

PROSPECTIVE & NEW HIKE LEADERS: ANSWERS TO FAQs

Hike Leader Culture

One of the wonderful aspects of CVHC is the delegation of authority and decision-making to its hike leaders. As hike leader, you are in charge. You decide when and where to hike, who gets to come, and if you need to change or terminate a hike. You don't ask for permission, you decide. Sensibility, confidence, good judgment, and the ability to make decisions on the fly are some of the important qualifications for being a hike leader. There are Club rules, but you are ultimately the "decider".

But you aren't alone. You can literally call other Club leaders to inquire about questionable hikers. In your vetting process, you can ask a hiker, "Who have you hiked with?" and then contact that leader using the Member Roster to obtain their telephone number or email address. You can also do the opposite and alert a leader to potential challenges with a particular hiker.

Other hike leaders are your support team. All are more than willing to come to your rescue. If you are in a bind or in a quandary on a hike, ask another leader in the group for help or advise. If needed, ask a hike leader in your group to walk a hiker back to the trailhead if there is a problem. If you had a difficult situation on a hike, discretely chat with other leaders afterwards for ideas for handling it more comfortably in the future.

Planning Your First Hike

A former Hike Leader Recruiter recommended that new hike leaders think of their event as "taking a few friends with you on your favorite hike". Keep the hike selection, maximum number of hikers, and sweep choice comfortable for you so you will be at your best.

When selecting hikes to lead, make sure you will be hiking well within your ability. Be mindful of your 'reserves'. There is no rule about reserves, but consider leading hikes that generally only use about 50% of your proven capacity, which will add to your confidence and effectiveness should there be an emergency.

Initially, limit yourself to out-and-back or loop hikes. Shuttle or key exchange hikes take more planning and give you less flexibility in an emergency. Wait until you are comfortable with leading hikes before adding another layer of complexity.

Consider limiting your hikes to 10 people or less to keep it manageable in the beginning. Smaller groups are easier to lead; they make it easier to keep it fun and light-hearted; and they make you more approachable. You want folks to let you know if they are struggling or have a special need. People are less likely to speak up in a large group or if the hike feels regimented.

To select a hike, familiarize yourself with the hike Archive. See the "Nitty Gritty" section at the bottom of this file for how to access the hikes listed in the Archive. Note that the distances and elevations may be approximations and their difficulty designation doesn't always follow the stated criteria. In the beginning, select hikes to lead from these established ones.

The guidance about posting hikes on the schedule is quite loose. Check the Calendar first to ensure that you aren't duplicating a hike or competing with similar hikes. The only restriction is to not have 2 identical hikes that depart at the same time on the same day. It's allowed for 2 hikes to be quite similar on the same day though strive to differentiate your hikes from others to give members a range of options to match with their available time.

After selecting a hike to lead and before posting it, be very clear in your own mind as to who your 'target market' is for that particular day. The best time will be had by all if the hiking ability and expectations are similar among the participants. Do you want your hike to be a leisurely stroll or a fitness activity? Trail selection and comments in your hike posting are the first steps in shaping your event. The longer the hike, the more similar the ability of the hikers should be. If there are significant mismatches of any kind, you may need to shorten your hike once underway.

The Club Secretary can post hikes for you or troubleshoot any problems you are having with posting hikes on the Calendar. Find his/her contact information on the CVHC Executive Committee section at the bottom of the Home page.

There is no rule as to how many hikes you should sponsor per year. Many leaders offer 1-3 hikes per month. Consider scheduling 2-3 hikes fairly soon after becoming a leader so you can gain the experience you need to be confident. Invite the Hike Leader Recruiter or another hiker leader on your first club hike as leader. Their presence takes the pressure off of you to remember all of the little details, particularly the greeting and instruction given at the trailhead. Invite hike leaders to support you for as many hikes as you need to feel comfortable. Also ask them for feedback at the end of the hike regarding your pace and attentiveness to the group while on the trail.

Feel free to ask other hike leaders to join your first hikes for sweep, moral support, or feedback. If you don't know who to ask, contact the Hike Leader Recruiter and ask them to find a leader to support you if they aren't available.

You are welcome to create new hikes, like with the ¼ Tram hike to Rescue 1 that was created in late 2017. Before you do so, be certain that you aren't duplicating a hike entered under a different name. To establish the level of difficulty, look at the guidelines on the Calendar page and fine tune it based on your experience.

Vetting

Your #1 responsibility as a hike leader is the safety of all. The first step in making a hike safe is the difficult job of vetting hikers. It however seems to be impossible to ask enough questions when vetting, so listen carefully for tell-tale clues from the prospective hiker and let those clues guide your questioning.

The longer and the more difficult the hike, the more thorough you need to be in screening hikers. It is acceptable to tell a prospective hiker that they can't come on your epic hike unless they have hiked with you or another Club leader recently. For example, one week 3 'just joined the club' or 'will be joining' hikers contacted a leader about doing the all day, ½ Tram hike. Since it is an extremely difficult hike and none had any history with the club, they were refused. They were advised to sign-up for another hike with the same leader, which none did and none ever called back. Had any of them recently completed a club hike, the ½ Tram leader could have contacted the prior leader to learn how they had performed. Being able to confirm that a member was on one of your hikes is a good reason to keep a record of participants on your past hikes.

When vetting, you are authorized to refuse hiker requests to join your hike based on prior bad behavior, in addition to lack of aptitude. At the trailhead, you are also authorized to refuse to allow a hiker to proceed on the hike for any reason you deem appropriate.

When posting a hike that is Strenuous or above, consider adding 'fast pace' to the entry unless it truly won't be. That comment will allow hikers to 'self-vet' and forewarn those with an inflexible view as to the proper pace. You can add a note to the posting for a specific hike that it will be a "moderate pace" and another time, you could designate the same hike as "fast pace."

There is no Club definition of moderate and fast, but on a hike with good footing and minimal or modest gain, think in terms of 2.25 mph for a moderate pace and approaching 3 mph for a fast pace. Likewise, 2.25 mph on a climb is likely a fast pace. And be clear with the confusing language when discussing difficulty with a hiker: is 'moderate' referring to the trail difficulty, which is a combination of distance and gain, or the speed?

There is a separate piece on this website with more information about vetting should you become a hike leader.

Make a list of the hikers you've accepted for your hike. Under Hiker Leader Documents, look for the password-protected Hiker Sign-In Sheet to find the Hiker Tracking Sheet that you may print-out to create a hardcopy list of your hiker's and their contact information. It is not required to have a hardcopy but you'll need a way to capture the names of your hikers and how to reach them. Another option is to list the hikers on your cell phone Calendar for the upcoming hike and create Contact entries for each. Hiker contact information is in the Member Roster but you might not have internet access to reference that list at the trailhead should you want to call an individual.

Before the Hike

Don't take it personally if no one or only 1 person signs up for your hikes. That happens. Even long time, popular leaders sometimes won't have any sign-ups. The ½ Tram hike is a good example: there are many people who want to do the hike but most aren't able and the others don't sign-up. But even poorly attended hikes are worth having on the schedule because they keep people interested in the Club and give members more choices.

The minimum number of people for a hike is at your discretion. Many leaders carry on with only 1 hiker: the member planned to hike that day; the leader planned to hike that day; so they go.

At least early in your hike leader career, strive to select a sweep for your hike before the meet-up. It is common practice to select a sweep at the trailhead (TH) but as a new leader, that could be problematic. Ideally you want your sweep to know the trail well enough to take over leading or to backtrack if a hiker needs to be walked out or something happens to you.

Pre-selecting a sweep isn't so important if the trail is very straightforward, but if not, it's best to have someone who knows the way. And keep in mind, on essentially any hike that is Strenuous or harder, more than half of the group will likely be hike leaders and you'll have many sweeps to choose from. It's a courtesy to contact them in advance in case they had planned on hiking with an out-of-town guest or the like.

Even for familiar hikes, it's smart to hike it once at the beginning of the season before leading a group or get a current trail conditions report from someone else. Being confident and projecting confidence is a big part of success in any endeavor.

Consider publicizing a return time of "no earlier than" before the hike day for longer hikes to reduce the unexpected demands on you. That can be done by e-mail a few days before the hike or on the hike posting. Restate the "no earlier than" time again at the trailhead.

Surprisingly often, hikers will arrive at the trailhead and announce, “I have an appointment at...” or worse, tell you that once the hike is underway. Make it clear that the estimated return time is not a guaranteed time and is entirely dependent on how the day unfolds. Hikers can be amazingly clueless to the problems they create with their “Oh, by the way...” expectations of accommodation.

At The Trailhead

Pre-Talk

Introduce yourself to hikers you don't know as they arrive at the trailhead (TH) and give them a quick look-over for their readiness to hike. Note the basics, like if they: have a pack; are wearing suitable clothing and footwear; and seem to have water. Broach the subject with them if you are concerned that they aren't properly outfitted.

Greetings & Introductions

Gather the hikers in a circle and welcome them to your hike. State that they'll each share their name and where their winter and summer residences are. Ask them to identify themselves if they are new members or guests. Begin with yourself so as to demonstrate that this is a brief introduction and identify the sweep for the hike.

Overview of Hike

Give a brief overview of the hike, such as distance and elevation gain, and generally what they can expect. For example, on the hike to Murray Hill from Garstin TH you might say:

- ..almost half of the elevation gain is in the first mile and a half so we will take it slow but maintain a steady pace
- ..we'll stop after about 10" to shed jackets
- ..we won't take sit-down breaks until the peak but pause a few times along the way
- ..we'll take 15-20" at the peak for break, depending on the temperature
- ..it's an out-and-back hike, so we'll return on the same trails we used to reach the peak

Rules

- ..Stay together: this is after all, a group hike.
- ..Don't leave the group without discussing your departure with the leader.
- ..Tell the leader or sweep if you are having problems with your health, the pace, your gear, or anything else.
- ..Tell the sweep if you need to stop for a 'bio break' or to adjust your gear. The group will stop and wait for you.
- ..Discreetly inform the hike leader of any medical issues that might be helpful for them to know about, like asthma or epilepsy, and the location of any medication they might retrieve for you.

Nice To Do: Invite the hikers to:

- ..make a point to introduce themselves to, and connect with, each hiker in the group while on the trail.
- ..inform the hike leader or sweep if a fellow hiker seems to be in distress.
- ..tell the hike leader if they are interested in becoming a hike leader.

Announcements

..mention any upcoming Club events like the next Social or the annual safety meeting
..share any timely information, such as closed trails or roads, changes in Tram operations, changes at Indian Canyon, recent mountain lion sightings, or anything else that is relevant.

On The Trail

Food & Water

Tailor your hike leader routine to each hiking day. For example, on hot days, you might want to have bottled water and Gatorade on ice in your vehicle to give out at the end of the hike to make sure everyone is safe enough to drive home. On hot days, consider carrying extra bottled water and maybe Gatorade in your pack, even if the hike is short and especially if you don't know the hikers. Some hike leaders also carry salt in a zip bag for anyone who believes they might be getting sodium depleted.

If you bring snacks to share with a struggling hiker, don't bring peanuts or products with peanuts—you just never know who might have a nut allergy.

Being Heard

Keep in mind that somewhere between a third and a half of the people over age 65 have some degree of hearing loss. Strive to spot the hikers at the trailhead who seem to be having difficulty hearing and accommodate them as much as possible by speaking up, being closer to them when you speak to the group, and making eye contact when speaking. Wind, grit underfoot on the trail, and other conversations will make it harder for you to be heard when walking. When talking with a hiker behind you on the trail, aim to turn your head slightly towards them to more readily be heard.

Walkie-talkies are available for your use from the Club for staying in touch with your sweep. The Club-owned pairs are usually held by the Hike Leader Recruiter in the peak of the winter season and the rest of the year, are held by a Club member who lives in the desert year-round. Some members own pairs that they will loan to you. There is a bit of a learning curve and charging time required, so plan ahead.

Monitoring Hikers

It's good 'continuing education' to make it a habit whenever you hike to monitor hikers for excessive weariness. The more practice you obtain in evaluating hikers on the fly, the more automatic it will be when you are leading a group. Periodically on the trail, take a long look at each hiker's face so you know when it changes from their baseline. Scan them for new limps or tilts in their posture.

Taking a break about 10 minutes into the hike, especially if going uphill, gives hikers a welcome opportunity to adjust their clothing or shoes to the actual conditions. It's also a good opportunity to make your first assessment as to how each is doing with the temperature, pace, and grades and check-in with your sweep to inquire about their observations and concerns.

Look for increasing redness, excessive sweating, tension in their face, and a pained look in their eyes as markers for being overwhelmed. If they are still smiling and chatting, they

probably are doing well with the conditions; if they've gone quiet, there may be a problem brewing. Dragging poles can be another marker for unmanageable fatigue.

Particularly if hikers are using water flasks and not drink tubes, stop periodically to allow them to drink. If they don't drink, consider reminding them to do so, perhaps by name, during your pauses.

Keep in mind that on trails with steep starts that some very capable hikers may require 10-30 minutes of warm-up time.

Resist the temptation to end a rest break when the last, lagging hiker rejoins the group. More than anyone, they need time to recover.

Periodically pause for 1-2 minutes to confer with your sweep. Do not assume that everything is going well at the back of the group. Privately chat with the sweep to learn if there are issues, like if you need to slow the pace, pause for breaks more often, or if there is a hiker contemplating turning around.

Emergency Calls

In case of an emergency, dial 911 even if you don't have cell service with your carrier. If another carrier is active in the region, their system will automatically take your 911 call, regardless of your carrier.

Consider making note of cell service on your phone when hiking on trails for which you sponsor club hikes. It's hard to remember exact points for reception, but even establishing that several high, open points are 'never' or 'sometimes' workable helps.

Call 911 to notify SARS that you might need assistance with a hiker BEFORE you have decided it is necessary. They appreciate knowing what is pending and if they already have craft in the air, they may swing by to locate you, just in case they are needed.

No Hiker Left Behind

Clearly state at the beginning of the hike that you'll all stay together, that anyone dropping back for a bio break needs to check-in with the sweep, and insist that any hiker leaving early must notify the leader.

Immediately stop if you lose track of a hiker and remain in place while you craft your plan. Begin by asking other members if the missing person mentioned that they were taking a bio break, were bored, sick, or were leaving, and when they last saw the person. Use their cell phone number in your records to call them. How you proceed will depend entirely upon the specifics of the situation but calling 911 to report the lost hiker is one of your options.

A nice club convention is for hike leaders to remain at the TH until all hikers have started their cars upon return to the parking area. As the hike leader, you can ask them to start their engine if they want to linger in the lot and you don't.

Report Injuries

Email the Hike Leader Coordinator to report an accident or injury that occurred on your hike.

Legal Issues

If you are leading a hike that requires carpooling or shuttling, DO NOT assign riders to drivers in advance. Do find out beforehand who can transport hikers to make sure you have sufficient seats and drivers available, then leave it at that. When at the meet-up, oversee only to the extent of shouting “Who is driving; how many can you take?” and let the drivers and riders work it out. Of course, make sure everyone has a ride. This distancing of oneself from the process decreases the Club’s liability and yours, if there is an issue.

Likewise, rather than offering ibuprofen or similar products to an ailing hiker, shift the exchange so that the hiker asks you for it.

The Next Step

If you would like to proceed with becoming a hike leader, the Website Coordinator will provide you with a username and password and the Hike Leader Recruiter will arrange training for posting hikes or direct you to the Secretary, who will post hikes for you.

Annual Hike Leader Events

January or February TBA, 3-5 pm, Palm Desert Library, annual Hike Leader Training meeting, sponsored by the Hike Leader Coordinator, is listed on the Club Calendar. Any member may attend.

December TBA, Hike Leaders Meeting to enter hikes on the schedule. Bring your calendar and consider arriving with the hikes you plan to lead and their dates for January and February as well. If unable to attend, post your hikes on the schedule being mindful of duplications of previously posted hikes.

Nitty Gritty: Accessing the Hike Archive To View Established Hikes

- ..Select “Links & Resources” from the top of the CVHC Home Page
- ..Scroll down to “HIKE LEADER DOCUMENTS”
- ..Select “Hike Entry Procedure (new Dec 2019)”
- ..Enter the generic hike leader PW for the website
- ..Press the green button: “Download Hike Entry Procedure”
- ..Locate the list of a dozen numbered instructions to enter a hike though only go through #7 to look at listed hikes with these additional instructions:
 -3. Tap “CVHC” and “Dashboard” will appear under it, which you then tap.
 -4. Under “Dashboard” on the far left, select “M.E. Calendar”, then select “All Events”.
 -5. Notice “Events” to the right of this far left column in a new space and select “All” if it isn’t highlighted. Tap “Show All Organizers” on the right and tap “Archive”, which is alphabetized in the list with hike leader names.
 -6. Follow the instructions here to locate a hike brought up by using the search function.
 -7. Tap on the hike name you are interested in and “View” and “Duplicate” will appear. To read the hike description, tap “View”; to create a hike posting, tap “Duplicate.”

Finding an established hike in the Archive is your starting point for posting a hike. Note any changes you need made to this boilerplate hike description for your event. You can either proceed with the instructions for posting your own hike by continuing on with “Duplicate” from

#7 in the itemized instructions, or contact the club Secretary and ask her/him to modify the Archive entry to customize it for your hike and to post it.

Smile and have fun!