



## NBATC GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER HIKE LEADERS

The following guidelines provide suggestions that will help ensure that you lead a successful hike, and should be considered as minimum standards that are expected of all hike leaders. These guidelines apply to all official club hikes, which include weekend, weekday, and work hikes.

### GENERAL POLICY

A primary goal of NBATC is to promote the appreciation of nature through the scheduling and sponsorship of pleasure and work hikes listed or referenced in the *Virginia Hiker*.

**Eligibility:** All leaders of official club hikes must be members of the club 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 occasionally entrance fees identified in the hike description. The driver cost is normally listed in the hiking schedule and is based upon total round trip mileage.

**Emergency procedures:** All hike leaders should carry a first aid kit. Other desirable items to carry include a cell phone, flashlight, insect repellent, maps, compass, small mirror, whistle, bathroom tissue, and Incident Report Form. The hike leader should also ensure that every hiker provides an emergency contact number on the Hike Report Form.

**Maximum number of hikers:** The absolute 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 by at least 15 minutes or consider options such as reverse directions on loop hikes or key exchange crossovers for linear hikes.

**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 a hike.

**Hike cancellation:** If a leader needs to cancel a hike for any reason, he or she should notify everyone who has registered, and go to the meeting place (looking for non-registered hikers) if practical to do so.

### HIKE LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES

#### Prior to the day of the hike:

**Scout the hike:** Hike leaders need to be familiar with the section of 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.

**Check the weather forecast:** Be aware of forecast weather conditions which could influence the safety of the hikers and impact the necessity of protective clothing.

### **Prior to leaving the meeting point:**

**Meet hikers:** Meet the hikers at the designated meeting point a few minutes prior to the scheduled departure time, and wait 5 minutes past the scheduled departure time for late hikers. If it is impractical to meet hikers at the meeting point, ask someone else who will be there to verify that everyone has come properly prepared to hike.

**Register all hikers on the Hike Report Form:** All leaders are provided with a Hike Report Form with their copy of the *Virginia Hiker*. Ensure that all hikers who show up sign the form. Extra blank forms can be downloaded from the club website at [www.nbatc.org](http://www.nbatc.org). This is very important from a liability standpoint for the club, and for contact information in case of emergency.

**Ensure adequate drivers:** Make sure that enough drivers are on hand to transport all the hikers to the trailhead, and remind hikers to reimburse their driver for applicable round trip costs as identified in the hike schedule.

### **Conduct a “tailgate” session of checks and reminders:**

- First aid issues – ensure that there is a first aid kit for the hike (two for crossover hikes). It is desirable that the leader knows what to do for the more serious problems like broken bones, bleeding, or shock. Also, the hike leader should determine before beginning the hike if any hiker has health or medical issues that could be of concern.
- Ensure that all hikers have adequate water for the hike. In hot, humid weather, one quart of water per person for every three hiking miles is recommended. Make sure that all hikers have brought lunch food or snacks if the length and time of the hike so warrants. Also, check to be sure that all hikers have adequate footwear and clothing for the hike and the conditions.
- Exercise leader authority - based on the leader’s best judgment that a hiker is not physically capable of completing the hike and/or the hiker is not properly equipped for the hike, the leader has the authority and responsibility to deny a hiker the right to participate.
- Brief hikers on the following – hike overview, safety precautions and emergency procedures, hike restrictions, environmental concerns, possible dangers of dehydration, untreated water, bees, ticks, snakes, bears, nettles, etc.

### **At the trailhead:**

**Review trail maps:** Each leader should have a trail map. Show the trail map to the hikers and explain the hike route, key intersections, hike terrain, scenic views, trail marking conventions (i.e., white or blue blazed), possible exit points along the trail in case of problems, and approximately what time and place the hike is scheduled to end. Be sure to let someone else know where you have put the sign-up sheet (with its emergency contact numbers) and where you have put your car keys if you were a driver.

**Assign the “sweep”:** Assign an experienced hiker to be the “sweep” (last person in the hiking group) and make sure that this individual has a first aid kit. For all hikes with multiple sections of hikers, the

leader should appoint a competent co-leader, who is also a club member, for the second group. In this case, a sweep is also needed for both groups. Inform the sweep(s) that their duties will be to reorient confused hikers, provide first aid materials to any injured hiker, and to assure that all hikers are in front of them and that no-one is left behind. The hike should not leave the trailhead until one of the hikers accepts the responsibility for being the sweep.

### **During the hike:**

**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 required for a struggling hiker), the lead should be passed to some other reliable hiker with knowledge of the remaining hiking trail. Ensure the new lead hiker is aware of possible confusing intersections ahead and will take appropriate action to prevent the hikers from making wrong turns on the trail.

**Maintain control of the hiking group:** On the trail, at every trail junction or every 30 minutes, make stops to ensure that all hikers are still with the leader. It is the leader's responsibility to keep the hiking group intact between a leader and a sweep. This does not infer that all hikers must remain within a tight cluster. However, if a hiker insists on hiking in front of the hike leader, that hiker may be informed that he (or she) is now on his own. He will no longer be considered as part of the hike group and assumes all risk for safe return to the meeting place. If it becomes apparent that someone cannot keep up at a reasonable pace, it may be necessary to send him back to the trailhead with another hiker.

**Watch for lost hikers:** If any hiker is unaccounted for, the leader must assess the situation and is expected to use good judgment in determining the best course of action to find the lost hiker(s).

### **After the hike:**

**Count hikers:** Ensure all hikers are accounted for before returning to the meeting place.

**Attend to missing hikers:** If a hiker is missing, the leader must initiate action to find him or her.

**Fill out the Hike Report Form:** Complete the form with mileage driven, trail conditions, and noteworthy events and/or recommendations for running this hike in the future. Be sure to mail this form to the club post office box (NBATC, PO Box 3012, Lynchburg, VA 24503) as it is our official and legal record of who hiked and who read (or had the opportunity to read) our safety precautions.

**Report trail conditions:** Report needed trail maintenance or the fact that the trail is "all clear" as noted on the form. Email this information promptly to [maint.report@nbatc.org](mailto:maint.report@nbatc.org). Also report any illegal or suspicious activity that you encountered along the trail (bicycles or horses on the trail, people camping in inappropriate places, large groups in the Wilderness, etc.).

**Report your hours:** Time spent planning, scouting, and leading club hikes is counted toward club work hours. Report hours to Emily Helms, Work Hours Coordinator ([admin.report@nbatc.org](mailto:admin.report@nbatc.org)).

## **THANK YOU**

The NBATC Outing Planning Committee sincerely thanks you for your participation as a hike leader. Please review these guidelines prior to leading each hike and follow them to the best of your ability.