

Hike Leader Guidelines

Thank you for volunteering to lead a hike for High Peaks! The following guidelines will help you prepare for your hike. Please contact Dennis Smith (hike coordinator) or any High Peaks Board member if you have any questions or need assistance.

Before the Hike

Decide what hike you would like to do. Consult with the High Peaks Hike Coordinator who will have suggestions for you. Most hikers have favorite hikes and that would be a good place to start! Review maps and other relevant information. Keep in mind the season as hikes at high elevation may not be suitable in winter. Access may also be a seasonal concern. For example the Blue Ridge Parkway and Mt. Mitchell are often closed in the winter.

Scout the trail and trailhead. Estimate the time required and select a good spot for a lunch break. Determine if the hike will be “out and back”, a loop hike, or a one-way hike. In the last case you need to consider a car shuttle. A related consideration is the use of Yancey County vans. These vans are generally available on weekends and possibly on weekdays. High Peaks normally requests a donation of \$5 per person to ride the van (to cover our cost). Dogs are not allowed on the vans so alternate arrangements will need to be made. Vans offer the option of dropping off and picking up hikers at the same trailhead or at the trailhead and trailend. This provides a lot of flexibility. If you decide to use the vans contact Cynthia Blood to make the initial arrangement. Once the booking is made you will be responsible for contacting the driver if the hike is canceled. We recommend that you contact YCTA the day before the hike to confirm the van booking and find out who the driver will be.

Write up a short hike description giving the highlights of the hike, the hike length and elevation gain (if significant). Also decide if the hike is “easy”, “moderate”, “strenuous” or “very strenuous”. We can help you with that determination. Estimate how many hours the hike should take. The hike description is needed at least two weeks before the hike so we can edit it and send it to the local newspaper and publish it on our website and Facebook page well in advance of the hike. A good photo featuring scenery or hikers on this trail is a plus. Send the hike description and any photos to Mike Williams.

Once the hike is publicized respond to any inquiries you might get by e-mail or phone. If you are planning to use a county van, we recommend that you ask hikers to reserve seats on the van in your hike description. Keep a list of those reserving seats.

Print out a copy of the Hike/Activity Sign Up sheet. Bring a copy to the hike meeting place along with any maps or other material you will need on the hike. Collect any equipment you might need such as a GPS or two-way radios. Bring a first aid kit and

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emergency supplies such as matches and rain gear (just in case!). Contact us if you need any of these items.

We recommend that you send the hike liability waiver form to any new hikers prior to the hike.

Day of the Hike

Be at the hike meeting place (usually the parking lot at Roses) at least 10 minutes before the announced meeting time. If using a van, meet with the van driver and explain the schedule. If the van is not there, call the van driver. Greet hikers and ask them to sign the signup sheet. Arrange carpools for dog owners (and everyone if you are not using a van). Collect donations from those riding on the van.

Wait five to 10 minutes after the announced meeting time for late arrivals. Make sure all drivers know the destination and how to get there.

Once at the trailhead take charge of the group. Appoint a dependable sweep. It is not a bad idea to have everyone introduce themselves. Explain to the hikers that in order to avoid hikers getting lost everyone should stay behind the hike leader and in front of the sweep. If anyone needs to turn back, they should inform the sweep. Ask if anyone has medical issues or allergies that the hike leader should be aware of.

Take a head count and make sure everyone knows who the sweep is. Check radio communication with the sweep or use cell phones if you have coverage. A whistle is also useful. Three blasts on a whistle is universally recognized as a call for help.

During the hike make stops along the way to allow slower hikers catch up. Try to keep the group together. Stop at any trail junctions to make sure all hikers take the correct trail. At these stops you may want to arrange a "trail break" (restroom stop). If you have a hiker that cannot keep up or is obviously not physically fit enough to do the hike you can direct that hiker to stop and return to their vehicle. Explain that for their own safety they need to return to the trailhead while they are still capable of doing so. Be sure to arrange an escort for the hiker back to their vehicle.

Enjoy the hike! When you reach the end be sure to account for everyone.

After the Hike

Turn in your hike signup sheet. Report any trail issues you might find on the trail. Post photos of the hike on our Facebook page or send them to a Board member to post.

Thank you for leading the hike!