

# TREK HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDELINES

Regardless of any other goals or aspirations the group has, the health and safety of the troop comes first. To that end, the troop leadership, the trek administrators and the Voyageur Guides will function together to cover the following guidelines before, during and after the wilderness trip.

## 1. TRIP LEADER PREREQUISITES

- a. Be familiar with region to be hiked.
- b. Consult maps, guidebooks and people who know the area.
- c. Do not undertake the trip unless one is a competent outdoorsman since safety of others depends on you.
- d. Leader's tripping philosophy should be adjusted to abilities and needs of group, not be dictated by own personal goals.
- e. Check state requirements for certified first aid training for leaders.
- f. Level of leader maturity should allow for interaction with hikers while still maintaining group's respect for his authority.

## 2. GROUP COMPOSITION

- a. Select itinerary well within capabilities of group, and attempt to keep group to approximately equal strength. This may be worked out with the Trek Director during the winter months prior to arrival.
- b. Keep group size to 7 or 11 based on trek area. A small group is easier to keep together and is quieter. Ecologically speaking, small groups tend to have less physical impact, particularly in fragile areas such as summits. In a small group there is a greater sense of community, allowing for a more enjoyable experience for all.

## 3. PRE-HIKE PREPARATION

- a. **Transportation** - Obtain, in writing, information about vehicle time and place for both departure and pickup, and leave this information and itinerary with responsible person. Make certain vehicle is in good repair, filled with gas and has spare tire.
- b. **Obtain Proper Permits** - or reservations as necessary. Permits through DEC are secured by the Trek Director for treks registered through the Massawepie Scout Camps High Adventure Program.
- c. **Stoves** - In heavily used areas, where firewood or established fireplace may not be present, use backpack stove. Become thoroughly familiar with stove usage, test all stoves before departing, bring enough fuel to last the trip. Stove advantages: Shorter cooking time, easy regulation of heat output, pots and pans do not accumulate soot as in a fire, little chance of upsetting meal. Beware of blue flame - it is extremely hot and sometimes difficult to see. Never refill gas tank while stove is hot, it may explode. Fireplaces are nice, but don't depend on them.
- d. **Lean-tos** - Always take tents and tarps, enough for every member of the party. Don't count on lean-to's always being available. They accommodate only 8-9 persons comfortably.
- e. **Tents** - Provides protection from most insects (especially necessary in heavily infested areas such as waterways), offers wind and rain protection. Check for leaks and tears before leaving. Check for sufficient ropes, stakes and poles. Don't substitute young saplings. Do overnight dry runs.
- f. **Trial Runs** - Overnight dry runs in your home area give insight into why various clothing and equipment are required. It allows one to become accustomed to the darkness and night sounds. Better to practice skills at home base than to experiment on forestland where consequence of mistakes may be more serious.
- g. **First -Aid** - Adequate first aid kit is top priority item. Both trip leader and assistant should have working knowledge of basic first aid skills. In kit have pencil, paper, and accident report

form, with dimes and quarters for phone call. Practice first aid procedures on one another. Prepare for special medical needs of an individual hiker.

- h. **Map & Compass** – Use most recent maps and guidebooks and know how to read and use them. These skills are prerequisite to safe mountain travel.
- i. **Litter Bags** – Pack out all you pack in, including aluminum foil, tin cans, food wastes and garbage left behind by uncaring hikers. Don't bury food wastes – it will attract animals. Carry enough litterbags for everyone.
- j. **Footwear** – Hiking trails are often muddy, rocky or eroded, making them difficult to walk on. Selection of footwear is influenced by three variables: roughness of terrain, amount of weight to be carried and distance to be hiked. Look for the three critical elements of a good shoe: sturdiness, ankle support and good traction. After fit, weight is the most important consideration – one doesn't have to have heavy, expeditionary type boots for trail hiking. Remember your impact on the forest floor.
- k. **Foul Weather Gear** – A durable poncho is essential, regardless of duration of trip or favorable weather forecast. Weather does change swiftly and radically in the mountains.
- l. **Hats** – In warm weather, a felt “crusher” hat provides protection from rain and insects. For cool weather, a wool hat is a warmer alternative. Furthermore, a brimmed hat can provide eye protection for canoe trekkers
- m. **Clothing** – Blue jeans and sweatshirts absorb large quantities of water, take forever to dry and are uncomfortably stiff and very cold. When wet, they do not provide insulation, thus robbing essential body heat. Select hiking pants on basis of how quickly they dry. Wear clothing in layers – cotton or fishnet T-shirt, regular cotton shirt, outer wool shirt or cardigan for evenings and inclement weather, windbreaker and finally poncho.
- n. **Clothing and Equipment Checklist** – Help parents by sending list home before hand. Also, make checklist for hiker, detailing exactly what he is to bring. Don't rely on verbal agreements. Check all gear before leaving. If shakedown is night before, take packs away. Otherwise, they might eat essential food or misplace important equipment during the evening.
- o. **Itinerary Prepping** – Describe itinerary and show it on a map, thus providing more active interest in hike and in safety factor should hiker become separated from the group.
- p. **Food** – Use variety of menus representing balanced diet. Forget canned goods, extremely heavy to carry and empty containers have to be packed out. Use dry or dehydrated foods reconstituted with water.
- q. **Trail Conduct** – Discuss woods ethics including litter, proper disposal of human waste involving digging a slit trench down 6-8” with boot heel or sturdy stick, cover with leaf matter. Best to use privies whenever available; but if not, at least get away from the trail. Leave tape players, transistor radios and loud human voices behind. Sounds you generate disturb not only other hikers but wildlife as well. Don't peel bark, especially birch. Don't leave debris behind and don't deface trail signs, lean-to floorboards, picnic tables or privies.
- r. **Washing** – Dishes and silverware should be washed well away from any water source. Prior to washing, scrape food waste into litterbag, use biodegradable soap and boiling water for washing. Rinse separately. Dump dirty soap and rinse water well back into the woods. Pollution of waterways, by food, soap or human water, is a punishable offense in most states. NOTE: Make sure to use bleach or sanitizing tablet in rinse water.
- s. **Goals** – De-emphasize summits as single determining factor for success of trip. On way to summit, instill a sense of awareness and appreciation, slow down and look around. By giving hikers an appreciation of their own ecological impact and how their actions relate to other life, they will become better woods users.
- t. **Weather** – Make last minute checks before trip. Abort trip if there is adverse weather – there will always be another time. If questionable weather is encountered at treeline, be prepared to alter your plans or delay ascent until weather has cleared. Be aware of electrical storms when

on summits. Descend immediately and seek shelter. Do not stand under a tree or in water pools.

#### 4. ON THE TRAIL

- a. **Trailhead Registers** - Sign in at all of them, stick with your plans, and sign the word "out" upon departure.
- b. **Distribute Group Gear and Food According to Hiker Strength** - Thus equalizing hikers so everyone feels comfortable hiking at about the same pace. Place slow hiker in "point" or "lead" position, allowing him to be the pacemaker, this usually improves his attitude and speed.
- c. **Sweep** - The one who brings up the rear is also a leader, one of responsibility to keep the group together and who has the power of surveillance that the point lacks.
- d. **Line of March** - Each person should be able to see the person in front of him, keep the group together.
- e. **Rest Stops** - Take them regularly, for toilet stops, passing out high-energy snacks that refuel hikers and give them a mental lift, taking head count. Also take head count at all trail junctions.
- f. **SOS** - Use whistle, international signal of 3 blasts for distress.
- g. **Darkness** - Comes earlier in woods than in more open environment. Allow at least 2 hours before dusk to find campsite, set up camp, cook and eat.
- h. **Camp Sites** - Use previously cleared site or lean-to. Avoid "pioneering" new sites or expanding existing ones. Never camp at the ecotone (line where two different systems meet) as they are extremely fragile and damage easily. Keep any fire small and attended at all times.
- i. **Dangers**
  - Unpredictable Weather - Be prepared for all - hypothermia (the cooling of the core body temperature) can occur throughout the year even in August and can cause death.
  - Beware of wildlife - Bears are wild creatures and should be respected as such. Hang food in durable bag between two trees, tied at least 15' high and 5' from each trunk, leave no food inside lean-to, tent or pack, eat away from the sleeping area, use whistle as deterrent since high frequency sound is painful to its ears; injuries should be attended to by skilled first aiders at site, send two responsible persons for help, complete accident report form with dates and details of incident.
- j. **Before Leaving Campsite** - Double check for litter and garbage, plastic sheeting, food, and other items, completely drown all fires, stir them with a stick, make final hand check to see that coals and embers are out and cold, leave no sign that you were there. If rake is provided, clean area, pack out any litter left behind by uncaring hiker.
- k. **Departure** - Know your pickup time and allow for an unhurried departure. Many accidents occur while rushing out of the woods at dusk. Don't push hikers because you, the leader, forced them to reach the summit against the pickup schedule. If your intended goal conflicts with your pickup time, forsake the goal.

#### 5. BASE CAMP ITEMS

- a. Hang out all tents, tarps and sleeping bags to dry. Make note of any equipment needing repair
- b. Rewash all dishes, pots and silverware to insure that bacteria and germs are killed.
- c. Send hikers with cuts, scrapes or serious blisters to receive treatment.
- d. Be certain all hikers get properly showered and changed.
- e. Make post-trip evaluation, discuss problems encountered and/or remedies.