
TRAIL TIPS

Helpful Hints for Hiking

Follow the Leader



I hope you all had a very Happy Thanksgiving. And I hope you're out on the trails with us, hiking off all of that turkey.

If you ARE out on the trails with the club, you will be hiking behind the Leader on your hike. The Leader is another hiker in the club, just like you. The only difference between you and your Leaders is that they have scouted the hike route in the previous week or two to familiarize themselves with the trails and conditions. They have also probably been hiking

with other experienced Leaders who have given them tips and hints on leading a SAFE and enjoyable hike.

You may be on a C hike, and your hike Leaders might be B hikers as their hike of preference. If they are, they will try to adjust their pace to accommodate the generally slower pace associated with a C hike. They may occasionally forget this, and perhaps go a little too fast for your comfort. Maybe they don't take enough rest stops for you to catch your breath going uphill. Maybe the Leader of your group forgets to take enough water stops, because he or she is using a water bladder in their backpack to drink while they're walking along, and you can't reach your water bottle in your side pocket of your pack without stopping.

Please speak up!

I have led numerous C hikes, and I myself am normally a B hiker. I have long legs. My normal hiking pace may be a little fast for someone who is 5' 2" tall, and 15 years older than me. I am a fellow hiker with you. I am human, and I can forget what the heck I'm doing. I can and do miss trail turns. Especially if I'm deep in conversation with a fellow hiker whilst ambling along the trail.

I want and need to hear how I'm doing up there. I generally stop every 15 minutes on a hike and remind my group to hydrate. I might lose track of time. If you're getting thirsty, and I haven't stopped in a while, please holler out "Hey! Can we stop for a minute?"

I promise you I will not take offense. None of the Leaders will.

At my first water stop, I will ask how the pace is for the group. If nobody speaks up, I will assume that my pace is OK. I would much rather hear someone ask to slow it down a bit than push someone faster than they're comfortable with. We're not racing a marathon here. I'm out here to enjoy the outdoors and the companionship of my fellow hikers.

If my hiking group is not having an enjoyable hike, I feel like I'm not being a good hike Leader.

Did I not stop at that last trail junction to make sure that everyone made the turn? Or did I blow past the turn, leaving you wondering if we were supposed to make a right hand turn there? Please speak up and ask me if I'm sure we are supposed to be going straight or not.

I would much rather be stopped at that point, rather than lead us off in the wrong direction for a mile or two before looking around and discovering, hey, none of this looks familiar. Oops.

If you have never led a hike before, believe me when I tell you that there is a certain amount of anxiety associated with leading a group of 10 to 40 people out into the desert for a few hours. While the Club stresses, and even has you sign a form acknowledging that YOU are responsible for your own well-being on our hikes, I do feel a responsibility for you having a nice hike out in the wild and wooly desert. I think I can safely say that every Leader feels the same way. It's why we agree to lead hikes. Well, that, and SOMEbody has to do it.

Your hike Leader will ask the group a few questions when we meet up in the morning at our designated parking lot before we leave for the trailhead. Did everyone bring enough water? Do you have sturdy shoes or boots for the hike today? Everybody got their sticks with them? Do you have your Vial of Life in your pack? Yes, the questions get old, as they're repeated every single time we go out on a hike. But they are extremely important, and it's YOUR responsibility to make sure that you have the proper gear and supplies to hike in a rugged environment.

Basically, what I'm getting at is this - help us to help you. Club hiking is a group effort. Let your Leaders know if they're setting a good pace, and when they're not. Speak up if you're feeling like you need more water breaks, or if the Leader did not wait long enough for the back of the pack to catch up before resuming the hike. We want to hear your feedback while we're on the trail. We can't fix what we don't know is broken.

And if you've never led a hike before, get with one of the Leaders you're hiking behind. The Hike Coordinators will more than likely be happy to scout a hike with you, and show you the ropes. We always need more Leaders. I like leading hikes. But sometimes, I like letting somebody else figure out if we're going right or left.

Be **SAFE** out there, and I'll see you on the Trail!

Burt