

Hike Leader Guidelines

- 1) Planning Your Hike – Everything that happens prior to entering the woods
 - a) Requirements to be a hike leader
 - i) You must be a current Roanoke ATC member -- AND
 - ii) You must have either attended a training or have been personally certified to lead hikes by the Hike Master
 - iii) Refer to “Hike Leader Guidelines”
 - b) Liability – Layers of protection
 - i) Limited liability to begin with under Virginia law
 - ii) It is absolutely critical for hike leaders to have participants sign the sign-in sheet / liability waiver before the carpool begins! Don’t forget to have people sign who show-up directly at the trailhead.
 - iii) RATC has a general liability policy that covers hike leaders that is separate from coverage of trail maintainers provided by agency partners.
 - iv) What else can you do to protect yourself? Follow principles explained in this training.
 - c) Selecting a Hike
 - i) Guide people to places and trails that you enjoy and with which you are familiar.
 - ii) NEVER lead a hike to a place you have never visited. Exception: **AT hikes** outside the RATC sections, that would be too distant to scout in advance. You **ARE** expected to research these hikes and their current conditions (bridge out, bad water, etc.) in advance.
 - iii) You can *become* familiar with new hikes by scouting a new location. Use the RATC hike library, Hiking Upward, guidebooks, maps, or any other resource to find new areas to explore!
 - iv) Hikes do not have to be grandiose or spectacular with multiples viewpoints and waterfalls. We gain diversity of hikes in terms of both scenery and difficulty level by having diverse hike leaders with diverse interests. We do need different levels of hikes easy, moderate and hard hikes. When you post hikes on meetup, please post what level of hike it is.
 - v) Kinds of hikes
 - (1) Loop Hikes: These do not require long and time-consuming shuttles and do allow hikers to see new terrain throughout the hike.
 - (2) Out-and-Back Hikes: Do not require any shuttling, but do not offer any new scenery on the return trip.
 - (3) Shuttle Hikes: Require logistics planning in setting up the shuttle, and extra time commitment from the participants. Before you set out, be sure to get a volunteer to take the drivers back to their cars at the end of the hike!
 - vi) Hikes to Avoid
 - (1) Any hikes that require crossing onto private land (unless you have written permission or own the land in question), including railroad tracks

- (2) Hikes that are not appropriate for the season (e.g. – hikes with dozens of deep, wide stream crossings in the dead of winter)
- (3) Hikes that may violate Leave No Trace principles
- (4) Hikes that may be too dangerous for a typical RATC group (e.g. – scaling cliffs, entering caves without proper equipment, or entering abandoned industrial areas)
- vii) Overnight
 - (1) Yes – overnights are permitted, welcomed, and encouraged! Let’s plan more of them!
 - (2) Group size limited to 10 campers (less if the area is restricted), all campers must be at least 12 years old. Minors between 12 and 17 years old must be accompanied by a parent.
- viii) Activities Beyond the Scope of the Hike
 - (1) After-hour at a Restaurant, Brewery, or Bar
 - (a) Try to plan ahead of time so that you can arrange your carpool around anyone who does not want to participate.
 - (b) Never ‘force’ anyone to attend such events by ‘majority vote’ in the car. If even a single person does not want to attend and you cannot accommodate them in the carpool, the extra event is off.
 - (c) You can always have people go out as a group after arriving back at the original meeting spot.
 - (d) Invite everyone in the group
 - (e) Be sensitive to anyone in the group with dietary restrictions or reservations about drinking alcohol, etc.
 - (2) Other Outdoor Activities in Conjunction with a Hike
 - (a) RATC does not have an official policy on point
 - (b) Recommended: Plan ‘extra’ events as private outings separate from RATC hikes and plan to accommodate anyone who does not want to participate in the extra event.
 - (c) It is unclear if our insurance policy would extend to activities beyond the scope of those of a normal hiking club, and you probably do not want to provide the test case.
- d) What You Need to Know About the Area Where You Are Leading a Hike
 - i) Where are the closest hospitals?
 - ii) What are the current conditions (as current as possible). (E.g. – Has a flood washed-out a critical bridge? Was the area impacted heavily by the November ice storm? Has the USFS / NPS closed any trails or forestry roads that you were planning to use on your route?)
 - iii) What are the best exit points along your route should an acute emergency arise?
 - iv) Are there any property boundaries of concern if your hike goes off-trail
 - v) The general terrain / names of landmarks, both for interest and in case of needing reference points when speaking with emergency personnel.
 - vi) The best viewpoints, break points, and eating options.
- e) Posting and Scheduling Your Hike

- i) Meetup
 - (1) Description
 - (2) How many people do you want to manage on the trail?
 - (3) Alert hikers as to anticipated difficulty
 - (a) It is usually a good idea to exaggerate the difficulty modestly so that hikers who may have an inflated sense of their own abilities and physical condition may re-consider (and hopefully find another RATC hike).
 - (i) Easy: Greenway-level hikes
 - (ii) Moderate: Typical sections of the Appalachian Trail for moderate lengths
 - (iii) Strenuous: Difficult sections of the Appalachian Trail, trails more difficult than the AT, fairly long distances
 - (iv) Extreme: Very long hikes with major elevation changes, bushwhacking, or rarely used trails (or combination)
 - (4) Meeting Time – The time you want to leave the meeting location, not the time you anticipate starting the hike.
 - (5) Meeting Location – See carpool procedures below, but try to select previously used locations to promote consistency.
 - ii) How much notice is ideal?
 - (1) Too little notice – hikers unable to change plans, may feel slighted or not part of the ‘clique.’
 - (2) Too long of notice – participants may sign-up without truly knowing their availability, may forget, may lose enthusiasm for the trip
 - iii) All Members of the Meetup Group who are physically able to do your hike must be invited and included if they sign-up. We do not allow hikes for: men-only, women-only, those who are older than 50-only, those who are under 30-only, LGBTQ-only, married-only, single and looking-only, Christians-only, Democrats or Republicans-only, etc. You can join other groups on Meetup or elsewhere for specialized outdoors groups.
 - iv) Where possible, avoid competition with other RATC hikes and with other outdoors social groups (e.g. -- ROSC and ROAG).
- f) When to Cancel a Hike?
 - i) The hike goes on if possible
 - ii) Find a replacement if your personal schedule changes unexpectedly
 - iii) Inclement weather
 - iv) Lack of participation – When is too few too few?
 - (1) Safety concerns should medical emergencies arise
 - (2) Social awkwardness, especially for first-time hikers
- g) Last Group Contact prior to the Hike
 - i) Highlight any last-minute changes, remind participants of any special concerns on the hike (e.g. – bring extra socks for multiple creek crossings or bring rain gear as some showers are possible)
 - ii) Remind people to update their RSVPs if their plans have changed so that you are not waiting for people who will never show-up (48 hours out or so)

- iii) Give your cell phone number out so that people can call or text you should something happen the morning of the hike (24 hours out or so)
- h) The Day of Your Hike –
 - i) At the Meeting Location
 - (1) Arrive several minutes before the stated meeting time so that you can be on-hand to greet participants as they arrive.
 - (2) Introduce yourself and have people sign the sign-in sheet / liability waiver.
 - (3) Be sure to look-out for first-time hikers and help them get introduced to others.
 - (4) Use this time to scope-out any hikers who are clearly not up for the challenges of the day.
 - (5) Keep your cell phone on and handy in case anyone is running late, gets lost, or must cancel at the last minute.
 - (6) Form participants into an informal meeting to go over rules, introduce the hike, ask participants to seek you out privately if they have medical concerns to convey to you, decide who is driving, and help people find rides in the carpool.
 - ii) Carpools are requested and required of all RATC hikes unless your hike is:
 - (1) Within the Roanoke Valley AND
 - (2) Will utilize a Trailhead without parking difficulties
 - (a) E.g. – Hikes to Explore Park, Mill Mountain, Greenway segments, or the AT to Hay Rock using the Daleville Park & Ride do not need carpools, whereas weekend hikes to Read Mountain, Poor Mountain, or the ‘Triple Crown’ sites should use carpools despite being ‘local hikes’ as they have small lots and/or high parking demand.
 - iii) Benefits of Carpooling
 - (1) Environmentally friendly – we are an outdoors club, after all
 - (2) Saves Money for both the riders and driver
 - (3) Prevents Overwhelming Trailheads or Exasperating Problems
 - (4) Helps Members who do not like driving or have less reliable cars
 - (5) A good social experience
 - iv) Meeting Spot
 - (1) Public lots preferred (Park & Rides)
 - (a) Even for public lots, it is a good idea to check the VDOT website for the location just to be sure there are no closures for cleaning, line painting, etc.
 - (2) Wal*Marts
 - (3) Do not use other private lots without permission
 - (a) If you do seek permission, make sure the person with whom you speak has the authority to grant permission and get the person’s name in case there is some sort of dispute later.
 - (4) Meeting spot should be in the greater Roanoke area. It negates the point of a carpool to have everyone drive the majority of the trip separately and then only carpool the last few miles to the trailhead.
 - (a) If it is inconvenient for you to meet the group at a Roanoke-area lot, feel free to ask a ‘regular’ participant to handle those duties for you.

- v) **Compensating Drivers – OPTIONAL**
 - (1) The rate is set by the RATC Board of Directors at \$0.10 per ride charged one way. Hike leaders do not have the authority to select your own rate of compensation. (E.g. – The trailhead is 50 miles from the meeting location and it is a loop, so there is no shuttle: 50 miles x 1 way x \$0.10 = \$5.00)
 - (a) Do not forget to include mileage for any shuttling. (E.g. – In the example above, if you had a 10-mile shuttle, that would increase the payment due to \$6.00 per rider.)
 - (b) You can either collect the fee from participants at the start and redistribute the money to the drivers or ask participants to pay their driver directly. However, if you have people pay their driver, the hike leader needs to ‘play the heavy’ by reminding people several times to pay-up.
 - (c) Please inform the Hike Master if a participant refuses to pay.
 - (d) It is fine to round to the nearest half-dollar or even dollar. You do not need to charge exactly \$6.28, for example, if the drive is 62.8 miles. \$6.50 or even \$7.00 is acceptable. However, ‘rounding’ to \$10 or \$12 would be violating the established rate.
 - vi) Do not caravan on the interstate as that practice can be dangerous and impolite to other drivers. Have people drive at their own pace and re-group at a designated spot if necessary.
 - vii) If a participant does not wish to join the carpool, try to work with the participant as much as is practical. If the trailhead has limited parking, however, do not be afraid to insist on participation. You can offer to meet the person at an alternate location if the participant is resisting because he or she lives closer to the trailhead than the meeting spot.
 - viii) Key exchanges can be a great convenience -- if not an outright necessity -- on some point-to-point hikes where the distance and driving time between trailheads can be staggering.
 - (1) It is a good idea to mention this idea in your Meetup description or at least in the comments section. It can put some drivers on the spot to allow a stranger to drive their car.
 - (2) Have drivers take the other person’s car on the way out and receive their own key back during the hike. If you do it the other way, the driver of the faster group may be stuck at the meeting spot for quite a long time waiting for his or her car to be returned (and to give back the other person’s car).
- i) **Going the Extra Mile – Nice extras that, while not necessary, can enhance the hike for your participants**
 - i) Provide a map and/or elevation profile for your route for each hiker. Maps can be easily created and printed using websites like Google Maps. If there is a map kiosk at the beginning of the hike, encourage people to take a picture of the map.
 - ii) Bring extra snacks to share during breaks or lunch.
 - iii) Bring treats to share at the end of the hike
 - iv) Other ideas?

2) Finally! The Hike Itself!

3) Post-Hike Duties

- a) Mail or scan and e-mail the sign-in sheet / liability waiver to the Hike Master at Hikemaster@RATC.org. This is critical as our insurance carrier may wish to see these sheets to ensure compliance with the terms of our policy. Alternatively, you can take a picture of the sign-in sheet and text it to the Hikemaster (currently Carol Rowlett, 540 354 4128).
- b) Mark any no-shows on Meetup
- c) Post pictures on Meetup for participants to enjoy. It is also nice to send messages to hikers thanking them for coming on the trip.
- d) Prepare a write-up for the “Trail Blazer” and e-mail it to Blazer@RATC.org. The write-up can be short and basic or more elaborate. See back copies of the “Trail Blazer” on the club’s website for examples. It is nice if you can mention participants by name, but be careful about humor or teasing as some people may find offense.
- e) Schedule your next hike!
- f) Avoid Burn-out.
 - i) Don’t run yourself ragged posting hikes.
 - ii) Don’t neglect to continue planning private hikes for yourself, family, and friends, as well as doing any other outdoors activities that you enjoy.
 - iii) Being a hike leader is quite different from going on your own hike.