



Hike Leader's Guidelines

Revised 02-05-2025

The club is very grateful for all members who volunteer to serve as Hike Leaders. Preparation and planning for the hike is a bigger job than actually leading a bunch of enthusiastic hikers through the woods. The Hike Chair will assist the Hike Leader in any of the duties shown below, to the extent requested. The information which follows is a guideline to the steps involved in planning and leading a hike.

Plan the Hike:

Information about many of the trails we hike is available on our club website in the Hike Reports. You can also use our OMH Google Calendar to find past hikes and work from the hike flash information included in the calendar as a starting point.

- **Plan your route.**

- Obtain maps and/or trail guides for your hike. These are available from State Park websites, National Park websites, Forest Service websites, downloadable apps (e.g. AllTrails, FarOut, GPSTracker, etc.). Links to many of these resources are available on the OMH website under "Trails We Hike" and "Ouachita Trail Information".
- Review previous hike reports and hike flashes on the OMH Google Calendar for route information.
- If possible, conduct a scouting pre-hike before your scheduled hike to make sure you are familiar with trailheads, intersections, timing, distance, etc. If you have not hiked that trail before, you may want to take with you a hiker experienced with that trail.
- **Walkie Talkies** are available to a hike leader by contacting the Hike Chair if you wish to use them on your hike.

- **Evaluate the difficulty of the hike.**
 - A hike rated **1 is Easy**. This means the trail is in great condition and the hike generally will have little elevation gain. The hike is usually 5 miles or less.
 - A hike rated **2 is Moderate**. This means the trail has more rocks/roots and possible vegetation making it a bit more difficult to hike. The trail may also have more elevation gains and up to 8 miles of hiking.
 - A hike rated **3 is Hard/Strenuous**. This means the trail has a lot of elevation change and some of this elevation change could be quite a challenge. The distance could also be a major factor (10+ miles).
 - A hike rated **4 is Difficult/Challenging**. This means this hike has off-trail options (bushwhacking). These hikes include challenging terrain, with a lot of steep elevation change. Water crossings or descents to waterfalls may be factors. Level 4 hikes often have less difficult options so that less aggressive hikers have the opportunity to participate. The hike description in the Hike Flash should make the possibilities clear.
- ***Establish times and meeting places for the hike.*** Determine when you want/need to actually start hiking at the trailhead and work backward to establish meeting times and carpool times. Start times should consider things such as:
 - Length of drive to trailhead and when you might expect to return
 - Weather: can it be expected to be very cold early or very hot later
 - Time of year: hours of daylight are especially shorter in December and January
- ***Carpooling is the norm for hikes.*** When appropriate, establish both a Hot Springs and a Hot Springs Village carpool location. Several Benton locations have also been suggested; specifically, the Walmart Supercenter at 17309 I-30, Benton or the Home Depot at 17060 I-30, Benton.
 - Carpool contribution amounts for roundtrip carpool
 - Zone 1 - trailhead is less than 15 miles from carpool location (roundtrip less than 30 miles): no charge
 - Zone 2 - trailhead is 15-50 miles from carpool location (roundtrip 30-100 miles): \$5 per person
 - Zone 3 - trailhead is 50-100 miles away from carpool location (roundtrip 101-200 miles): \$10 per person
 - Zone 4 - trailhead is greater than 100 miles away from carpool location (roundtrip 201 miles or more): \$15 per person
- ***Plan the logistics of your hike.*** For loop hikes and out-and-back hikes, where you finish at the same place you started, this is easy. For point-to-point hikes, where you finish at a different place than you started, determine how you plan to get back to the cars. Consider parking availability at both the beginning and endpoints of the hike. Options include:
 - Drop one or more vehicles at the endpoint before beginning the hike.
 - Have people who are not doing the entire hike move vehicles for you.

- Have two groups begin hiking at opposite endpoints and swap keys when they meet in the middle.
 - With this “key-swap” option, consider pre-planning the groups ahead of time. Ideally, the two groups should have comparable ability so one doesn’t wait on the other after the hike. Obtain concurrence ahead of time from the person you want to lead the second group.
- For hikes that involve shuttle drivers:
 - Hike flash should describe shuttles and the amount to contribute to the hike leader for the shuttle.
 - The Hike Leader will collect contributions and reimburse shuttle driver(s) at the beginning of the hike.
 - Shuttle contribution amount and distribution
 - The shuttle fee is 10 cents/mile of shuttle (rounded to the nearest dollar).
 - Total miles of shuttling for all shuttle vehicles will be calculated and the contribution amount evenly distributed (rounded to the nearest dollar) among all shuttle vehicles, regardless of how many people ride in each vehicle.
 - For example:
 - Let's say the total shuttle mileage is 40. Each hiker using the shuttle service would contribute \$4 (40 x \$0.10).
 - The hike leader collects the shuttle fee from all the hikers. If there are six hikers in our example, the total amount collected would be \$24 (6 x \$4).
 - The hike leader then evenly divides the total shuttle contribution among the shuttle vehicles, regardless of passenger count. In this case, if there were 3 vehicles, each one would receive \$8 (\$24/3).

Screen Hikers:

- **Screen all new hikers** to determine that they understand what they are getting into and that they are ready. Ask them about hiking experience and general physical condition. Make sure they realize that they need good shoes, water and electrolytes as a minimum. New hikers generally should be requested to begin with shorter hikes (usually Saturday hikes). If you feel that they are not capable of the hike, suggest they start with a simpler hike or more local walking to get in shape.
- **New hikers will be required to complete the Participant Waiver and Release of Liability Form** either online before the hike or a hard copy at the beginning of the hike (available on the OMH website).
- **Check the club roster to make sure members are active and have submitted a current Participant Waiver and Release of Liability Form.**

- ***When any hiker checks in for your hike, member or otherwise, consider their abilities, particularly for difficult hikes.*** Even at hike check-in, if, in the hike leader's opinion, a potential hiker is not capable of completing the hike, they should be requested not to participate. Should controversies arise, refer the person to the Hike Chair. The Hike Chair is the hike leader's back-up in such circumstances.

Conduct of the Hike:

- ***Weather aborts are the Hike Leader's call.*** Either before or during the hike, you have the responsibility and the authority to cancel the hike if you think weather conditions dictate. Common sense should be your guide. Rain in itself is not usually a sufficient reason to cancel a hike. Rain plus a cold wind might be; a thunderstorm is almost always sufficient reason to cancel a hike. Consider trail conditions. An inch or two of rain the night before a hike could make creek crossings impossible. Don't forget road conditions. Icy roads reaching the carpool points may be sufficient cause to cancel.
- ***Set a pace that is comfortable for the group you have.*** The Hike Leader does not have to be the pacesetter, but is still responsible for the pace. If you let someone else set the pace, let them know how they are doing.
- ***Assign a "sweep" person to bring up the rear. The sweep should be an experienced hiker, who knows the route, and who can remain with stragglers and help get them out safely.*** Furnish the sweep with a copy of your trail guide or maps. Also, a few rules of thumb: the pacesetter must know who is ahead of them (if anyone) and identify a location at which the group will reconvene; the sweep should not let a hiker get behind them, except for a comfort stop. Lastly, never accept the assertion of a struggling hiker that they will be fine.
- ***Recognize that all the people in the group will not have the same pace.*** Stop periodically to let slower hikers catch up. When they do catch up, advise them that they are entitled to a break also. Encourage the faster hikers to be sensitive to this need.
- ***The Hike Leader may choose to break the group into slower and faster hikers if there is sufficient expertise on the hike.*** This strategy could allow the slower hikers to proceed at their own pace and rest as needed.
- ***Stop at all intersections or confusing sections of the trail to make sure all hikers know which way to go.***
- ***Dogs are occasional participants on OMH hikes. Dog owners are responsible for their dogs and for making sure the dogs do not bother other hikers.*** Hikers should advise you if they are bringing dogs with them. As Hike Leader you have the say as to whether dogs can go on your hike and should alert dog owners in advance of the hike if you believe a particular route is not appropriate for dogs.

Administration:

- ***Coordinate with the Publicity Chair at least a week prior to your hike to provide information for publication in the weekly "Hike Flash".*** Include meeting times and places; carpool share cost; any special equipment hikers should bring (such as

waders or water shoes); whether or not they should bring lunch or snacks; and anything unusual or enticing that you want to say in the Hike Flash. A suggested format is provided on the OMH website. E-mail your hike announcement to the Publicity Chair no later than the Friday a week before your hike.

- ***Obtain a completed Participant Waiver and Release of Liability Form from each new hiker prior to the start of your hike (including guests – see below).***

This can be done online at the OMH website or with a hard copy provided by the Hike Leader at the beginning of the hike. Carry several blank forms with you whenever you are Hike Leader. Turn in completed forms to the Membership Chair. It is helpful to the Membership Chair to include on the form an email and physical address and a phone number.

- ***Guest Hikers.*** The Club encourages new hikers to check us out. Additionally, Club members may have friends visiting who would like to join a hike. After one hike as a guest, the Board of Directors has set a policy that the hiker should join the club if they wish to participate in other hikes. A hiker who wishes to join the Club should consult the “New Member Information” on the Club website. A hiker’s promise to submit their dues to the Membership chair is sufficient for inclusion on a hike. For overnight trips, the Board’s policy is that all hikers should be Club members.
- ***Complete a Hike Report*** on the club website using the online form that is available. These reports are used to maintain a database on the club website.

If you are unable to lead your scheduled hike, it is your responsibility to try to find a replacement and to notify the Hike Chair of the change. Here is the procedure for doing this:

Email all other hike leaders (copy the Hike Chair) to ask for a replacement. A current list of Hike Leaders and their email addresses may be obtained by downloading the Club Roster from the website and sorting by the Hike Leader column. (If needed, the Hike Chair is available to help with sending this email.)

- If this succeeds, then assist the new hike leader in planning the hike and notify the Hike Chair of the change.
- If this fails, notify the Hike Chair as soon as possible.
- If a replacement hike leader has not been found, then the Hike Chair may cancel the hike or schedule a meet-up hike.