

Collecting Information About Groups

If you meet an organized group on the Trail and can have a brief conversation with them, please record whatever information you gather and share it with ATC Education & Outreach Coordinator Kathryn Herndon: kherndon@appalachiantrail.org.

Only ask for information if it is convenient and easy to do so as part of a friendly conversation. Even if all you can write down is something like "10 students from Washington & Lee Outing Club", along with the date and location, that will help us get a more complete picture of what groups use the NBATC section, when, and where.

If you are comfortable doing so, you can let the leader know that ATC hopes to develop better online resources groups can use to plan their trips in this region. You can ask for their contact information (name and email or phone number) so they can be notified if and when we have new resources to share.

You may not be able to tell if it is a "commercial use" group: any group where the participants are paying for the experience (summer camps and paid outfitter guides, for instance). Just leave anything you don't know blank.

Here are a few Do's and Don'ts to keep in mind:

Do:

- Only participate in this survey if and when you feel like it
- Let the group know you are a volunteer
- Keep conversations friendly and cordial
- Make it clear they don't have to answer your questions, and their contact info will only be used to notify them when ATC has new resources or policies related to groups.

Don't:

- Interrupt or stop a group that doesn't want to talk to you
- Make it seem as if they are required to share their contact info

Occasionally we all meet groups whose behavior isn't what we prefer to see on the A.T.--perhaps the group size is too big, or they are being inconsiderate or not following Leave No Trace principles. It's good to assume the best and say something in a tactful way: "You probably don't realize you're in a Wilderness Area..." or "Did you know you just washed

your dishes in the water source? Want me to show you how I do it?". However, such encounters sometimes feel hostile to the group. Don't use this survey as a threat. ATC and our agency partners do sometimes contact a group after the fact when we hear about especially problematic behavior--but the purpose of this survey is to get an idea of how bad such problems are, not to "catch" the bad actors.

Thank you for helping us gather this information!