

NBATC Guidelines for Volunteer Hike Leaders

The following Guidelines & Responsibilities package provides suggestions that will help you lead successful hikes and should be considered the NBATC hike leader standard for all weekday & weekend club sponsored hikes. Please review this helpful tool prior to each hike.

General Policy

One of NBATC's goals is to promote the appreciation of nature through the scheduling and sponsorship of work and recreational hikes.

Eligibility: All leaders of official NBATC hikes must be members of the club and in good standing.

Cost of Hikes: There will be no cost for participation on club hikes except for transportation paid to the drivers of privately owned vehicles and any entrance fees identified in the hike description. The carpool fee is listed in the hike description and is based on total round trip mileage.

Emergency Procedures: All Hike Leaders should carry a first aid kit and the completed Hike Report Form with emergency contact information for each hiker. Other recommended items to carry include a cell phone, flashlight/headlamp, insect repellent, maps, whistle. IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY: Call 911.

Maximum Number of Hikers: The maximum number of hikers in one group in Wilderness areas is 10. For all other hikes the maximum single group size is 25. If the number of hikers exceeds these limits, split them into two groups and stagger their starting times so that they will be hiking at least 15-minutes apart -or- hike in reverse directions on loop hikes -or- use key exchange hikes.

NOTE: The Hike Leader always has the authority to lower the maximum number of people in their hiking group.

Hike Rerouting: Hike Leaders may reroute a scheduled hike at their discretion if there is some justification that makes this action advisable. This may occur before or during the hike.

Hike Cancellation: If a Hike Leader needs to cancel a hike for any reason, they should notify everyone who has registered.

(October 2023)

Hike Leader Responsibilities

Prior to the Day of the Hike:

1. Scout the Hike: Hike leaders should be familiar with the trail on which the hike will take place. They should have walked the trail in the past to be sure that they know the trailhead location, the availability of parking, the location of intersecting trails or other possible points of confusion and the general level of difficulty of the hike. In Addition: It is highly desirable that a Hike Leader checks current trail conditions a week or so in advance of the hike. This may be especially true at certain water crossing points or during the winter where ice may linger in the shadows well after ice/snow has dissipated at lower elevations.
2. Check the Weather Forecast: Be aware of forecasted weather conditions which could influence the safety of the hikers or the necessity of protective clothing or hiking gear.
3. If hiking from the BR Parkway, know the parkway closure status. Even during good weather, road closures due to maintenance activities are possible. (Go to our website: nbatc.org (Click: "BR Parkway Road Closures" on the bottom/left margin of the NBATC opening page.) Scroll down, after the Road Closure Page opens.
4. If there are hikers you are not familiar with, assess their capabilities through a phone conversation. Ask questions about their hiking experience recently: distance hiked, terrain, what pace are they comfortable hiking? If you determine your hike will be too strenuous for them, suggest another hike or joining one of the other weekday hiking groups. If you do have a hiker that cannot keep up you may have to ask an experienced hiker to accompany them back to the trailhead. Feel free to discuss this type of situation with an Outings Committee member.
5. Ensure that the transportation needs are met. This may include having enough drivers for carpools to a single trailhead or run-around and key exchange hikes.
6. Send a pre-hike email on the day/evening before the hike to every person that signed up. This will verify where each hiker will meet the group and let hikers know if everyone is present before leaving the meeting place.

At the Carpool Meeting Point or Trailhead:

1. Meet and register all hikers on the Hike Report Form. Explain the Responsibility for Safety paragraph and ensure that all hikers sign the form and enter their emergency contact information. This is a very important form in case of an emergency and from a liability standpoint for the club & hike leader.
2. Late Arrivals: Before Leaving, wait 10-minutes past the scheduled meet time for late arrivals that have reserved a place on the hike.
3. First Aid: Ensure there is a first aid kit for each hiking group. Before the hike begins, the hike leader should try to determine if a hiker has any health or medical conditions that could be a concern.
4. Is Everyone Ready for the Hike? Adequate Water, Food/Snacks, Proper Footwear & Clothing for the Conditions.
5. Exercise Leader Authority: Based on the hike leader's best judgement, determine if each hiker is physically able to complete the hike. The hike leader has the authority and responsibility to deny a hiker the right to participate on the hike.
6. Brief Hikers on the Following: Provide a Hike Overview - Show a Trail Map (if you have one) or 88 Miler Map, then explain the hike route, key intersections, hike terrain & scenic views. Review Safety Precautions & Emergency Procedures, Hike Restrictions, Leave No Trace Protocol and possible dangers from dehydration, bees, ticks, snakes, bears & nettles.
7. Let Someone Know Where You Have Placed: (1) your First Aid Kit (2) the sign-up sheet with emergency contact info (3) your cell phone (4) your car keys (if you were a carpool driver).
8. Assign the "Sweep": Assign an experienced hiker to be the "sweep" (last person in the group). This person is responsible for spotting disoriented hikers, keeping track of the hikers in the group and making sure no one is left behind.
9. Key Exchange Hikes: Each key exchange hiking group will have a hike leader and a sweep.

During The Hike:

1. Take Leader Actions: Be the lead person at the front of the hiking group. If leading at the front becomes inadvisable for some reason (i.e. assistance is required for a struggling hiker), the lead should be given to some other reliable hiker with knowledge of the remaining trail.
2. Maintain Control of the Hiking Group: (1) It is the hike leader's responsibility to keep the group intact between the leader and the sweep. Stop at every trail junction and road crossing -or- every 30-minutes to make sure all hikers are still with the group. (2) Encourage hikers to hydrate, especially in hot/humid conditions. (3) If a hiker insists on hiking in front of the group that hiker may be informed that they are on their own. They will no longer be considered as part of the hiking group and they assume all risk for their safe return to the trailhead.
3. If it is apparent that someone cannot keep up at a reasonable pace, it may be necessary to send them back to the trailhead with another hiker.
4. Watch for Lost Hikers: If a hiker is missing, the leader must initiate action to find the lost hiker(s).
5. In case of an Emergency: Call 911.

After The Hike:

1. Count Hikers: Ensure all hikers are accounted for before returning to the meeting place.
2. Find Any Missing Hikers: If any hikers are missing, the leader must initiate action to find them.
3. Make sure all vehicles can be started before leaving the parking area.
4. Complete and Submit the Hike Report Form: (1) Complete the remainder of the form, including the miles hiked and hike leader voluntary hours earned. (2) Email the Hike Report Form to Bret Boman: blboman@verizon.net -or- mail the form to NBATC, P.O. Box 3012, Lynchburg, VA 24503. (emailing the form is preferred). This is the club's legal record of who was on the hike and read (or had the opportunity to read) the Responsibility for Safety precautions.
5. Report Trail Conditions: Report needed trail maintenance -or- give an "all clear" report. Email this information promptly to: maint.report@nbatc.org