

New Mexico Cross Country Ski Club

GUIDELINES FOR TOUR LEADERS

I. PURPOSE

These guidelines provide general duties and responsibilities for New Mexico Cross Country Ski Club (NMCCSC) tour leaders. It is the leader's responsibility to help everyone enjoy the tour and return safely. The best leaders are informed, prepared, organized, patient and thoughtful. A separate set of guidelines apply to tour participants.

Day tours start at a pre-determined meeting place in town. Bus trip tours begin at a bus-accessible trailhead, and hut trips begin at a point designated by the hut trip leader and includes car travel.

II. PRE-TOUR PROCEDURES

Publicize Tours (Club newsletter, e-groups, and website):

- Date of tour
- Meeting place and time
- CLASS rating (see *TERRAIN & RATINGS*), any expected variation to the rating, and any special equipment or other requirements for the tour.
- Description of tour (*length, elevation gain, general description – see form on website*)
- Leader contact information

Checklist to Plan the Tour:

- Find out what the snow conditions are.
- Know the route options for the tour to determine the Class Rating.
- Determine if special equipment is required: skins, GPS, two-way radios, avalanche equipment, etc.
- Identify maps needed, including the roads to the trailhead, and make a few extra copies.
- Find emergency telephone numbers in advance for area Search and Rescue, local/state Police, County Sheriff, etc. If in Colorado, know how to contact the Colorado Avalanche Information Center. Remember the most important emergency telephone number: **911**.
- Check the road and weather conditions before leaving home the day of the tour.
- Attempt to evaluate participants. If participants appear to have inadequate skills or equipment, you have the right and the responsibility to decline their participation.
- State in the announcement that for Class III tours participants **must** call the leader in advance.
- Download a **Release of Liability** form from the website for all participants to sign on the tour. Send the completed form to the Day Trip Chair after the tour.

Pack the 10 Essentials Plus Suggested Items:

1. Map of the area and compass
2. Water (*more than you think you need ~ 2 liters or 10 oz./hour of skiing*)
3. Food for expected consumption and extra high-energy food for emergencies
4. Clothing appropriate for extreme cold and worst imaginable conditions (*i.e. polypropylene underwear, fleece shirts, waterproof shell, down jacket or vest and extra headgear and gloves/mittens*)
5. Sunglasses, sunscreen and a sun hat
6. A tool for cutting, e.g. knife, scissors or Leatherman
7. First aid kit
8. Matches and/or lighter and a fire starter
9. Headlamp and extra batteries
10. Whistle
11. Hand and foot warmers
12. Space blanket
13. Small insulating pad for sitting on at lunch and can be used in various ways for emergencies
14. Fully charged cell phone if you have one
15. Avalanche equipment if going into avalanche conditions
16. Two-way radios
17. GPS with key waypoints, including trailhead and extra batteries (*optional*)
18. Additional items, e.g. camera, tape for poles, wire for binding repair, screw driver, steel wool, etc.

III. TOUR LOGISTICS – MEETING PLACE

- Arrive at the meeting place early.
- Introduce yourself as the leader and have participants introduce themselves.
- Check to make sure the skiers are adequately prepared for the weather conditions, have proper and functioning gear, and adequate food and water for the tour.
- Ask questions to determine if skiers have adequate skills, equipment and clothing for the ski tour, and decline participation of those who are not prepared.
- Have all participants read and sign the **Release of Liability** form.
- Describe the road and ski route conditions as determined from weather forecasts, State Police, personal experience, etc.
- Determine the drivers and evaluate whether their vehicle is suitable for the road conditions expected.
- Explain the Club policy on reimbursing the drivers.
- Provide explicit driving directions to the trailhead and any shuttles for the return.
- Exchange cell phone numbers if available. Consider taking several cell phones with different service providers.
- Make sure skiers are in the same vehicle as their gear (*if possible*).
- Encourage caravanning, although drivers may arrive at the trailhead at different times.

IV. TRAILHEAD

- Assemble everyone at the trailhead and give any last minute instructions.
- Count heads and try to learn the names of all the skiers.
- State explicitly that Club policy discourages solitary skiing. Tell them that if they need to return to the trailhead, they must inform you and negotiate the terms for their return. It may be possible to find a companion for the returning skier. Insist that you be informed so that you won't mount an unnecessary search for a missing skier.
- **Do not start skiing until everyone is ready to go.**
- Start off at a slow pace; build up the pace gradually. The leader should try to ski at a steady pace that can be maintained by all skiers. Always stay in contact with the group

V. CONDUCTING THE SKI TOUR

- Let the skiers know that they can ask for a break, equipment/clothing adjustments, food and water, rest and/or personal needs at any time.
- Discourage skiers from stopping randomly without the knowledge of the leader.
- Monitor the condition and behavior of the slower skiers and take breaks accordingly. During the break, give all participants adequate time to rest, eat and drink. After a break, do not resume skiing until all are accounted for.

VI. TOUR MANAGEMENT

- Determine if an Assistant Leader is needed if the group size is large or different skill levels lead to wide separations of skiers. If so, appoint the Assistant Leader and break into two groups. Also, consider appointing a "sweep" to make sure slow skiers are not abandoned or go astray. The leader and sweep should have two-way radios or cell phones to maintain effective communications.
- Encourage skiers identify a "buddy" to ski with and to keep that person in sight throughout the tour.
- Determine in advance if any car group intends to turn around early. If there is an agreement that several skiers may turn around, make sure they have car keys. Turning around early is a less desirable option on a loop tour than an in-out ski tour, since returning skiers will not be re-tracing their route to detect any problems.
- Set a turnaround time on an in-out ski tour so slower skiers will be sure they can return to the cars at the same time as faster skiers.
- Be aware of potential difficulties associated with shuttle tours, one in which the ski party exits at a trailhead different from the entry trailhead. Such a tour is more demanding because all skiers should arrive at the exit trailhead at about the same time. Be forewarned that complications can develop with a shuttle tour, particularly if a skier should become injured or exhausted and needs to return to the entry trailhead.
- Think about and have a **plan** for dealing with an injured skier and the above potential situations.

VII. TERRAIN & RATINGS

Skiers in the Club may have a large range of abilities. For that reason the Club has three tour ratings: Class I, II and III. The ratings help skiers choose tours compatible with their abilities. Be aware that a skier may show up for a tour, but lacks the skills and/or endurance to complete the tour safely and in a timely manner. Sometimes the tour is underrated for the snow conditions. At other times, neither the skier nor the Leader knows what the skier's rating really is. Also, ratings do not separate skill from endurance when rating the difficulty.

The Leader must always assume that their group will include slow and fast, weak and strong skiers. The Leader can reject someone from a tour, but that is a difficult decision and is best made before the day of the tour. The skier's ability is critical for Class III tours. The ratings:

CLASS I: Tour with less than 1,000 feet of elevation gain and less than 5 miles in total length. Skiers should be able to execute stops and turns. *Some, but not all*, tours are appropriate for novice skiers with minimal cross country experience. The pace will be slow (*1 to 1.5 miles per hour*). Persons with no cross country skiing experience **MUST** take the beginning lessons or must obtain the leader's permission prior to joining a CLASS I tour.

CLASS II: Tour with less than 2,000 feet of elevation gain and is less than 10 miles in total length. Tour requires intermediate skills and ability to maintain control on moderate slopes with techniques such as snowplowing, turning and traversing. Skiers should have enough stamina for sustained kick and glide touring on near level ground at a pace of 2 miles per hour for several miles and should also be experienced at using climbing skins to climb trails with moderate slopes.

CLASS III: Tour with greater than 3,000 feet of elevation gain and greater than 10 miles in total length. Tour usually requires advanced skills and ability to competently and confidently climb and descend steep, narrow trails. A skier with advanced skills should be able to do Telemark, parallel, or comparable turns on moderate slopes. That skier should also be very experienced with using climbing skins for both climbing and safely descending steep slopes. Skiers should have the endurance for skiing 10 miles or more *within the time constraints of the tour*.

Trail slopes are categorized:

1. Gentle slopes have less than 5% grades.
2. Moderate slopes have grades greater than 5 % but less than 15 %.
3. Steep slopes have grades greater than 15 %.

Exploratory designation:

In addition to a CLASS rating, a tour may be designated exploratory (Exp). This means the leader has not skied on this route recently (*or ever*) or is unsure about some aspect of the proposed route. Participants should be experienced in backcountry skiing. They should be prepared for any possible situation and should have emergency gear with them.

Leaders must adequately describe their tour with its CLASS, expected elevation gain and length, details about steepness, icy conditions (if they may exist), trail narrowness or any obstacles beyond the norm. If you think it would be appropriate for participants to bring specific gear such as climbing skins, avalanche equipment, etc. clearly specify the gear and whether it is mandatory for participation. If the tour is time constrained, consider stating the expected duration. If you want to screen all participants, omit the details of the meeting place and substitute "Call Leader for details."

VIII. POTENTIAL HAZARDS

Try to anticipate what could go wrong and how to avoid the problem. Should an accident occur, be prepared to act and to use the expertise or equipment of members in your group, i.e. medical skills, first aid kit, warm clothing, GPS navigation, radio, etc.

A. Injury –

Cold weather will compound situations and create a sense of urgency about getting the injured person out. Be prepared to assign tasks to members in the group. If possible try NOT to become too

involved in the hands-on work of assisting the injured person. The Leader should stay focused on planning the course of action. Determine if you have cell phone coverage. If necessary, contact **911** and request assistance from Search and Rescue, State Police or the County Sheriff; or contact the agency directly if you have their telephone number. Inventory the group for useful equipment such as space blankets, insulating pads, extra clothing that will protect them against hypothermia. Fast skiers could ski ahead to contact the authorities and/or mobilize resources for getting the person out.

Until help arrives, make sure the person stays warm and hydrated. Consider assigning someone to talk to the injured person in a reassuring manner. If someone in the group has medical training, let that person take the lead in making recommendations. If possible, help the person move toward the trailhead.

B. Other Medical Emergencies —

Other medical emergencies may arise due to microbial infections, altitude sickness, reaction to prescription medicine, etc. These emergencies may weaken or incapacitate a skier. If you have medically trained people on the tour, consult with them and, if the sick person is conscious, question them about their condition. The medically trained person may administer prescription drugs with the permission of the impaired skier. The general approach is to evacuate the impaired skier under their own power. If that is impossible, then follow the same procedures as those for an immobilizing injury above.

C. Exhaustion —

This may be caused by skiers being physically unfit for the snow or terrain conditions. Climbing skins are particularly useful in steep terrain and someone without skins may exhaust himself. You must be prepared to walk/ski the person out at his pace and you should remain cheerful and optimistic. Keep the person hydrated and fed, and borrow clothing if necessary to keep the person warm. In an extreme case of exhaustion, emergency evacuation may be necessary and you must resort to procedures similar to those for an immobilizing injury above.

D. Hypothermia —

The weather may be unusually cold or some skiers may have inadequate clothing or food. Keep the person hydrated and consider borrowing food or clothing to improve his condition. Encourage the person to eat even if they say they are not hungry. Keep them moving at a sustainable speed and give cheerful encouragement.

E. Equipment Failures —

Possible equipment failures and solutions:

1. The New Nordic Norm Back Country (NNNBC) bindings can freeze up making it difficult to get one's boot into or out of the bindings. Knock the binding against something solid and shake the ski to expel the ice.
2. Binding screws work loose. Place steel wool in the hole and screw the screws back in.
3. Bail of binding lost or broken. Carry an extra bail, wire or duct tape.
4. Ski pole breaks or the basket comes off. Repair with duct tape using a stick to splint the broken pole and carry an extra basket.
5. Pins pull out of holes in the boot toe. Rig an approximation to a cable binding behind the boot heel with wire and duct tape (*bind the toe of the boot to the ski with duct tape can work*).
6. Boot blow-outs. The toe of the boot may come loose from the sole rendering the boot inoperative. Duct tape may help.

F. Avalanche —

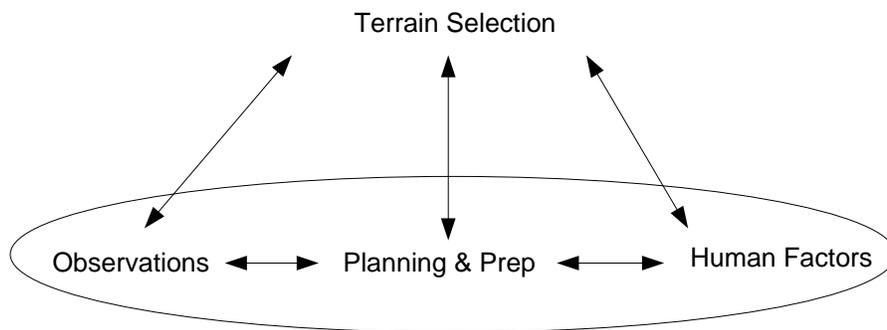
Most avalanches occur on slopes with angles between 35° and 45°; slopes that are convex are typically more at risk than those that are concave. Clues indicating potential avalanche paths are lower run out areas that have broken and bent trees with higher areas above that have been swept clear of trees. The Leader should be continually scanning the slopes above their current and upcoming route, assessing the possibility that they may be entering a potential avalanche area. A Leader's best defense against avalanche danger is to obtain information about the proposed route to see if the potential exists. Weigh the potential hazard against your knowledge of avalanche safety; if you don't know, don't go! The Club highly recommends that Leaders, who lead trips in avalanche

terrain, obtain additional knowledge by attending Avalanche Safety class and reading avalanche reference books.

After determining that you have the knowledge and equipment to attempt the tour, check the weather and avalanche information sites (such as the Colorado Avalanche Information Center at www.avalanche.state.co.us or 303.499.9650); or www.avalanchemapping.org/avatlas.htm to obtain the current conditions of your route just before going.

It is the Leader's option to require that participants carry beacons, shovels and probes on any tour they lead. Leaders should check that all beacons are on and working at the beginning of the tour, and that all skiers know how to operate the equipment. They should keep all skiers in sight during the tour, have discussions about the terrain throughout the day, and ski one at a time across slopes in question.

The following two tools/concepts from the Silverton Avalanche School will help Leaders think about and discuss conditions and terrain before making a go/no-go decision:



Flexibility is always required during the planning and execution of a trip. Observations you make enroute and on the trail, information you gather before leaving home, and human factors all impact terrain selection. Information should be collected constantly and decisions re-evaluated. Always be flexible and have alternatives in mind in case “Plan A” is no longer appropriate.

ALPTRUTH

An acronym to help your group discuss all relevant factors in making a **go/no-go** route decision is ALPTRUTH. **Three “yes” answers out of seven is a no-go decision.** Ian McCammon, a NOLS instructor and researcher, developed this tool. He believes the information is usually available to make a correct decision. If people would only remember to consider it. “Google” Ian McCammon if you want to learn more.

Yes or No

- A** Avalanche signs in the last 48 hours?
- L** Loading by new snow or wind?
- P** Are you in an avalanche path?
- T** Terrain trap — are you in one?
- R** Rating — high, considerable, extreme?
- U** Unstable snow — whumpfs or cracking?
- Th** Thaw/instability, sudden temperature increases?

Remember, no tour objective is so important that you should take unnecessary risks when avalanche danger is high. The mountain will always be there — pick another time when the odds are in your favor.

IX. LEADERSHIP STYLES

No single personality type makes the ideal outdoor activity Leader. People with different personalities bring different positive traits to their leadership role. However, **confidence** is an essential personality trait, which serves as the glue that holds the other leadership skills together. **Situational leadership** is considered to be the best approach, which means the Leader employs different leadership styles based on the situation that exists at the time. The four basic leadership styles:

1. **Directing:** Leader makes all the decisions and informs the participants of actions to be taken.
2. **Selling:** Leader makes the decisions, but discusses them with participants, answering questions and seeking participant concurrence.
3. **Participating:** Leader and participants make decisions jointly, with the Leader acting as a facilitator or articulator of joint decision-making procedure.
4. **Delegating:** Participants make decisions within limits defined by the Leader.

No matter which leadership style is employed, it is the prerogative of the Leader to select the most appropriate leadership style for the situation. There will also be situations when it is appropriate for the Leader to delegate a limited task to another member of the group having greater proficiency than the leader in that task, e.g. administering first aid or conducting GPS navigation.

In executing all of these leadership styles, it is important for Leaders to exercise good listening and communication skills. One of the biggest causes of conflict on outdoor tours is poor communication. If time permits, it can be an effective learning experience for both Leader and participants to reflect as a group on the shared experiences.

X. BACKCOUNTRY SKILLS

A Leader who has backcountry skills is an asset to all. The following skills can be useful: first aid, winter travel and survival techniques, weather forecasting, map reading, compass orienteering, GPS navigation, waxing and cross-country ski techniques. A list of reference books by subject is available in a separate document on the website (*Leadership Reference Books*). The NMCCSC encourages and supports its members in developing these skills.