure that everyone appears to be capable of completing the route safely at the posted pace.
* Check DOT website for road closures/delays

       Call or check land manager websites for updates on road access, trail conditions, blowdowns, stream crossings, anticipated campsites, insects, water availability, etc.

* Check weather forecast
* Notify participants of any significant changes in the trip or gear/skills requirements
* Check on everyone’s plans for how they will get to the meeting place
* Provide Gaia GPS route and/or Caltopo printable map of planned route
* Remind everyone about [Covid-19 Code of Conduct and expectations](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1LGxLpIFFz5VaOCLWB8TNfykYjb1U7xumoaGWTraTOu8/edit?usp=sharing)

**Day before the Trip:**

        Provide all drivers with link to google map location of the trailhead.

        Print out trip roster with participant contact info, emergency contacts, high level overview of the route, and [Mountaineers emergency phone number](https://www.mountaineers.org/about/safety/safety-web-pages/mountaineers-emergency-line)

* Check weather forecast – make any necessary last-minute gear and route adjustments for safety.
* Remind everyone about requirement for masks, hand sanitizer; if they or close contact are showing any symptoms, stay home.

**At the Initial Meeting Place (such as Park and Ride):**

* Arrive early
* Bring trip roster, contact info, directions to trailhead, weather reports
* Introduce yourself as leader, check off names of hikers on roster.
* Make sure everyone has a ride; note who is in what car
* Give driving directions to drivers, exchange cell phone numbers among drivers (in case someone doesn’t show up at trailhead, or to coordinate pit stops along the way)
* Review and check for required gear (better to find out something is missing here than at the trailhead).

**At the Trailhead:**

* Remind everyone to stay 6 feet apart and wear their masks whenever they must pass someone closer than 6 feet.
* Introduce yourselves
* Ask for a volunteer with first-aid training/experience to be your first-aid leader. Review their role, give them a chance to say a word or two.
  + Ask participants to inform first-aid leader of relevant medical conditions in private.
  + Ask participants to share with the group if they have any life-threatening conditions that may arise – location of critical meds including epi-pen if any.
  + Find out where each person is carrying their first-aid kit.
* Ask someone to be your sweep – explain their role and their responsibility to take care of the people at the back of the group. (Plan to trade this role through the day.)
* Begin to build ‘expedition culture’ – explain that Mountaineers groups support each other and help each other succeed – success is everyone having a good time and getting home safely, not necessarily reaching the destination.
* Let them know that safety is the key and you may turn the group around if the conditions aren’t safe.
* Review the map and plan for the day. Remind everyone of approximate distance and elevation gain to expect at various points. Clarify distance between reliable water sources!
* Communicate explicit expectations about:
  + How you intend to manage the pace –“staying together” rules
  + Party separation procedure
  + Safety first! Will turn around if unsafe
* Final check of critical gear, water supply.
* Encourage communication of concerns – begin to build emotional safety by being humble.
* Designate front guard, sweep. (good to have first aid skills at both ends)
* Remind drivers to post passes, hide valuables.

**On the Trail:**

* Stop in 5-15 minutes for a clothing & pack adjustment, then periodically thereafter based on how your slower participants are doing.
  + At rest stops allow slower hikers to actually get a rest
* Manage your group’s pace for safety and morale (See options below). At the very least, gather people at junctions, water crossings or every 15-30 mins between.
* Regularly reinforce ‘staying found’ with the map.
* Reinforce “buddy system” for party separations – should be an absolute requirement.
* Encourage regular hydration and snacking. Explicitly ask about foot issues at every stop.
* Encourage proactive communication about safety and comfort needs.  If hot spots on the feet, stop before you have a blister!  If hurting or injured, stop and ask for help!  If pace is too fast, slow down and speak up!  If uncomfortable with a snow, rock or water crossing, ask for help!  Stop to remove a layer or slow down before you are sweat-soaked.  Add warm clothing if you are cold.
* When you cross a good water source, ask if anyone needs to replenish. Leave enough time for water treatment before setting out again.
* Leader in the back vs. leader at the front
  + Regardless, keep a close eye on how each person is doing. May require moving back and forth in the group through the day.
  + Get a volunteer to ‘sweep’ and ‘front lead’ when you are at the other end, and ensure they understand your expectations.
  + Sweep should always stay at the end of the group and watch out for the morale, safety and proper route selection of the slower contingent.  Rotate this role through the trip so that it doesn’t become a downer for them to always be at the end, get the last pick of tent spots, etc.

**Vigilance and Decision Making:**

* Stay vigilant for participant, weather, route issues through the day especially toward the end. Stop and help struggling participants in discrete, considerate way.
  + Don’t take your group beyond the capabilities of the weakest members.
* If conditions become threatening and/or route is more difficult than expected, make a decision with focus on safety of the entire group.
  + Involve the group in decisions if situation allows. Draw out quiet people.
  + Don’t be afraid to make an unpopular call if YOU believe it’s important for safety of the group!

**Some Leader Options to Manage Pace for Safety**

* On certain routes (unclear trails, hazardous conditions), you may require that the group stays close together. Also keep the group closer before lunch and when nearing camp.
* Ask participants to identify a ‘buddy’ and commit to keep track of each other – don’t end up hiking alone or let someone else hike alone. (Three is even better!)
* Always tell someone if you’re leaving the trail for a party separation, and ask them to wait until you catch up again.
* If you get far enough ahead that you can’t see the others, stop and wait until the rest of the group is in sight.  Consider adjusting your pace a bit (vs. ‘sprint and wait’).
* Stop and wait for the leader at all junctions and significant stream crossings or any point of ~danger or confusion (use very clear language here!)
* If no junctions or crossings, wait every half-hour or so.
* Remind everyone to look out for each other.  Could suggest a buddy system – participants self-select buddies.  Instruct everyone to let someone know when they need a party separation or photo stop; that other person should move on a polite distance and wait for the person to return.
* Ask if anyone wants to share gear to save weight.
* Check that permits are properly displayed, that vehicles are locked and everyone has their keys (good to have an extra set somewhere and tell others where they are).
* Consider appointing a sweep aka rear guard, preferably with first aid skills.

**At Camp:**

* Oversee, reinforce ‘leave-no-trace’ camp setup, food prep, storage, cleanup practices.
  + If camping at a lake or otherwise posted, no campfires.
* Camp 200’ or more from lake or river – avoid soap or food debris in the water.
* Find toilet area away from water and camp, ability to dig a deep enough cathole; reminder to wash hands or use sanitizer every time.
* Don’t take up more area than we need as a group, don’t move rocks or dig trenches.
* Eat away from tents; proper food storage
* Offer non-judgmental gear review discussions for opportunities for improve satisfaction, reduce pack weight. Encourage sharing of info among participants.
* Help to draw shy people into the group – make the group time fun.
* Discuss when everyone needs to be ready to start walking the next morning – ask if everyone is set up with a wake-up alarm
* In the morning: review the day’s route on the map, remind everyone of distance to first water and other checkpoints, check for left-behind gear.

**After the Trip:**

* Ensure everybody has returned to trailhead and has a ride back to their vehicle.
* Make sure all cars start before you leave the parking area.
* Update your roster, enter volunteer hours and participant notes, submit any near miss or incident reports, and close the activity.
  + First go through the roster and cancel anyone who didn’t come. If you choose No Show the person will get an automatic reminder email from The Mountaineers encouraging them not to do this! No Shows typically go to someone who didn’t contact you and didn’t show up, though someone who bails and texts you the morning of the trip can also get this rating.
  + Scroll down and choose the Trip Result, then SAVE.
  + Go back up and add volunteer hours for you and any co-leader(s).
  + Enter Participant Notes to recognize a participant who is a great group member or a future leader prospect, or to share notes on a participant who was not prepared, who behaved badly, or who couldn’t keep up the posted pace. Be constructive. Other leaders can see these notes.
* File an online Trip Report by opening the Route-Place, scrolling down to the Blue admin bar and clicking on Trip Reports. Fill in your report including detailed trail conditions, route-finding challenges, camp and water locations, mis-located trailheads, etc.
* After you get home, you’re encouraged to send a followup email thanking your participants for a great trip, and here you can also encourage a promising leader prospect to apply to become a leader. Send them our [New Leader application](https://www.mountaineers.org/volunteer/volunteer-with-us/leader-applications-folder/hike-or-backpack-leader-application) and document summarizing the [steps to become a hike or backpack leader.](https://www.mountaineers.org/locations-lodges/foothills-branch/committees/foothills-hiking-backpacking/foothills-hiking-committee/how-to-become-a-hike-or-backpack-leader-for-the-mountaineers/at_download/file)