

A QUICK START GUIDE FOR NEW TRIP LEADERS

Introduction

After mulling it over for awhile, you've made the decision to become an ACC Trip Leader. Congratulations, and thank you on behalf of your Section. We know it's all a bit intimidating. We were there ourselves a few years ago. This section of the Trip Leader manual will lay out the steps involved in planning, organizing and running a typical club day trip - be it climbing, hiking, skiing, etc. Some trips will be more or less complicated than what is described here. For example, a return trip to a local climbing crag for the umpteenth time can be quite straight forward. Later, we'll provide the "fine print", such as details on club policies and standard practices. You can find activity-specific information for each category of club trip offered by ACC Ottawa in the companion Trip Leader Guidelines document. So, let's get started.

Trip Planning

- The first step is to come up with a trip concept. Make it an activity, location and route you are well familiar with. It is best to start with easy trips and work up to more adventuresome outings as you gain experience. Feel free to solicit ideas from and to bounce proposals off experienced Trip Leaders. They will be more than happy to assist. You may also be able to talk one of them into being your mentor while you learn the ropes.
- Select a date for the trip and, perhaps, an alternative in the advent of bad weather.
- Have a good idea of what you expect from participants in terms of fitness, experience, skill level, equipment, training, etc. Don't hesitate to seek advice from experienced leaders.
- Carefully consider the numbers of participants you will be comfortable leading on this venture. Small group sizes are more manageable in the beginning. Some activities have specific recommendations on group size (see the Trip Leader Guidelines). Additionally, some land managers such as national, provincial or state parks have group size limitations.
- Ensure you will have sufficient experienced assistants for the required "leader/participant" ratio, if guidelines specify this. Even if there is no specific guidance, it will be reassuring to have some experienced, familiar faces in the group.
- Consider enlisting the help of a co-leader. Many experienced Trip Leaders start from that point – getting a trusted co-leader on board – and then proceed from there.
- What essential items of personal and group gear will be appropriate? Do you anticipate using some of the [club gear](#)?
- Is there a need for pre-trip fitness or technical skill refresher training?
- Conceptualize how you would handle an accident. Can you expect cell phone coverage? If not, how would you handle communications in an emergency? Do you need to do some more research about the area of the proposed trip?
- Using previous e-letter entries as models, prepare and submit a trip notice to the appropriate Activity Coordinator. He or she will discuss details with you, perhaps suggest changes and, if your trip is accepted, publish the notice in the e-letter and on the web site.
- Depending on the novelty and complexity of the trip, anticipate a lot of email and phone enquiries from interested members once the event is publicized.

Screen Trip Participants

- Suitable screening of prospective participants has a big impact on the likelihood of success or problems in the field. As Trip Leader, you have full authority to screen participants as you see fit but must make decisions objectively and without personal bias.
- See [guidelines](#) for dealing with non-Section members, minors and other special cases.
- If the number of members interested in your trip begins to exceed your stated maximum, set up a waiting list. People can be fickle. Last minute changes are a common occurrence.

Event Co-ordination

- About 1-2 weeks in advance, send participants the trip details by email:
 - Event logistics i.e. meeting time & place, transportation, accommodation, meals, etc.
 - Gear, clothing and supplies appropriate for the trip
 - Include an e-copy of the waiver. Ask participants to read and sign it and bring their signed copy to the meeting place.
 - If the trip is in the US, remind participants to bring suitable identity documents.
- If appropriate, arrange to pick up whatever club gear you need. Check with the club Quartermaster or the leader who ran the last club trip. It may be necessary to resolve conflicts regarding the availability of club gear with other concurrent trips.
- In the week before the trip, monitor weather forecasts and then update participants:
 - Mid-week - update the weather forecast and give a reminder about the waiver.
 - 1-2 days before the trip - a final "GO, NO-GO" decision and any last minute details.
- Ensure a responsible person in town knows the destination and expected return time.

At the Meeting Place in Town

- Make introductions amongst the group.
- Ensure all participants read and sign the trip [waiver](#) prior to the trip. Collect and retain the signed waivers.
- Sort out car pooling, responsibility for club gear, need for specific items of personal gear.

At the Trailhead Parking Lot

- Check for stragglers.
- Communicate with participants: the route, what to expect, the anticipated finish time.
- Coordinate with assistant leaders about who's doing what.

At the Activity Location or Along the Route

- Brief participants on activity-specific safety hazards and safety procedures. For a climbing trip this would include areas of objective hazards where helmets are to be worn. For a hiking or skiing trip, it could include discussion of the route and the anticipated challenges. Explaining the "why" behind a desired course of action is always helpful.
- Engage other experienced participants to assist with supervising the activity. Don't lose sight of the big picture. You are responsible for overall supervision.
- Where circumstances permit, mentor less-experienced participants on proper technique.

- Don't get so focussed on your responsibilities that you forget that the purpose of the whole exercise is for everyone to have a good time. That includes you!

Wrapping up the Event

- By monitoring participants, weather, time of day and conditions, determine an appropriate time to wrap up the event.
- Leave the activity site or the route cleaner than found.

At the Trailhead Parking Lot

- Check for stragglers.
- Retrieve ALL the club gear while you have the group together. (Trying to collect missing gear after everyone disperses back in town can be a real pain.)
- In cold weather, make sure everyone's vehicle gets started.
- A brief social gathering over a beverage on the way home can be a great way to polish tall tales about the day's adventures, to cement bonds with future trip mates and to gather feedback on how the trip went.

Post-Trip

- Pass signed waivers to the Activity Coordinator at the earliest opportunity.
- Clean and return club gear to the Quartermaster.
- Encourage a participant to submit a trip report and/or photos to the e-letter.

Conclusion

Congratulations on a trip well done. Kick up your feet and have a cold one. Now, let's flesh out a few details.