

RS HIKE LEADER TRAINING MANUAL

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RS OUTINGS LEADER'S GUIDE FOR DAY OUTINGS

SELECTING AN OUTING – What makes a good one? What's the purpose? (Enjoy the outdoors, focus on conservation, teach an outdoor skill...)

- It's INTERESTING to you and others – perhaps a favorite place.
- Great scenery or beauty: views, mountains, coastline, rivers, waterfalls, woods, Headlands
- Important natural features: earthquake fault, mountain pass, meteor showers, full moon walk
- Representative or unusual flora or fauna
- Ecological interest: wetlands, tide pools
- Environmental importance: dumpsite, pollution site, new open space, freeways being demolished. Read Yodeler for areas of current interest & then lead a hike there.
- Historical interest: Black Diamond Mines ghost town, Mt. Tam's old gravity car route; the Dipsea trail; John Muir historical site
- An especially challenging hike
- An easy walk for elderly, physically challenged, etc.

Ideas for activities other than hiking:

- Bird watching at your favorite wetland
- Tide pool exploration
- Potluck picnic
- Sports day at the beach with Frisbees & volleyball, or croquet or baseball in a park
- Creative celebration of the equinox or solstice
- Special Golden Gate Park activities: Use the horseshoe pits, try out the fly-casting pool, row boats around Stow Lake.
- Organize a docent-led tour of museum or park (or take a docent tour and then lead a similar one yourself for RS)
- Planetarium or museum or zoo visit on free day
- Bicycle ride: road or off road
- Attend a conservation lecture with other RS members (such as a lecture sponsored by the main Sierra Club)
- Organize a service trip to repair or build trails or weed out exotic plants
- Potluck brunch organized around a letter-writing campaign
- Photography hike and follow-up potluck to review photos
- Climb city hills and staircases
- Tour city dump or county watershed
- Tour a sewage treatment plant

- Tour little-known public park or open space

ANYTHING THAT BROADENS OUR AWARENESS OF OUR ENVIRONMENT IS A VALID OUTING (except climbing and some watersports)

SCOUTING YOUR OUTING: WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Why bother to scout? You must plan and scout your outing before you offer it. If you don't, you must reveal that in your write-up describing the outing. RS members are relying on you to make sure they are safe, well-prepared, reasonably comfortable, and home on time. Some may have important health concerns or may be novice hikers very much in need of your good leadership. Show them a good time and don't violate their trust.

When you scout, consider:

1. **DIFFICULTY** of the outing
2. **LOGISTICS** (transportation, timing & preparation)
3. **INTERESTING FEATURES**
4. **POTENTIAL PROBLEMS**

APPROPRIATE DIFFICULTY:

Choose your level

Use a map to assess difficulty: How many miles is it? How much elevation change?

Walk the route: How long does it take you in all and from point to point? Most people average about 2 M.P.H., so is your pace realistic? How rough and rutted is the trail? Any extremely steep sections? Do loose stones make it slippery? Any other features requiring special ability, attention, or warning? Where is the trail ambiguous? What landmarks will help you remember important turnoffs? At what points should you stop to make sure everyone is together before you go on? (At least wait at every trail junction.) If there is a hazard, what alternative route will you take? Any required bouldering, stream fords, or much to walk through? Are rattlesnakes likely? Consider the environmental impact. Consider the psychological effect of the sequence of sites and events: It is important to note where the difficult portions of the trip are. Do they come early or late in the outing? Are they adequately balanced with rest periods?

LOGISTICS

- **TRANSPORTATION CONVENIENCE**—Not too far. Is public transportation available? How long would it take? Exactly what bus do you catch and where? How much does bus cost? Adequate parking at trailhead? Parking fee? Road conditions: will drivers have to take rutted dirt road? If so, warn them.
- Is a car shuttle necessary to get back to trailhead? If so, arrange carefully.

- Will carpooling be feasible? The Sierra Club encourages carpooling to conserve natural resources, and not everyone has a car. Although outings leaders are not permitted to organize carpools, you can designate a meeting place and time, such as SAFEWAY or ROCKRIDGE BART.
- How long does it take to get to the trailhead from carpool site?
- DIRECTIONS: Most people have GPS but sometimes it fails when you most need it. Exactly how do you get there?
- Are there toilet facilities at the trailhead? (Helpful, especially if it's a long drive, but not essential.)
- TIMING—Set a schedule. It may be easiest to start from the end: ending time, hiking time, lunch & rest time, starting time, meeting time. When do you want to finish? How long does the actual hiking take? How much rest and lunch time is appropriate? If you intend to be out late, you should let participants know in the write-up or at the start of the hike.
- Lunch location: Where will you eat lunch? Will you be able to get there at a reasonable time?
- To stay on schedule, it helps to know how much time it takes to get between major points in the hike.

INTERESTING FEATURES

What interesting features does the hike offer? Can you point out some geological formations, identify plant or bird life, explain where the trail name came from, or the history of the place? Trail guidebooks may give this info.

Loop: Can you make the trip a loop rather than just retracing steps?

Side trails: Are there side trails worth exploring? They may lead to terrific viewpoints.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

GETTING LOST: How well do you know the trail? It's hard to win the confidence of your group if you haven't scouted your outing recently and aren't sure where you are going. Try not to get lost or even look lost on a RS hike. The issue here is more than your embarrassment: if you get lost, your hikers might not want to participate again.

CHANGING CONDITIONS: Are trail conditions likely to change between the time you scout and the time you lead the hike? Unchecked poison oak growth has ruined some trails at Point Reyes. Any severe erosion might cause the trail to be closed or unpleasant by the time of your hike. If you suspect so, you should try to scout the trail again shortly before the day of the hike. Alternatively, you can call that agency's ranger office to ask about conditions on particular trails shortly before the outing.

WEATHER CONCERNS: Are dustiness or excessive heat likely to be a problem on the day of the hike? Is fog likely to kill the views on the day of the hike?

SCHEDULING CONFLICTS: Avoid traffic for events such as Bay-to-Breakers or the Dipsea. Consider that turnout may be light around holiday weekends, Castro Street fair, Pride, and the day of time change in spring.

LEGAL HASSLES: Are you on public property that will be open to the group? Stay off private property unless you have written permission. If you are leading a dog hike, have you checked that dogs are allowed on all the trails on your route? Must they be leashed?

GROUP PERMITS & CLOSING TIMES: Many public lands close at dark. The Marin Municipal Water District forbids groups of 20 or more without a permit. Other agencies require group-use permits. Be aware of the ordinances that apply to your route. Take agency rules seriously.

EMERGENCY AIDS: It's prudent to note the location of the nearest facilities for emergency aid, such as telephone, ranger station, or road.

WRITING IT UP – THE EASIEST WAY TO SCREEN YOUR PARTICIPANTS

BASICS: Your write-up is your invitation for participants to join you, so it must tell them who, what, where, and when.

SCREENING: The write-up also screens out those you don't want. If you are sloppy in your write-up, you risk problems on your hike.

A tip: members will be upset if the hike is harder than the rating indicates, and you may find yourself babysitting very slow walkers. Some veteran hike leaders purposely rate their hikes slightly harder than they really are to screen out problem hikers.

SPELL IT OUT: Even if you rate your hike accurately with the Sierra Club rating system, people may not take the trouble to decipher the rating symbols. Thus, describe length and difficulty in your write-up to make sure people grasp it.

CO-LEADERS: A co-leader is useful in fielding questions, conducting the hike, and dealing with unplanned circumstances.

DESCRIPTION:

- Describe interesting/unusual features to attract members. Share your enthusiasm: make it sound fun.
- Include a geographical reference to help people understand where your outing is (e.g., "near Mt. Tam "or "East Bay").
- Include meeting places and times. It helps to give public transit info.
- It helps to indicate your expected time of return.
- If you are planning a Bay Area overnight, don't list the campsite location in your write-up. People will just show up without calling, whether there is space for them or not.
- List what to bring, e.g. lunch, water, money for all anticipated expense including a share of transportation costs, boots with good tread, layered clothing, windbreaker, sunscreen, sunglasses, insect spray, food, flashlights and warm clothing if at night, swimsuit if appropriate etc.
- Warn of particularly difficult aspects (e.g. "Includes a very steep climb" or "brisk pace").
- Weather policy: Rain cancels?

PUBLICITY: Outings must first be entered in Campfire and approved by the Outings Chair before they go "live." Publicity is a good since the Sierra Club encourages outreach to people who are not yet members of the Club. Non-members are welcome on our

outings. But also consider: Are you prepared for a big crowd that may include people who are slow and inexperienced? If you want to list your outing on Meetup, wait until it's been approved and posted on Campfire before announcing on Meetup.

CONDUCTING THE OUTING

1. WHAT TO BRING

- a. First Aid Kit
- b. Trailhead Talk Card
- c. Liability Waiver, clipboard, pen
- d. Emergency Response Card
- e. Incident Report Form
- f. Emergency Response – Patient Report
- g. Safety Management Plan (if needed)
- h. Health Forms for participants (if needed)
- i. Leave No Trace Cards (for participants)
- j. Trash bag
- k. Ten Essentials: Navigation (map and compass), Sun protection (sunglasses and sunscreen), insulation (extra clothing), Illumination (headlamp/flashlight), First-aid supplies, Fire (waterproof matches/lighter/candles), Repair kit and tools, Nutrition (extra food), Hydration (extra water), Emergency shelter (tarp, bivvy sac, space blanket)

2. PRELIMINARIES: MEETING PLACE OR TRAILHEAD

- a. Arrive 15 minutes early to greet members and reassure them they are in the right place and to coordinate departure activities.
- b. Introduce yourself and others in a friendly, informal way. It's a good idea to wear a RS T-shirt so people can identify you at your meeting place or at crowded trailheads.
- c. Sign up and count.
- d. Screening: Visually inspect for proper footwear and out-of-shape people. If you fear someone is not in good enough shape to keep up with the group, talk to that person privately and ask about their previous hiking experience. Be sensitive and tactful. Don't make automatic judgments about a person's hiking experience and ability based simply on that person's appearance, but if the hike is strenuous and the pace is brisk, you need to make sure all participants can keep up. If you believe someone won't be able to keep up, say you are sorry, but for their safety and out of concern for the rest it would be better for that person to skip today's outing and attend another time. (Helps to have an upcoming event to recommend. You have the right and responsibility to screen out unprepared and unfit people.
- e. OFFICIAL SIERRA CLUB POLICY ON SCREENING: "The outing leader is completely in charge of the outing. The leader's discretion is complete, and the leader's decisions are final. The outing leader decides who goes on an outing and

who does not. If the leader is uncertain about an applicant's ability, the leader should ask questions and make suggestions. Usually, after such discussions, the unqualified applicant will decide not to participate in the outing. However, if he/she does not, the leader must be willing to say to the poorly equipped or out of condition applicant, "I'm sorry, but for your own safety and for the safety of the other participants in the outing, I cannot accept you on this outing."

3. TRAILHEAD TALK

4. THE HIKE

- a. **SET PACE** Set and maintain an appropriate pace with appropriate rest stops. Be sensitive to your group and adjust your pace if necessary. It's dangerous to push the group faster than it wants to go, even if you are running late. Call for RESTS if you notice some people are showing signs of fatigue.
- b. **WHO'S IN FRONT?** If it's your policy to stay at the front of the pack, what do you do if some participants want to go on ahead of the group? It depends on the situation and your knowledge of the people who want to go on ahead. Will they be OK? Do they know where they are going and where to meet you later? Will they notice the junctions in the trail?
- c. **CARRY a FIRST-AID KIT** on all hikes. Watch those hikers who seem to be straining. Look for signs of exhaustion, dehydration. Privately talk with anyone showing excessive strain and insist that the person rest or take water if necessary. Ask if they have a condition that would make hiking difficult today. Remember your first-aid training.
- d. **SPLIT GROUP?** If some hikers just seem slower than others and you have a co-leader who knows the route, consider breaking the group into two parts going two different paces. If the route can be shortened, perhaps the slower part should take the shorter route. Or perhaps the faster walkers can add a side-trip that the others skip. Before you let anyone leave the group on the trail, have that person sign out on the sign-in sheet. Before they leave, make sure they have adequate water, etc. to make it back to the trailhead and make sure they aren't carrying something essential to someone else (i.e. lunch or car keys).
- e. **WAIT AND COUNT:** Wait at trail junctions to make sure everyone knows where to go. Both the leader and sweep should quietly conduct periodic head counts to make sure nobody is missing.
- f. **ENCOURAGE GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL MANNERS:** Don't allow shortcutting, flower picking, etc. Encourage members to pick up and pack out litter if they see it. Set a good example by picking up and packing out any trash you see. You might

carry a plastic bag in your backpack for this. Encourage good peeing etiquette (away from trail, 200 ft. from water).

- g. **BE FRIENDLY:** Mix with the group as much as possible. Make an effort to talk at least briefly with each participant. Try to say something friendly to everyone attending. Engage them so they feel welcome and at home in the group.
- h. **STAY ON SCHEDULE:** Bring a watch and keep to your time schedule unless it's clear that nobody in the group cares when they get back.

5. ENDING THE OUTING

- a. **RECRUIT:** Note anyone who has shown good judgment and other leadership qualities and encourage them to become hike leaders.
- b. **COUNT AND THANK:** Take a final head count to make sure nobody's missing. Thank each participant for accompanying you on the outing. If you're in a remote area, it's a good idea not to leave the trailhead until all cars have started. If you feel like having dinner with the group, see who's interested.

INSURANCE, ACCIDENTS, AND CONTROVERSIAL INCIDENTS

LIABILITY NOT ACCIDENT PAY-OFF: The Sierra Club does NOT have an accident policy insuring members against losses from injuries. The Club has a liability policy covering hike leaders responsibly performing duties on behalf of the Club. This means that if some hiker is injured on a hike you are leading and sues you for negligence, the insurance company has agreed to provide a lawyer to defend you.

RESTRICTED OUTINGS: Challenge Courses, Rock climbing, Water sports. Check with outings leader about requirements before leading any of these.

REPORTING AN INCIDENT: For detailed information go to:
<http://clubhouse.sierraclub.org/outings/Common/Incidents/incident.asp>

A GOOD RS LEADER:

- Accepts responsibility
- Knows appropriate outdoor skills and practices
- Organizes and delegates
- Is an enthusiastic, energetic self-starter with follow-through
- Remains poised and confident under pressure
- Possesses a sense of humor and is congenial and considerate
- Can be tactful and understanding, yet firm and diligent
- Has patience with the inexperienced
- Is an effective communicator, good listener, and encourages others
- Willingly imparts knowledge and skills to others
- Recognizes her/his own limitations, capabilities and shortcomings
- Identifies potential leaders

KEEPING YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Being an outing leader can be a tremendously rewarding experience. Often our participants have a grand time on outings and thank us warmly. Sometimes they linger afterward in the parking lot, talking with us and wanting to prolong that special kind of closeness you share when you have just rediscovered together how wonderful and spectacular nature can be.

On the other hand, there are times when things don't go right, when our group doesn't quite click, and when inconsiderate, unprepared, or unappreciative participants make us wonder, "Why do we do this?"

We do this because...

- ✓ We love the outdoors and want to share that love with other queers.
- ✓ We believe the LGBTQ+ should participate in protecting and enjoying our natural environment, that RS therefore is needed and important and that we must contribute our time and energy for RS to survive and grow.
- ✓ We play a valuable role in helping our sisters and brothers renew their inner energy through contact with nature.
- ✓ We are proud to be members of the nation's first and largest gay and lesbian organization for environmental protection and participating and we want to set an example for others. We are proud to be recognized members of a conservation organization as distinguished, respected and effective as the Sierra Club

- ✓ We want to educate members of our community in the need to reduce their impact on the natural environment, and we want to demonstrate techniques for displaying good outdoor manners.
- ✓ We want to familiarize our community with specific areas, so they will be motivated to preserve natural values and speak from personal experience as advocates for preservation.
- ✓ We are proud to show that LGBTQ+ people make a valuable contribution to everyone's world.
- ✓ Contribute what you can to the group, learn to protect yourself against burn-out, don't lead an outing if you are not physically and emotionally up to the task, and above all, HAVE FUN.