

ACC Ottawa Guidelines - Frontcountry Hiking Leader

Scope

This document provides advice on "best practices" for ACC Ottawa amateur leaders leading Section frontcountry hiking trips. It is intended to help leaders plan and manage club trips. It should be read in conjunction with the "[ACC Ottawa Guidelines - Introduction](#)" which clarifies the distinction between frontcountry and backcountry trips. [Backcountry hiking and backpacking](#) are described in a separate guideline.

Introduction

Frontcountry hiking is done on an official network of maintained trails. These are often close to urban areas or main roads. Trails in the network are typically numbered or named and well-signed. Most trail networks publish well-illustrated trail maps so that navigation presents few challenges. The terrain can run the spectrum from flat to gentle rolling hills to steep, difficult terrain. Trail networks are often, but not always, subject to regular patrols by trained personnel. It is common to encounter other parties. Day-use shelters may be provided.

While it is common to see poorly-equipped trail users, prudent hikers carry a small day pack with extra clothing, food, water, small first aid kit, headlamp, map and compass.

First Aid Qualification

Either the Trip Leader or an Assistant Trip Leader should be "[Basic-First-Aid-Qualified](#)".

Guidelines for Frontcountry Hiking Trip Leaders

- 1) prepare for a frontcountry hiking trip:
 - a) select an area, terrain and route for the desired level of hiking difficulty
 - b) estimate trip travel times, considering the number of daylight hours, group size, group experience level, terrain, trail conditions, distance, elevation gain/loss, etc.
 - c) prepare and publish a trip notice in conjunction with the Hiking Coordinator, clearly defining the level of trip difficulty, group size limit and participant fitness, skill, experience and equipment requirements
 - d) screen trip participants, offering constructive suggestions for alternatives to those who do not possess the necessary fitness, skill, experience or equipment
 - e) advise participants on gear, clothing and supplies appropriate for the trip:
 - i) traction aids required or optional?
 - ii) a headlamp, layered clothing and a personal micro-first aid kit
 - iii) ensure adequate water and high energy food and snacks for the trail
 - f) consider bringing a water filter, group first aid kit, tarp and micro repair kit
 - g) organize trip logistics such as transportation, hut bookings, meals, etc. as appropriate

- h) note emergency contacts for the area, mid-trip bailout routes, communication options and conceptualize how an accident would be handled
 - i) ensure all participants read and sign the trip waiver prior to the trip; pass the signed waiver to the Hiking Coordinator at the earliest opportunity
- 2) knowledge and skills:
- a) basic navigation skills with map and compass
 - b) knowledgeable about techniques to avoid wildlife conflicts
 - c) knowledgeable about clothing layering options for efficient frontcountry travel
 - d) preventing, recognizing and treating hypothermia
 - e) recognizing and dealing with frontcountry hazards: changing weather; uneven terrain; difficult ground conditions (wet and muddy or snowy and icy); water crossings; equipment failure; steep ascents and descents; potential wild life encounters
 - f) level-headed, calm and resourceful in an emergency
 - g) resourceful in making field repairs to equipment with minimal tools and supplies
 - h) confidence to mentor participants on the more difficult skills, such as negotiating difficult trail sections
- 3) supervise trip safety:
- a) delegate tasks to assistant trip leaders and engage other experienced participants
 - b) double-check items of participant gear and supplies considered critical to the trip
 - c) brief participants on trip-specific safety hazards and safety procedures
 - d) set a turnaround time
 - e) maintain situational awareness with respect to trail conditions, weather, location, speed of travel, time of day, participant energy level and frame of mind, etc. and be ready to change plans, if appropriate
 - f) good judgement to make tough, perhaps unpopular, safety-related decisions
 - g) understand the club Emergency Response Protocol and take charge in an emergency