



**Rideau Trail**

**Rideau Trail Association  
Guide for Leaders**

Fourth Edition

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Guide for Leaders  
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**Notes**

**Disclaimer**

This Guide has been prepared by a volunteer team of the Rideau Trail Association (RTA) to assist the association's members in leading hikes and other activities in a safe, professional and enjoyable manner. While the information presented is intended to help improve the safety and enjoyment of members and other participants in RTA activities, the RTA, its clubs, directors, leaders, members and other volunteers do not assume any responsibility for the information contained in this Guide and cannot be held responsible for any failure of a user to apply appropriate judgment in leading or participating in a hike or other activity. Nor can they be held responsible for any errors or omissions in the Guide, the uses made of it, or the timeliness of the material it contains. Persons using this Guide do so at their own risk.

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and  
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daylight available in conjunction with the expected ability level of the participants.

Winter hiking can become a nightmare for people if they are not well equipped. Low temperatures accompanied by a wind chill can create hazardous conditions. Leaders should ensure that their hikers are up to the task and that they are properly equipped. Clothing should consist of double layers of insulation in the form of sweaters or vests, preferably of fleece or wool together with wind proof pants, gaiters, boots, hat, gloves/mitts and a sturdy shell jacket. Despite the cold, a good supply of water or juice is required, as well as snacks and additional food. If possible a hot drink should be brought to have at lunchtime.

The key to staying comfortable under adverse conditions is to add or shed layers so that one becomes neither too warm nor too cool. Leaders should provide guidance to novice hikers in this respect and make a point of stopping often so that the group can take off layers when necessary. A hiker who becomes wet with perspiration will become cold very quickly at lunch stops and have difficulty generating enough heat to recover. As well as discomfort, it could lead to the onset of hypothermia. Depending on the temperature, lunch stops should be limited to between 15 and 20 minutes.

Pre-hiking is important, although an overnight snowfall can easily change the trail conditions. Regular parking spots may be snowed. The sides of the road should be left clear to allow ploughs to come through. A good idea is to have snow shovels available.

### References

*The Backpackers Field Manual*: Rick Curtis Princeton University Outdoor Action Program. Three Rivers Press, New York 1998, ISBN: 0517887835.

First Aid, *First on the Scene: The Complete Guide to First Aid and CPR*, St. John Ambulance, ISBN: 0-929006-89-5.

*Standard Hike Leader Course, Instructors Manual*: Steve Robinson. Developed by Hike Ontario: 2002. Edited by Carmen Schlamb Updated: 2003.

Compass navigation: The Silva 1-2-3 System see [www.silva.se/outdoor/index.htm](http://www.silva.se/outdoor/index.htm)

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**D** – If available, power on the automated external **Defibrillator** and follow the commands.

\* *Please consult a recognized CPR Manual for a more detailed description of techniques.*

## I SURVIVAL

The five elements of survival are:

**Attitude:** Stay calm, and be positive.

**Shelter:** Protection from the weather, heat, cold, wind and rain is essential. The greatest danger in an emergency situation is hypothermia. A small tarp or a length of thin plastic can be carried easily without adding much extra weight. It can be used together with other materials to build a shelter.

**Water:** Extra water should always be carried and also the means of water purification if the hike is a wilderness event. With adequate shelter and a supply of water a person can survive for many days.

**Fire:** As well as a good source of heat and light, a fire can be used as a signal to search and rescue people.

**Food:** A person can survive for many days without food. Whatever food is available should be rationed, but food is not a high priority since rescue should occur fairly quickly.

## J WINTER HIKING

Winter hiking is one of the most invigorating and enjoyable of experiences. Many hikers like to come out and participate when there is a good layer of snow on the ground. The recent popularity of hiking with snowshoes has provided further encouragement for people to spend more time outdoors in the winter. Leaders may find it helpful to provide some instruction if there are novices on the hike, or to give advice to those thinking about purchasing snowshoes.

In the area of safety the same practices apply as those required for regular hiking. However, leaders should pay closer attention to the more demanding aspects of hiking in snow. In planning winter hikes whether on snowshoes or on foot, special consideration should be given to the level of difficulty, the length of the hike and the hours of

such as breathing difficulties, hives, swelling around eyes and mouth, difficulty breathing or swallowing, or loss of consciousness. If any of these symptoms are present evacuation may be necessary.

For bee and wasp stings remove the stinger by gently scraping it off the skin but try not to squeeze it.

#### **Blisters:**

Blisters are caused by the heat of friction and usually begin as a “hot spot,” somewhere on the foot. Early treatment using moleskin or tape to cover the spot will usually prevent the blister from forming. On long hikes the group could be made aware of this possibility. Advise them that you have moleskin if any one needs it. In some cases blisters can be prevented by wearing an additional pair of thin inner socks or by the use of talcum powder.

#### **Fractures:**

Occasionally hikers injure themselves by falling or tripping. If it appears that a fracture or a suspected fracture has occurred, the injured limb will need to be immobilized to keep it from moving. Splints, slings or bandages can be used for this purpose. Splints can be improvised by using available materials. A splint should be sufficiently rigid to support the injured limb and wide enough to be comfortable. For a fracture between two joints the splint should extend beyond both joints. Evacuation may be necessary in some cases.

#### **CPR**

While many leaders have first aid training, the fine details of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can fade from memory with time. Most people who are trained never have occasion to use CPR, but remembering how to proceed quickly could save a life.

#### **Adult CPR Basics\*** - Easy as 1,2,A,B,C,D

1. Check for response.

2. Phone 911.

**A** - Open **Airway** and check breathing.

**B** - Give 2 **Breaths** that make the chest rise.

**C** - Check for signs of **Circulation** (normal breathing, coughing, movement).

Give 15 **Chest Compressions** and 2 breaths. Continue until EMS arrives.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Guide is intended to provide instruction to new leaders and to enable experienced leaders to brush up on their skills. It is based on the experiences of leaders from the Ottawa, Central and Kingston Clubs of the Rideau Trail Association, and other hiking clubs. The Guide is intended to accompany a leadership workshop or training session, but can also be used for self-study and for reference when planning or leading an event.

The principles outlined here are mainly focused on hiking, but also apply to other activities such as cycling, skiing and canoeing, so that they are conducted in a safe, professional and enjoyable manner. The main focus is on helping leaders to spot and avoid potential problems before they arise, but suggestions are also provided for dealing with unexpected situations during an event.

The Guide is neither more nor less than its name implies – a set of suggestions that, if followed, will usually result in an enjoyable, successful outdoor trip. It is not intended to be the final word, or to be followed without adaptation. Leaders are encouraged to tailor it to the circumstances of their own events.

**Note: If you want to know the basics at a glance, see the reverse side of the RTA signup sheet; the signup sheet is provided in Appendix A of this Guide.**

## **WHAT DOES BEING A LEADER INVOLVE?**

It is a misconception to think that the leader is simply the one who goes in the front of the group to serve as a guide. This is a small part of a leader's role; in fact, the leader may even choose not to walk at the head of the group. Rather, the leader is the individual who has assumed responsibility for organizing and conducting a safe, smooth-running outdoor trip for the enjoyment of the participants. The leader is the person in charge, and is entitled to respect. Leading is a challenging but rewarding role.

Ideally, hike leaders should have a range of different skills, including the ability to:

- organize an event and instruct others in a sensitive and tactful way;
- apply sound risk management principles and thus promote the safety of the group;

- lead the event so that it is an enjoyable experience for all participants;
- apply outdoor and basic first aid skills;
- understand weather changes and their effect on an outdoor event.

While recognizing that its leaders are volunteers, the RTA encourages potential leaders to have basic first aid skills and to consider taking the Hike Ontario Standard Course for hike leader training.

New leaders are not expected to possess all the pertinent skills when they first begin leading hikes. Skills are developed over time, with knowledge and experience. New leaders should observe the techniques and methods used by experienced leaders, and the mentoring of new leaders by more experienced leaders is strongly encouraged. Different leaders have different styles of leading. Many leaders lead a hike from the front; others prefer to designate another person to be in front while they spend more time within the group. Leaders should use a style they are comfortable with and be flexible, depending on the length and difficulty of the hike.

Leaders do not need to be athletes, but they should be physically fit enough to cope successfully with the difficulty level of the chosen hike. Ideally, leaders will combine knowledge of basic outdoor skills and ability to interact within groups with sensitivity and tact. This involves a certain amount of hiking experience and organizational ability, but more importantly, maturity and good judgment. As well as being a healthy and enjoyable activity, hiking provides an opportunity for people to socialize and make new friends. A good leader can enhance that experience for everyone by creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

## DEFINITIONS AND RATING SYSTEM

### **Definitions**

The **meeting place** is where the local club meets at the publicized time to begin an event.

Each of the three clubs of the Rideau Trail Association – Ottawa, Central and Kingston – has its own location where people generally meet for club events. Details of these meeting places are outlined in the preamble to the hiking schedule which appears in the Newsletter, and are also given on the RTA website and in the e-Newsletter. Check with your local club for current arrangements.

### **Heat Injuries:**

Soaring temperatures add a further element of risk to the hiker. Leaders should ensure that every one has a sufficient supply of water, taking into consideration possible high mid-day temperatures and the length and duration of the hike. Here are some common illnesses associated with strenuous exercise in hot weather:

**Heat Cramps** are painful muscle spasms caused by excessive loss of salt. They usually occur after long exposure to hot conditions. For muscle cramps in the legs and abdomen, the person should be placed in the shade and given plenty of water.

**Heat Exhaustion** is a more serious condition caused by excessive sweating, loss of body fluids and the inability of the body to cool itself. The afflicted person might complain of blurred vision, dizziness, headache, nausea and cramps. The person should be placed in the shade with feet and legs elevated. Remove excessive clothing and give as much drinking water as is available.

**Shock.** If the person goes into shock, emergency help should be sought. Shock may be present with most injuries and illnesses. It results when the brain and other vital organs are deprived of oxygen. It can be fatal and immediate care is necessary. Symptoms are, pale cold clammy skin, anxiety, confusion, and weak rapid pulse. The casualty may complain of extreme thirst, nausea, faintness or dizziness. The development of shock can be gradual or rapid.

To prevent the condition from becoming worse, reassure the person, loosen tight clothing, place in shock position with feet and legs raised about 30cm. Place emergency blankets under and over the casualty to ensure warmth. Monitor breathing until emergency services arrive.

### **Other medical concerns**

#### **Poison Ivy:**

Care should be taken, as the plant's sticky resin can adhere to boots and clothing and remain active for weeks. Affected parts of the body can be cleansed with soap and water, but the resin will bind to the skin within 30 minutes. The rash may take a few hours or perhaps days to develop and starts as red itchy bumps followed by blisters.

#### **Insect Bites and Stings:**

In most people insect bites cause mild reactions such as redness, itching, and swelling. Wasp and bee stings may cause allergic reactions in some people. Leaders should note any allergic reactions

- Make sure those left behind have an adequate supply of water and any other supplies likely to be needed.

## Illnesses resulting from heat and cold

### Cold Injuries

The risk of frost bite or hypothermia is increased when:

- Low temperature is combined with strong winds creating a windchill factor.
- Fatigue sets in.
- Clothing is wet, probably from sweating.
- Clothing does not retain body heat.
- Exposure to cold continues for a long period of time.

**Frostbite** may be superficial or deep. Superficial frostbite usually affects the ears, face, fingers and toes. You may see white waxy skin that is firm to the touch but soft underneath. Superficial frostbite may progress to deep frostbite, a much more serious condition. Treatment for superficial frostbite involves warming the area with the heat of your body using a warm hand or breathing on the frost bitten part. Do *not* apply direct heat. Do *not* rub. Do *not* use snow.

**Hypothermia** is often diagnosed when the body temperature drops below 35C for an extended length of time. Unless treatment is given, the situation may deteriorate as follows:

- 37C: Normal body temperature;
- 36C: The body feels cold;
- 35C: Shivering begins;
- 34C: Person will become clumsy;
- 33C: Muscles stiffen;
- 32C: Shivering stops;
- 30C: Person falls unconscious;
- 29C: Pulse rate slows dramatically;
- 28C: Loss of vital signs.

Treatment for mild hypothermia involves removing the casualty from the cold environment to a warm shelter. Wet clothing should be removed and the person placed under warm covers. Huddle together and keep the person out of the wind and as warm as possible. Cover head and neck. Give warm liquids. Monitor breathing.

The **rendezvous point** is where cars arrive after following the directions given to drivers by the leader at the meeting place. It may be the start of the hike, or it may be a collection point (such as a turnoff from a main highway) from which other transport arrangements are made to the trail head.

The **trail head** is the point where the group leaves the cars and starts the hike.

**Activity Coordinators** are the members of the executive of each local club who arrange the activity schedules for the season. They will contact the leaders and invite them to lead events. The coordinators will, if necessary, advise leaders on the suitability of their plans and on the correct wording to use for publication in the Newsletter. They can also suggest a destination if the leader has nothing particular in mind. If you have one or more hikes that you are interested in leading, you may call the coordinator yourself and outline your plans.

**Maintenance Coordinators** are members of the local club executive who organize the activities of the volunteers who maintain the Rideau Trail.

The **sweep** is the person at the tail end of the group who watches for stragglers and checks that the group does not become too spread out for effective control.

### Ratings

The RTA hike rating system has been adopted by Hike Ontario and is now the standard for hiking clubs across the province.

### Hiking

Level 1	Well-defined trails, gentle inclines. Hiking boots not required but trails may be wet. Suitable for beginners. Recommended for newcomers to club activities.
Level 2	Generally on trail. May be hilly with some light bushwhacking and rough spots. Boots recommended.
Level 3	Rough terrain, one or more places with extensive bushwhacking, steep sections, long climbs and descents, rock scrambling, beaver dams or other obstacles. Boots and level 2 experience are essential. Long pants and sleeves are recommended.
Speed	Slow: 2-3km/hr Moderate: 3-4km/hr Fast: 4-5km/hr Very fast: 5km/hr or greater

**Cycling**

- Level 1 Few hills, broad roads or bike paths, little traffic. Participants must have some cycling experience.
- Level 2 Some hills, some traffic, participants should be fit and experienced.
- Level 3 Long hills and narrow roads. An excellent level of fitness and cycling experience is essential.

**Cross-country skiing**

- Level 0 Easy, short, slow pace. All other levels require some experience and may be long (more than 15 km).
- Level 1 Easy. Small hills, wide trails (green).
- Level 2 Intermediate. Narrower, steeper trails (blue).
- Level 3 Expert. Steep narrow trails (red/black) and/or bushwhacking.

**Snowshoeing**

Difficulty depends on position in the group. More experienced participants will lead and break trail.

**Canoeing**

- Level 1 Slow-moving sheltered water with no portages.
- Level 2 Larger expanses of water, level 1 experience required.
- Level 3 Canoeing in areas with larger expanses of water and portages.

The levels above are based on mainly terrain difficulty or similar criteria, not on distance. Slight adjustment to the level may be made if a trip has exceptional endurance requirements (for example, a very long trip in easy terrain may change from Level 1 to Level 2 for this reason). Newsletter trip descriptions usually contain a distance estimate as well as a level of difficulty.

The system covers most common cases and takes little space in the Newsletter. It is not exhaustive, however, and if a particular trip has special requirements, this should be explained in the event description.

Participants taking part in Level 2 trips should have Level 1 experience or equivalent, and those taking part in Level 3 trips should have Level 2 experience. In cycling, skiing, snowshoeing and canoeing, Level 1 participants should have a basic mastery of the technique and provide their own equipment.

Consideration would also have to be given to the nature of the terrain and the distance from the nearest possible exit point. Unless the proper equipment, experience and manpower is available, a litter evacuation should not be attempted by the group. It is best left to skilled rescue personnel.

**Steps to Follow in the Event of an Injury:**

- Stay calm, take charge, establish priorities, and delegate tasks.
- Give first aid or defer to another person who is more skilled in first aid.
- Assess the patient's ability to walk out. This could depend on how far you are from the trail head, the end of the hike, or from another exit or road where help can be found.

**Major Injury**

In the event of a major injury where the patient will need to be evacuated, attempts should be made to reach help using a cell phone if available. In a provincial or national park, try to contact the superintendent or other park personnel, otherwise call 911 and alert emergency services. If phone contact is not possible proceed as follows:

- Reassure everyone and keep people informed of your plans.
- Have the group make a temporary shelter to protect the injured person from hot sun, rain, wind or cold.
- The following information should be written down and provided for emergency medical services:
  - name, address, age, initial condition and current condition of the injured person;
  - a description of how the accident occurred;
  - the date, time and an account of the injuries sustained and first aid given;
  - if rescue is needed, a map with the location marked on it with, if possible, compass or GPS bearings.
- Two persons should remain with the injured person at all times. If the leader stays, an experienced person should be designated to lead the group out. This may be back to the beginning of the hike, or to the end, whichever is thought to be the best plan. A shortcut may be considered providing it is well defined and the leader is familiar with the area. Hikers should proceed at a normal pace so that safety is not compromised. If the victim is located off-trail, mark the route with tape or by breaking twigs as you go.

actual problem. Listen to both sides of the argument and be non judgemental. The following methods should be considered:

- **Accommodation:** This is where it is accepted that there is some merit in both sides of the argument and that in the interest of the group the confrontations should be put aside so the hike can continue. This is marginally effective as the problem might erupt more seriously later on.
- **Collaboration:** An agreement is reached by both parties with the help of the group who believe that the problem can and will be solved. This is perhaps the most effective way of reaching a solution.
- **Compromise:** In order to reach a settlement both parties agree to give up something. This is a “trade off” and may be successful but the conflict could break out again later.
- **Avoidance:** This is not a good solution as the situation may deteriorate with more serious consequences. It would work best if the hike is close to the end or the incident is of a minor nature.
- **Other:** If it becomes impossible to resolve a dispute and only two people are involved, have one walk behind the leader and the other in front of the sweep. Continue to monitor the situation.

## H FIRST AID

Despite the best efforts of the leader accidents can happen, resulting in injuries that may be of a minor nature or serious enough to warrant evacuation. It is therefore useful for leaders to have basic first aid training from St. John Ambulance or another recognized organization.

Some minor medical conditions could include an upset stomach, mild allergic reaction, mild flu symptoms, or a laceration that can be treated with a first aid kit. Provided that the health of the person will not be compromised, he or she should be able to walk out.

A sprained ankle that is stable or a forearm fracture may not be sufficiently serious to prevent the person from walking out with assistance. This is acceptable as long as there is no possibility of further aggravating the injury. The injured person should have to carry as little weight as possible. Constant monitoring is necessary.

Lower leg fractures, spinal or head injuries are examples of medical conditions where an evacuation is required. It would normally take three teams of about 6 people to do an evacuation safely.

## HOW THE RTA ACTIVITY SCHEDULE IS COMPILED

As Activity Coordinators change, the actual method of compiling the schedule also changes. A scheduler may assist by compiling the actual schedule for the Newsletter, though in this Guide the term “Activity Coordinator” is used in referring to all tasks involved in organizing a club’s schedule of events. The Activity Coordinator or chair of your club can explain how the schedule is compiled in your area. Some coordinators prefer to work via e-mail, while others organize a meeting to plan the season or call potential leaders and suggest events they think members would be interested in.

Whatever the method, the basic schedule is set by the deadline for compiling the Newsletter, according to the following timetable:

Winter	coordinator seeks leaders in October*, for Nov. 1 Newsletter deadline
Spring	coordinator seeks leaders in January*, for Feb. 1 Newsletter deadline
Summer	coordinator seeks leaders in April*, for May 1 Newsletter deadline
Fall	coordinator seeks leaders in July*, for Aug. 1 Newsletter deadline.

\* these are the latest times to meet the Newsletter schedule – some coordinators start as soon as the previous season’s event schedule is complete.

Organizing the RTA’s ambitious schedule takes a lot of work. It would help the coordinators greatly if you could think ahead a season or two to the type of hike you might want to lead so that you have the information available when a coordinator asks for volunteers to lead. Best of all, why not call or e-mail the coordinator yourself beforehand, when you can choose the dates you prefer?

## HIKE PLANNING

### *For the Newsletter*

Usually the first decision is: “How should my event be described in the Newsletter?”– when is it going to be, and what type of event is it? This includes the destination, perhaps where you are starting from (the trail head), the rough distance, and a brief description, so that people know what to expect and can decide whether to come or not. The e-Newsletter

generally includes the same information as the Newsletter, though it permits more flexibility if the description has to be modified later. Not all members have access to the e-Newsletter, so the Newsletter description is considered the primary description of events.

### Choosing a date, destination and route

All types of hikes are valuable to the program: on the Rideau Trail or elsewhere; long or short; easy or difficult; nearby or far away; on-trail or bushwhacking; day or weekend; primarily social or vigorous hike. The coordinators are always pleased if a leader suggests a destination, as this tends to generate new outings and keeps the program interesting. However, there are a good many classic routes that the coordinators can describe and suggest to a leader, so limited familiarity with the countryside does not exclude one from leading hikes.

It's not necessary to be familiar with details of the intended route at this stage, providing you know enough to give a good description for the Newsletter. Other aspects you will need to know as the event gets closer are described later in this Guide.

It is important that the Newsletter publicity convey a clear idea of the demands of the event so that readers understand any conditioning, equipment, technique and experience expected. The level grading system described earlier in this Guide covers most eventualities, but a leader is free to add more detail if required.

If the return time is likely to be later than typical (5 p.m. or so) or you plan to stop at a pub or restaurant before heading back, indicate this or use a phrase such as "Be prepared for a long day." If the event includes a social aspect such as a picnic, let people know so that they can come prepared, rather than having to sit with a sandwich while the core group is enjoying a sumptuous repast.

The activity program contains everything from easy strolls to tough multiday events, and the publicity is the first step in matching participants' abilities to the demands of the event. The Activity Coordinators will help set this up.

### Participants

People with disabilities are welcome to take part in RTA activities provided that they have an adequate level of fitness, technique, and the proper equipment for the particular events they wish to attend. These requirements apply to all participants. It is very important that any participants with disabilities start with very easy trips to learn their own

- Holding the compass with the direction of travel arrow pointing at your navel instead of where you want to go.

#### **Moderate errors**

- Not allowing for declination;
- Adding instead of subtracting declination, or vice-versa;
- Not cancelling a previous setting, on compasses with a screw for pre-setting declination.

#### **Minor errors**

- Taking direction from looking at the compass needle instead of a distant object on your intended path;
- Offsets due to obstacles.

## F SIGNALLING

The universal distress code consists of three of any signal, such as flashes of light, a row of fires, or whistle blasts. When using a whistle, take care to warn those nearby before blowing and never blow a whistle close to anyone's ears.

The following convention should apply:

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. One blast.   | Stop, attention |
| 2. Two blasts   | Come here.      |
| 3. Three blasts | Emergency       |

The reply to any whistle signal is a single blast.

## G CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Apart from the specific suggestions for dealing with problems given above, the general notes in this section may provide some help in understanding and resolving more serious personal conflicts if they develop within the group.

#### **Problem Solving:**

Conflicts may occur at some point along the trail. The conflict could be between factions within the group or between two individuals. It could also be a problem between the leader and others in the group. Regardless of the circumstances, it is the responsibility of the leader to deal with the situation before it gets out of hand.

The main focus before a solution can be attempted will be to avoid the "blaming" aspect of the argument and to separate the people from the

points to North on the map. (On most maps other than orienteering maps, the grid lines use true North or something close to it as a reference. It is then necessary to correct for declination at this point, e.g., in eastern Ontario by adding 13° to the bearing so that a course of 90° true, or due East, becomes 103° magnetic).

- Pick up the compass, hold it against your navel and turn your body until the red end of the needle coincides with the red arrow of the compass housing. The front of the compass with the direction of travel arrow now points towards your destination. Your course, in degrees magnetic, is shown where the direction of travel line meets the compass housing.

Choose a landmark or a spot in this direction. Walk to the landmark without looking at the compass, going around obstacles such as dense bush or steep slopes where possible rather than always making a beeline for your target. Choose a new landmark and repeat the procedure until you reach your destination.

**To return**, do not move the compass housing – simply turn around so that the white (or non-red) end of the needle coincides with the red arrow of the compass housing, then follow the direction of travel arrow back along your original route.

### E3 Finding the current location by taking bearings on distant objects

Hold the compass so that you can see the distant landmark and the position of the needle, point the direction of travel arrow at the landmark, then rotate the compass housing so that the red arrow coincides with the red end of the needle. You can now read off the bearing (where the direction of travel line meets the ring) in degrees magnetic. Apply the declination (unless using an orienteering map) to convert this to degrees true (subtract 13° in eastern Ontario). Then place the compass on the map with the North/South lines parallel to North/South on the map (usually the vertical lines) and draw a line through the distant landmark towards your estimated position. Repeat the above process two more times, with landmarks in different directions. Your position is in the triangle where the three lines meet.

#### Common problems when using a compass

**Major errors** (these will send you in the exact opposite direction from where you want to go!)

- Positioning the compass on the map with the direction of travel arrow pointing opposite to the way you want to go;
- Rotating the compass housing so that North is pointing towards the bottom of the map instead of the top;

limitations, so by all means ask them to describe their experience before allowing them to participate. With some disabilities – for example the hearing impaired – it may be possible for the disabled person to be paired with someone who can compensate for the impaired ability, providing both persons understand and agree to the arrangement and meet the basic requirements of fitness, technique and equipment.

Persons under the age of 18 may be allowed on some events, but this depends on the nature of the event and also the capability and maturity of the child and responsible adult. Any persons under 18 must be accompanied by an adult who will be responsible for them and who signs the sign-up sheet and waiver on their behalf. For young children the event will typically be no more than Level 1, with the total distance short enough for them to walk out or with intermediate dropout points. Older teenagers may be permitted on Level 2 or even Level 3 events if they and their responsible adult are fit and sufficiently mature or willing to follow directions, but this should be arranged with the leader beforehand.

If you would particularly like to encourage the participation of young people, mention it in the publicity so that the situation is clear to readers from the outset – you may then attract people who otherwise would not have been able to participate.

Dogs, with the exception of certified guide dogs accompanying a visually impaired participant, are not allowed at RTA events, due to problems with park regulations, wildlife, landowners, and also other participants on the trail or during transportation to and from the event.

### Hunting Season

Hikes should not be planned on private land during the hunting season, but should be confined to Provincial Parks, Conservation Areas and other public locations where hunting is not permitted. Information regarding the scheduled dates for legal hunting can be obtained from the Ministry of Natural Resources in the area. Leaders should be aware of the dates of both the deer hunting and duck hunting seasons.

### Writing the Newsletter description

You will need to write a brief description of your hike to advertise it in the Newsletter. Mention the terrain, unique features, difficulty level, speed, distance, gas and park fees, departure time, any special items participants should be prepared for, and your name and contact information. Here is an example:

**Saturday April 3 Rideau Trail/Gould Lake**

Hike the Rideau Trail from the Conservation Area Gate and return along the Ridgewalk Loop. Scenic views and wildflowers. Rugged terrain. Moderate pace, Level 3, 15km. Gas \$3, Departs 09:00  
Leader: John Smith 613-123-4567

**As the day approaches****Details of the event**

The brief description is enough for the Newsletter, but as the date of the event approaches you will need more detail. Ideally, you should arrange to pre-hike the trail. If you have a good general knowledge of the trail and it is not practical for you to do the pre-hike, try to obtain information from someone who has been there recently. Pre-hiking will enable you to be familiar with washroom facilities, potential rest and lunch stops, and the time it takes to cover the different sections of the hike. You may also wish to consider several possibilities for lunch, bearing in mind the weather conditions. On a bright sunny day a high point with a scenic view would be perfect. However, be aware of the possibility of wind, heat, or cold, and plan sheltered or shady spots.

Pre-hiking will also enable you to discover any hazards or changes that may have occurred such as floods or bridges washed out, so that you can advise the group of the condition of the trail. Estimate the approximate time the hike will finish (be aware of the time of sunset, and dates for Daylight Saving Time). Watch for potential places such as trail junctions where extra care might be needed in navigation or in keeping the group together. Ask yourself how it would look from the opposite direction in case anyone has to go back, or if expected weather conditions on the day cause you to hike a loop in the reverse direction. You should also check to see that there are sufficient parking spaces available at the beginning of the hike if it is a loop, or at both ends if there is to be a shuttle. Partial pre-hiking, such as reconnoitering a ridge walk from a road at the bottom, can be beneficial in cases where a full pre-hike is not possible.

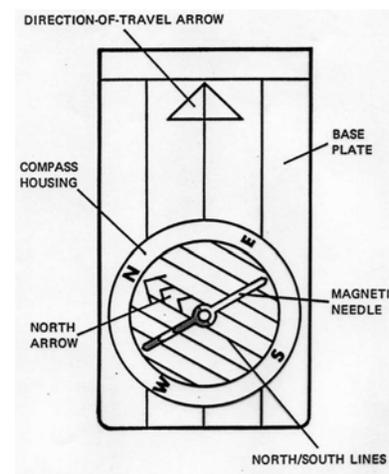
RTA policy is that events take place regardless of weather, but that does not necessarily mean that they take place without modification. During the pre-hike, consider alternatives you could use in case bad weather, trail conditions or other problems greatly affect the event. The classic examples are events scheduled for the in-between seasons, which may be hikes or ski trips, depending on ground conditions; ski trips, which may have to be modified drastically depending on weather and snow

- Place metal objects well away from the group.
- Note that lightning can strike without warning up to 30 minutes before and after a storm.

**E HOW TO USE A COMPASS**

The compass can be used:

- to orient your map;
- to find the direction (bearing) to where you want to go and to come back;
- to find your current position, by taking bearings on distant objects.

**E1 Orienting the map**

*The vertical lines on the map point to magnetic north on orienteering maps, but on most other maps they typically point closer to true north; check this – it should be explained somewhere on the map – and adjust the compass housing to allow for this declination if necessary as explained below.*

Place the map on a flat surface, well away from any metal objects, power lines, etc. that could deflect the needle. Place the compass on the map. Rotate the map without rotating the compass until the red needle points in exactly the same direction as magnetic North on the map.

**E2 Finding the direction of travel (the Silva 3-Step method)**

- Place compass on map with edge along the desired line of travel.
- Rotate the compass housing until the "N" on the compass dial

variant of the first option, when passengers are ferried back as well as drivers.)

A third variant is the trade-key, or double, shuttle. The group is broken into two subgroups, one of which goes to one end of the route, the other to the opposite end. Both groups start the hike, they meet in the centre and exchange car keys, and use the other group's vehicles to return to a common rendezvous point. Advantages - extreme saving of time; choice of direction of hiking the route. Disadvantages - some drivers may not want others driving their vehicles, especially on the bad roads that often characterize shuttle routes; the event consists of two hikes so two leaders are required – one for each direction of travel.

The leader should plan the shuttle in advance, perhaps allowing a plan change to be decided based on the amount of space available in the cars. Some adaptation may be necessary at the last minute.

## D WEATHER

### Thunder and Lightning:

Severe weather conditions can pose serious risks to hikers, so it's a good idea to follow the weather reports in the days prior to the hike and be prepared to modify or – as a last resort – cancel the event if it appears advisable.

Hazardous weather can strike suddenly. If this does happen, keep everyone close together so you can monitor the group and take evasive action quickly if necessary. Look for a sheltered area in a safe place to wait until the storm has passed.

One of the most worrisome experiences a leader can have is to encounter thunder and lightning, particularly when the flash and bang occur close together. This means the storm is in the immediate area. Each second between the flash and the bang represents about 300m distance from where you are located.

If the time between the lightning and the thunder is 15 seconds or less, quick action should be taken as follows:

- Stay away from open fields, high ridges, tall trees, and power lines; stay as close to the ground as possible.
- Have the group spread out with each person about 3m apart. This is to prevent every one being struck at once.
- Avoid sheltering on tree roots, in wet areas, on cracks in rocks, or caves, as these can act as conduits for lightning.
- Crouch down with your butt off the ground and your feet together.

conditions; and summer events, where high temperatures may cause problems. Heavy rain may also suggest a change of plans. In cases where more than one type of event is feasible – for example, skiing and hiking – the leader may appoint a second leader to take those participants who prefer the other activity.

And, of course, apply safety principles to your pre-hike. Go with someone else if possible – another leader might be glad to go with you – carry appropriate equipment and let someone know where you are going and when you expect to be back.

### Other useful information

As the details of the event take shape, it's worth researching other information that could be useful on the day. Examples are the office and home telephone numbers of key park staff if the event is in a National or Provincial Park; any special numbers for emergency services; the location of the nearest hospital with emergency services; and some knowledge of the road system in the area and potential access points for emergency services EMS should they be needed.

If the drive home will be long, or simply to provide an opportunity for socializing after the event, directions and hours of operation of a nearby restaurant or cafe should be obtained at this stage.

### Getting ready

The RTA has developed a standard **sign-up sheet** (see Appendix A of this Guide), which is in use in all three clubs. On the front, in addition to space for participants' names and telephone numbers, is a printed waiver of liability for the leader and all other volunteers. On the back is a concise summary of these leader guidelines, for reference during the event. The leader should obtain copies of the form from the Activity Coordinator at least a few days ahead of the event. The sign-up sheet is also available from the RTA website.

Prepare **instructions for drivers** to the rendezvous point, providing enough information for someone unfamiliar with the route (such as exit numbers from main highways, characteristic features at or before turn-offs, and approximate distances between points). Include a map if appropriate. Make copies for the estimated number of cars (10 to 15 is not uncommon).

It is also helpful if you maintain a small stock of RTA brochures with membership application forms to give to participants who request them.

Check the list in Appendix B for suggestions on equipment to carry, bearing in mind that when you are the leader it could be worthwhile adding items to your usual equipment in case they are needed by the group.

### Handling enquiries

In the days leading up to your event, you may receive phone calls from people who are considering participating in the outing and need more details. Handle these in as welcoming way as possible. If you feel that your outing is obviously beyond the capability of the callers, politely dissuade them and suggest other outings that may be more suitable.

### Substitution and cancellation

Once the activity schedule has gone to press (which is when the Newsletter deadline, given above, has passed) those who have volunteered to lead an event are expected to follow through with that commitment. Circumstances do sometimes change so that the stated leader or hike is not available on the date shown. Every effort should then be made to arrange for a substitute leader and/or event. Cancellation should be used only as a last resort. The e-Newsletter can be used to advise members of changes, but should not be relied upon for important communications as not all members have access to or will check their e-mail in time.

**Leader:** If you are unable to lead your hike on the date it is advertised, you are expected to find a substitute. You may do this by making the arrangement with any experienced hike leader you know. One good technique is to make a trade with another leader on the current schedule.

The substitute leader should try not to change the scheduled hike but, if changes are unavoidable, should substitute one as similar as possible to the original, avoiding any significant increase in the level of difficulty. The Activity Coordinator should be informed of the substitution before the hike.

Only as a last resort should the Activity Coordinator be asked to find a substitute leader, bearing in mind that activity coordination is already a huge task.

Anything the leader can do to arrange for a substitute is much appreciated.

to sit on. Do not rely too much on radios or cell phones as they have a tendency not to work under certain conditions.

The above items ought to be carried by all participants for safety and comfort, but are especially important in the case of the leader. The only item unique to the leader is the sign-up sheet.

Other safety measures may be appropriate depending on the event. It is up to the leader to make arrangements accordingly.

## C RUNNING A CAR SHUTTLE

Frequently, hikes that start in one location and end in another require car shuttle arrangements. It is up to the leader to decide how to conduct and manage the shuttle. The decisions may be affected by the number of cars; number of passengers; driving distance between start and end; whether the start or the end of the hike is closer to the group's home city; and whether amenities such as a Visitor Centre, pub, or tea room are located at one end of the hike.

The first rule is to make sure upon leaving the meeting place that there are enough empty seats available to support the shuttle. About 30 percent empty seats will allow the leader flexibility in arranging the shuttle.

Here is the most common type of shuttle. All cars drive to the start point. All passengers get out. All drivers drive to end point of the hike. All drivers climb into the fewest possible cars and return to the start, leaving the remaining vehicles at the end. After the hike, the drivers whose cars are at the start are ferried back to their cars. Advantages - most cars are at the end, so some participants can leave for home before the shuttle is complete; reasonably economical of space. Disadvantage - takes a lot of time both at the start and the end. (If there are enough seats to ferry not only the drivers, but also their passengers back to the start, an extra shuttle to pick them up will be saved.)

Here is another type of shuttle. All cars drive to the end point of the hike. Enough cars are left at the end point to carry all drivers to the start point. All occupants of those cars get into the remaining cars. Everyone goes by car to the start point. The hike is carried out. Afterward, the cars left at the end are used to ferry drivers back to the start to get their cars. Advantage – very efficient time saving at the start. Disadvantages – everyone has to wait at the end; requires a lot of empty seats. (Although this needs extra space, it is comparable to the

## APPENDICES

### A RTA ACTIVITY SIGN-UP SHEET

This Appendix is printed in landscape format on pages 38-41 for easier copying if needed. It is also available on the RTA website.

### B EQUIPMENT

The equipment the leader should carry depends on the type and location of the hike. The following items would be suitable for the average wilderness or semi-wilderness hike:

- Sign up sheet
- Map
- Compass
- Matches or lighter, plus fire starter (a tube of fire starter paste, a candle, or something to help light a fire under wet conditions to warm an injured participant – cotton balls soaked in yellow petroleum jelly and stuffed into 35mm film containers are good for starting a fire in wet conditions)
- Extra food
- Knife
- Flashlight
- Extra clothing
- First aid kit
- Whistle
- Extra water
- Rain gear
- Insect repellent
- Sunglasses
- Sunblock
- Duct tape
- Emergency blanket
- Pen and paper
- Watch
- Small tarp
- Plastic trash bags (for use as an emergency substitute for rain gear).

Optional items include a cell phone, water purification tablets, antihistamines in case of allergic reactions (e.g., to wasp stings), liniment for sprains or muscle pains, GPS equipment, an insulating pad

**Event:** This is usually easier to deal with, and typically involves selecting another event in place of the one advertised. As mentioned above, this should be as similar as possible to the event as described in the Newsletter, with the same starting time and similar conditions such as length, difficulty, expected return time, etc. If in doubt, easier conditions are preferable to more difficult ones.

Any changes, either in leader or intended event, should be communicated to the Activity Coordinator who will advise the e-Newsletter editor, website operator and person handling the club telephone hotline. If communicating by voicemail or e-mail, ask for confirmation so you know the Activity Coordinator has received the message. If you get no reply, or know the Activity Coordinator is out of town, contact the club chair or another member of the club executive.

## ON THE DAY OF THE HIKE

### *Personal preparation*

Most of this is what you usually do when going on a hike, but there are a few extra points when you are the leader. Check your equipment to be sure you have not only your usual gear but also any extra items that might be useful for other participants. Refer to the checklist in Appendix B if in doubt. Be sure you have the sign-up sheet, a pen or pencil, directions for other drivers and any maps needed. Allow extra time to be at the meeting point early. If you are likely to be driving others, clear space in your car for any passengers and their gear, and check your gas.

### *Confirming details or changes*

On the morning of the hike, the leader should decide if weather or trail conditions will affect the hike. The general rule is that events go ahead even in bad weather, but extremes of heat or cold, torrential or freezing rain, or the possibility of severe thunderstorms may suggest that an event be modified or even cancelled. Modifying the event is straightforward – the leader simply explains to the participants at the meeting place what the changes are and the (probably obvious) reason.

Cancellation is a last resort, but if it is necessary to do so for safety reasons, the leader should still go to the meeting place to inform any arriving participants of this decision. The only exception is when road conditions are so bad that going to the meeting place would be

dangerous; in that event, needless to say, the leader is advised to cancel the event without going to the meeting place.

## AT THE MEETING PLACE

The meeting place is often the scene for a small social occasion. When you are the leader, remember that your role is different from usual. You are the one who has to make sure everyone gets signed up, briefed, assigned transport and sent off to the rendezvous point or trail head. If other groups are departing at the same time, you also have to work with the other leaders to keep your group separate from theirs. It's easy to forget things here, but the checklist on the back of the sign-up sheet will remind you of the main points.

### **Sign-up, introductions and general briefing**

Arrive early – at least ten to fifteen minutes before the published start time. Have participants sign the sign-up sheet as soon as they arrive. As the departure time approaches, call the group together, greet the participants, welcome any new faces, confirm that they have all signed the sheet, and make the required announcements. If the group is small, ask the participants to introduce themselves, otherwise let them know you'll take care of the introductions at the trail head.

Give the destination and the type of hike (easy, medium, tough, on-trail or off, special characteristics). If the event is a challenging one, it is wise to overstate the difficulty slightly, without losing credibility. For events at levels 2 or 3, remind participants that they are expected to have experience at the previous level. Explain the main objectives of the trip, and how trade-offs will be made, if applicable, between time spent sightseeing, bird watching, etc., and time spent hiking.

Announce the type of equipment and supplies hikers are expected to have. Notable are food, plenty of water, rain gear and suitable clothing, including appropriate footwear for the hike.

Try to identify people who lack the fitness, experience, or equipment for the hike, and tactfully suggest an alternative for those who are not suited to the event – an easier hike with a later start if one is scheduled, or a public area with visitor information nearby where that they can take a self-guided hike.

Tell people how long a drive is required, and at what hour the hike will probably get back to town. Allow generous time to get to the trail head. If the journey is long, indicate whether they can stop for a break along the

Groups of over 20 people may be difficult to handle and may be separated, perhaps into faster and slower hikers. If there is a second group, appoint a leader and sweep. Encourage new leaders - they are hard to come by! Advise hikers not to go ahead of the leader (except at your discretion) and to face oncoming traffic when hiking on a road.

### **On the Trail**

Start off at warm-up pace and continue at speed for everyone's enjoyment. When slower walkers are present, regroup frequently to keep group together. Do not allow faster hikers to push the pace.

At impediments such as stiles and beaver dams, ask all hikers to gather on the far side before proceeding. Have all members wait at trail junctions.

During the hike, announce the next scheduled event.

### **In an Emergency**

You are in charge; act in a calm manner. Appoint people to specific tasks and be sure they understand your instructions.

Be sure to have at least two people stay with an injured person at all times.

If someone is uninjured but cannot/will not continue, send an experienced hiker back with that person; as leader, you must stay with the group or appoint an acceptable substitute leader.

### **At the End**

Ensure everyone has a ride back to town.

Mail sign-in sheet to Human Resources Coordinator (Kingston Club) or Activity Coordinator (Ottawa Club).

If hike is on a section of the trail that requires maintenance or improved signage, inform Trail Maintenance Coordinator.

### **Other Notes**

If you can't lead a hike, arrange your replacement as soon as possible explaining main aspects of the hike. Inform Hike Coordinator and Human Resources Coordinator (Kingston) or Activity Coordinator (Ottawa) of the change.

If trail bikes, ATVs or horseback riders are met on private property, politely explain that the trail is a hiking trail only and that the landowners may not approve of it being used for other purposes

## RTA SIGNUP SHEET (REVERSE SIDE): HIKING LEADERSHIP

(also applies to other Rideau Trail activities such as skiing, cycling and canoeing - see also the Guide for Leaders)

### Preparation

Prehike trail (not alone) to familiarize yourself with area, planning timing, lunch stop, parking and car shuttle (if required), etc. Be flexible to group's preferences on the day of the hike bearing in mind there are many diabetics who cannot vary mealtimes. When taking phone enquiries, remember that you may be the first Rideau Trail contact for some callers. Make them welcome! Carry a map of the area (guide book), whistle, extra water, first aid kit, sun screen, insect repellent, antihistamines and garbage bag (can be used as emergency rain protection).

**At Meeting Place** (usually Kingston Centre, north parking lot next to Princess St. for Kingston Club, Conlon Farm, Perth for Central Club, and parking lot of R.H Coats Building, Tunney's Pasture on west side of Parkdale for Ottawa Club)

Be there at least 10 minutes early.

Have everyone sign reverse of this form. Have Rideau Trail Association brochures available for non-members.

Welcome newcomers and ask members of the group to introduce themselves.

Be sure everyone understands what the hike entails (including anticipated weather) and that they are properly equipped. Explain waiver. Discourage or even disallow those not properly prepared.

Young people may be welcome, depending on the event, if accompanied by a responsible adult. Normally dogs cannot be allowed.

Give drivers precise directions including instructions on relevant park fees. Ask passengers to contribute towards gas expenses and park charges.

### At Rendezvous Point

Shuttle cars if trail is not a loop. Plan shuttle with care, making sure all cars are accounted for at the rendezvous point and all drivers have a ride to their cars at the end of the hike. Separate instructions on planning a car shuttle are in the Guide for Leaders. Appoint a sweep.

way or if there will be an opportunity for this at the rendezvous point, or suggest an arrival time so that the first to arrive are not kept waiting an excessive time for stragglers.

Encourage questions, and respond to them to the best of your ability.

Inform the participants of the gas contribution and any other charges such as park fees, and request that they pay their driver some time during the day.

Most members are non-smokers, so that anyone wishing to smoke should do so discreetly at breaks, away from other participants, taking extreme care about fire. They should not smoke in a vehicle unless all passengers have no objection. (If smokers are also drivers and wish to smoke while driving, they should agree this with any passengers before anyone departs from the meeting place in case the car-pooling arrangements need to be changed). Alcohol use should comply with rules of common sense and the jurisdiction where the event is taking place. Leaders should deter any participants who appear to be under the influence of alcohol or narcotics.

Call the group's attention to the RTA waiver on the sign-up sheet, and make sure everyone understands what has been signed. Advise them that if anyone has health problems that may call for special precautions or first aid measures, they should advise the leader then or sometime before the group actually starts into the hike.

Make sure the sign up sheet is complete before everyone leaves. (If some hikers are meeting the group at the trail head or rendezvous point, be sure to have them sign in.)

Offer membership brochures to potential new members, but let them know they are welcome to participate whether they join or not.

### **Specific instructions**

If the event is one where more than one group is formed – for example where conditions permit hiking, skiing and snowshoeing, or where there is one activity but it divides into sub-groups at different levels – the original leader should ensure that extra leaders and sweeps are appointed and any needed coordination is arranged for the groups to meet together for lunch or at the departure point at an agreed upon time. The extra leaders should take care of any special instructions for their groups.



## RIDEAU TRAIL ASSOCIATION (RTA) ACTIVITY SIGN-UP SHEET

**Activity:**  
**Destination:**

**Leader:**  
**Date:**

**Outline:**

**Release of Liability** I understand that there can be risks associated with any recreational pursuit and, in consideration of the RTA permitting me to participate in this activity, I, for myself and my heirs and personal representatives, hereby release the RTA, its clubs, directors, leaders, members, and other volunteers from all claims and demands for any loss, damage, or injury, however caused and whether or not contributed to by negligence, in connection with my participation. I have read and understand this, and am voluntarily signing below.

One name per line, please!

#	Print Name	Signature	Mem- Y/N	Home Tel	Emergency Tel	Plate #. if Driving
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						

Some participants, after listening to the description of how the trip will be run, may object to some of its details and ask that it be run differently. A leader may make modifications, provided he or she feels completely comfortable with all details of the new arrangements. Most times, however, the simplest thing to do is to explain that the trip has been planned and will be run accordingly; if participants do not like the arrangements, they are cordially invited to withdraw from that particular event. Remember, you are the leader, and you have rights as well as obligations.

Occasionally people who are unqualified for an event, due to lack of conditioning or inexperience, insist on coming, "at their own risk," or unofficially. This should not be allowed; it is a confirmation of poor judgment on the part of a participant. Explain to the individuals that this cannot be allowed as, even if they are going at their own risk, the group will still have to mount a rescue if they get into difficulty. Be firm, and don't give in. If you do, you are inviting problems on the trail.

Sometimes regular participants invite a friend to an event, and this of course is generally encouraged. However, for the more challenging Level 2 or 3 events, be cautious that the friend is sufficiently aware of and prepared for what is involved. The person who explained it may have an optimistic idea of the friend's ability, or might have misrepresented or misunderstood what the event actually entails.

Keep a special eye out for anyone who looks unprepared, especially for a Level 2 or 3 event (lunch in plastic bag, no obvious hiking gear). If the nature of the event is such that they can still participate, advise anyone lacking enough food or water to obtain these on the way to the rendezvous point. If someone lacks rain gear, ask if anyone has spare equipment they are willing to lend.

For hikes in steep or rough terrain and wet weather, footwear inspection might be worthwhile. Hikers with worn heels are inviting slips, but if necessary can make a great difference to their grip by a few careful strokes with a pocket knife.

Watch out for those who are not paying attention or not present when instructions are given. It is better to repeat the information for their benefit before setting out than to have to compensate for their lack of preparation during the event.

## **AT THE RENDEZVOUS POINT**

The rendezvous point is where the cars will gather after the instructions to the drivers have been followed. If this is the same as the trail head, jump to the next section of this Guide. However, it may be a collecting point from which a lead car will lead the others to the trail head, or it may be the start of a car shuttle.

The rendezvous point should be a location which is easy to find, especially for those unfamiliar with the area, to bring all the cars together before proceeding in a convoy to the trail head. Some drivers may also find it more convenient to meet the group here rather than at the meeting point or trail head. Typical examples of a rendezvous point include a road junction, lay by or turnoff from a main highway.

The only advice pertaining to the rendezvous point is to make sure that all cars are accounted for. Here it's best to actually identify drivers – sometimes a car may arrive late at the meeting place just as everyone is departing, and follow the cars as they leave. If someone stops for gas you could have the right number of cars, but not necessarily all the same cars as when you left! It's also possible that you may have cars from another group visiting the same area who have mistaken your group for theirs.

Ideally all cars will arrive promptly, but if not, it is best to wait some time – at least twenty minutes, and perhaps more if the journey is long – for late arrivals. Someone may have a flat tire or navigational difficulties. However, if a car has failed to arrive after this wait period, you may proceed to the trailhead, noting the missing persons on the sign-up sheet.

When driving from the rendezvous point to the trail head, travel slowly enough for all cars to follow your route easily.

See appendix C for information on running a car shuttle.

## **AT THE TRAIL HEAD**

This is where the hike is to start.

The first requirement at the trail head is a safe, legal place to park the cars without impeding the passage of other traffic. If the hike is an end to end with a car shuttle, then this requirement exists at both ends. The leader should ensure that vehicles are not likely to cause an issue on private property, do not block access to gates, etc. and that parking fees are paid where required. Usually the cost is shared.

## **CONCLUSION**

As stated in the introduction, the information presented in this Guide is not intended as rules but as a collection of helpful suggestions drawn from the experience of those who have encountered problems in past events and thought about how to avoid or deal with them in future. Many of our experienced leaders have developed their own creative ways of achieving the same goals, and you are encouraged to add to these techniques yourself as you gain experience.

If you are new to hiking, there's nothing like leading an event yourself. You can start with something simple, or share the lead with someone else. Let your Activity Coordinator know that you're interested – help to get you started will be readily available. And if you have any suggestions, pass these along as well so we can consider them the next time this Guide is being revised. See you on the trail!

## AT THE END

Remind the participants to pay their driver the gas money. Thanks are exchanged all around.

Make sure that everyone is out, and has a ride back to town. Frequently passengers return with a different driver; the leader should make sure that no one is left behind. Participants who change cars should inform their outbound driver of their departure. Participants should negotiate the gas contribution ratio between the outgoing and returning drivers – usually a 50-50 split.

The standard transportation arrangement is a return to the meeting place after the event. However, it is common for drivers and their passengers to agree to a different drop off point, and there is no problem with that.

The leader should be the last to leave the parking area, after ensuring that everyone has a ride home with all their gear. The leader should pick up any items left behind, for retrieval by their owners.

## AFTER THE EVENT

The sign-up sheet is very important to the coordinators. Please give or send it to the coordinator listed for this purpose on the schedule in the Newsletter.

Occasionally, the leader may have to act as a clearing house for lost gear. The sign-up sheet will help in providing participants' phone numbers as needed.

Written trip reports are seldom necessary for a day trip. If anything unusual happens, and certainly if any kind of accident happens, the leader is encouraged to call the Activity Coordinator and describe what happened. If a leader has had problems with an individual participant, the matter should be brought to the Activity Coordinator's attention.

Any problems with Rideau Trail maintenance, sites, signs and markers should be drawn to the attention of the Club's Maintenance Coordinator, the Club Chair, or the Activity Coordinator as soon as possible after the hike.

If the leader received any complaints or suggestions that apply to the whole program, rather than a single event, these should be forwarded to the Activity Coordinator.

The general parking situation should be known from the pre-hike, but conditions on the day may be different. There may be more cars than expected, or some of the space may be taken up by other vehicles already present when the group arrives. Usually shortage of space can be dealt with by instructing drivers to park closely to make full use of available space.

Occasionally a desired trail head turns out to be inaccessible by car; for example, a bridge may have been washed out or a road may have become impassable, and a solution has to be improvised. Among the options are to park farther out and walk the extra distance; modify the route to start from a different access point; or do a completely different hike.

Check that all vehicles have arrived. As at the rendezvous point, a generous waiting period, at the discretion of the leader, is appropriate in case of late arrivals.

## **Confirmation of participants and introductions**

Once everyone has assembled, introductions, information, requirements, and responsibilities should be repeated. The leader should do a brief recap of the procedures already given at the meeting place. Specifically, the following points should be covered, as some participants may have joined the group at the trail head.

## **General briefing**

- Describe the route and any difficulties anticipated.
- Explain the broad objectives of the trip with timings of stops for lunch, rests and points of interest, and the approximate time of return.
- Ensure that all participants have sufficient experience, conditioning, and equipment. Even at this late hour it is better for someone to bail out than to get in over their head.
- Make sure everyone has signed the sign-up sheet and understands the waiver.
- Make it clear what people are expected to bring, and make sure they haven't left anything essential in the car, such as lunch or water. Advise them not to leave valuables in vehicles and to ensure that vehicles are locked. (Look around for any suspicious activity).

## **The Sweep**

Appoint a "sweep" to stay at the end of the group, and check that the sweep understands the role.

The most important job of the sweep is to make sure that all hikers are accounted for and no one is left behind. The sweep may also need to assist any hiker having difficulty and falling behind the group. The leader should therefore not get too far ahead of the sweep, and should stay in sufficient contact for the sweep to advise the leader if the group gets too spread out or if an emergency stop needs to be made. The sweep should also carry a whistle or have some other means of contacting the leader (See Appendix F for whistle convention).

If there is a large number of participants it may be necessary to designate a “middleman”, or to break up the group and appoint additional leaders and sweeps. For very large groups it may be necessary to appoint more than one leader and sweep, and to stagger the start.

### **Trail Discipline**

Give the participants instructions on how you want them to behave on the trail. If you want to go first at all times, tell them so. If you prefer to lead from the middle or the back (also acceptable), tell participants not to get too far ahead, and to wait at all junctions. The approach you take will depend on the route and your own style. If the route is not absolutely clear, leading from the front is recommended.

Advise hikers to face oncoming traffic when hiking on a road, and to use the shoulder where practical. It is very annoying for drivers when people are scattered along both sides, especially on cottage roads that are usually quite narrow. Accidents can occur if the group splits unpredictably to both sides of the route. The same holds for shared-use trails where bicycles or snowmobiles may be encountered.

Advise them that there will be frequent breaks so that they should not need to leave the trail for a relief or “pit stop”, but that if they must do so, it is no longer considered good practice to leave their packs on the trail as in the past, because it is all too easy to turn around in the bush and become disoriented and lost without food, water or extra clothing. Instead, they should notify another member of the group what they are doing, and then let that person know when they return. (This is one reason why some leaders like to pair participants in a “buddy” system at the start – it also helps to break the ice for those who are new to the group).

Give the participants a brief instruction about what to do if they become separated from the group. They should stay in one place for at least one hour, and wait to be found. In cold weather, they may walk back and forth over a short distance to keep warm. See the notes below on off-trail

no longer needed. In any case, if the dropout is permitted, those leaving should be advised that they are now on their own and the dropout and reason noted against their names on the sign-up sheet. If early withdrawal is inadvisable, the leader should explain to the participant why, and what would be the consequences of such an action.

### **Losing a participant**

If a head count reveals that a participant is missing, arrange for the group to stop; check if the sweep has any information; and wait about five minutes to see if the person has dropped behind for a pit stop or because of an equipment failure.

Have two experienced hikers retrace the route to search for the missing person. Set a time limit on the search, and inform the group what the time limit will be. It is the leader's decision whether to stay with the group or go with the search party; if you decide to search, you should clearly designate a temporary leader who is in charge of the group in your absence.

If at the end of the time limit the person still has not been found, it is important to get the rest of the group safely to the end of the hike and in good time before sunset. If the person has not turned up at the end of hike or at the trailhead he/she may have returned by a different route and be stranded at another location. Otherwise the person may have suffered a medical problem or be lost and alone in the bush.

The family or next of kin and the emergency services should be notified as soon as possible.

### **Losing equipment**

If gear is accidentally left behind on the trail by a participant, the leader should develop a plan. Some variables to be considered include the value of the item; how far behind its estimated location is; and how late in the day it is. One option is letting the participant and others leave to recover the object on the same terms as a dropout, as above. Another is to keep the group in one location and send back a search party, on the same terms as a missing participant search, as above. A third option is, with regrets, to abandon the object if recovering it is unworkable. As a matter of interest, there have been several cases on club events of a trip's being repeated weeks later with the specific objective of retrieving lost equipment, with success.

subsequent hiking parties for a long time. Plants, flowers, and rocks etc., should not be removed or taken as souvenirs but left for others to enjoy. For day events, participants usually bring lunch and drink (hot or cold,) from home, so that fires or stoves are not necessary. If they are needed, fire regulations should be obeyed and any fire should be well wetted down before leaving the site.

### **Harassment**

Occasionally the interaction between participants goes beyond the acceptable and verges on harassment. The threshold of tolerance for this varies a lot from person to person, as does the readiness to speak up about it. If you sense that someone in the group is particularly uneasy about such behaviour, the best approach is first to confirm that you are not misreading the situation by discreetly questioning the affected party and discussing the matter with experienced members present. If you are correct and some action is called for, then take the offender aside, tactfully explain the concern and ask that the undesirable actions be stopped. If you are not comfortable with doing this yourself, ask one or more of the more experienced and assertive members of the group to help you.

### **Dropouts**

Some hikes may be planned and advertised with an arrangement for some who do not wish to walk the full distance to drop out at a certain point. In other cases, one or more participants may want to withdraw from a hike before the end, either temporarily, for example to go back for an item left at the last stop or lost en route, or permanently, because of not feeling up to the rest of the hike, or wanting to get back earlier or via another route. Dropouts can also occur near the end of the hike, when one or two hikers want to move at a faster pace than the rest of the group. Sometimes the leader is aware of the proposed dropout, but it could be the sweep who is faced with this decision if those dropping out wish to go back along the route.

Dropouts may be permitted, provided:

- that those who wish to leave have the required knowledge and ability to get out safely;
- that the needs of all participants are met at the end. This refers mainly to transportation, but also to gear left in other vehicles which somehow has to be reunited with its owner.

If the first condition is not met – for example, where the dropout is for medical or fitness reasons – it may be necessary to arrange for an experienced member of the group to accompany the victim until help is

hiking for additional information on what to do if the route is not on a defined trail.

Count the participants as you leave the trail head. One technique is to have them number off in military style, which is effective and good for camaraderie. The number should be balanced with the sign-up sheet and communicated to the sweep. Keep the sign-up sheet with you for reference. After rest stops, and lunch, a good idea is to have every one file past the sweep so a count can be made.

## **ON THE TRAIL**

### ***Leading***

It is the leader's choice to lead from the front or from another position in the group. Leading from the front makes it much easier to control the pace, so it's a good idea to start off at the front and apply tactful discipline, at least until the group has settled into a regular pace and any obvious problems have been identified.

If you have not already done so, quietly evaluate the participants to pick out one or two in whom you have confidence in asking for assistance if you need it.

If you prefer to float within the group, then tell the participants of an obvious landmark less than an hour up the trail, and ask them to wait there. Be careful of this if you have enthusiastic or fast hikers you don't know, or the potential exists for them to overshoot or inadvertently go off down a side trail, as they may not act as you expect. If in doubt, assign a competent hiker to keep an eye on them.

It helps to warn participants of any hazards you encounter, such as slippery surfaces, loose rocks, or poison ivy, and ask those behind you to pass on the warning to those following.

An explanation of special walking techniques where appropriate, such as locking the knees on a steep climb, or kicking into the snow if there is snow coverage, may help participants who are unfamiliar with the finer points of hiking.

### ***Direction, pace and breaks***

Start at a leisurely warm-up pace and build up the speed gradually. Try to prevent the group from becoming too spread out. Pay attention to pace, and do not let the group's speed become too great for the slowest

participant to handle comfortably. A good warning sign of too fast a pace is dispersion of the group over a great length of trail.

Be sure to take an early bio-break or “pit stop” at a convenient spot along the trail, and have periodic pauses to regroup, rest, pit stop and have a drink. On hot days, advise participants to drink before they get thirsty. Suggested break intervals are about once an hour, at trail junctions, after crossing stiles and beaver dams, etc. and after any steep ascents or difficult sections. Let the slower hikers catch up, then give them a chance to rest as well – they typically need the rest more than anyone, yet may get the least chance if the faster group resumes the hike as soon as the slower ones arrive. Do not let faster hikers force the pace. Count the participants periodically to ensure all are accounted for. Keep an eye on the group for discomfort, pain and fatigue. Have the sweep count up the number of hikers after each stop so nobody gets left behind.

Announce when the lunch break will occur shortly before you actually stop. Lunch and rest stops are a good time to mingle and socialize, and also to make any announcements or reminders about information from the briefing if needed. Allow enough time for people to eat and rest, and allow extra time for special activities such as a lunch-time swim. Announce the group's departure time about ten minutes ahead so that people can get organized. Just before departing, explain the afternoon's activities.

Some time during the day (during the lunch break is often a convenient time), advise the group about other upcoming RTA events and items of interest.

Report the group's progress from time to time – the proportion of the trip completed, what is to come and the rough time of arrival at the lunch spot or back at the cars. Point out on the map to those interested, at any rest stop, the route being followed and the stage of progress along it. Answer questions from the group, but be conservative in estimating the finish time in case the group's pace should slow, and try to avoid firm commitments.

Late in the hike, watch the participants closely for signs of becoming tired or cold. Whining, complaining and slowing down are classic signs. Watch also for body language and facial expressions as indicators of distress, as some people are reluctant to share their discomfort with others and will struggle along regardless. It is a good idea to have a backup plan to shorten the hike if some participants are not up to it.

Always be aware of the group's rate of progress. If it is much slower than expected, consider options for how to end the hike safely. Neglecting this

When hiking off trail, occasionally hikers who are at ease in the bush may explore to one side of the group and may even try to get ahead of it. Unless they are sharing the role of leading by agreement with the designated hike leader for the event, the leader should discourage this, as the offender can tend to pull the group off the intended route without the leader realizing it. It's also confusing for others, who are not sure whom to follow. Sometimes the offending individual will argue that he or she does this on other outings and it's accepted. However, those outings may have a high proportion of experienced hikers, while yours has many newcomers or people who are less at ease in the bush. You are the leader, and should therefore use judgement, and if necessary point out that others are free to lead their own hikes, but while they are on yours they should comply with your instructions.

### **Conflict over priorities**

On some events there may be a divergence of opinion in the group about priorities. For example, some may want to spend a lot of time on bird watching or nature photography, some may want to forge ahead at great speed, and others may want to make a side trip to another destination. The leader may have enough flexibility to accommodate diverse wishes, but if a conflict cannot be resolved, then the leader has to decide on the course of action and explain the reasoning to the participants. The best way to minimize possible conflicts of interest is by giving a clear briefing at the outset (in the publicity, at the meeting place and at the trail head) of what the primary purpose of the event is.

### **Noise**

Some groups can be noisy. Usually this involves just one or two people who get everyone else involved. Distracted hikers are at risk of an accident since they are not paying attention, and the noise also destroys the peaceful ambience of the occasion for everyone else, including other groups who may also be in the area. The leader should bring the hike to a halt and tactfully explain this to the group, most of whom will probably be appreciative.

### **Environmental concerns**

Most participants don't have to be told not to leave litter behind on the trail, but occasionally there is an exception. If someone in the group is littering the landscape, explain that hiker etiquette is “Pack In, Pack Out” and to leave no trace of one's presence. All items brought on the hike should be taken out. Garbage should be taken home for disposal. (After breaks, check to see that nothing has been left). Even biodegradable material should be packed out, because it will be an eyesore for

A participant who is injured but able to walk should be assisted by the group. If the hiker can't walk but can be moved, a carry could be attempted if the leader is confident that the group can safely transport the casualty all the way out. If the distance is too great for carrying, or the casualty can't be moved, it is probably best to find a safe location, make the injured person comfortable, and send for help. If the last is required, the leader should decide, based on the difficulty and length of the exit route, what portion of the party to send out, and what portion should remain at the accident scene to help.

Be sure to have at least two people stay with an injured person at all times. If it is necessary to split the party, the leader should appoint a competent substitute leader for the other group.

### **Failure to follow instructions**

People fail to follow instructions for a variety of reasons. Some mean to behave, but lack concentration and are easily distracted. It is difficult to change such behaviour. A more effective approach is to allow for it but use other experienced or reliable members of the group to assist in maintaining order and making sure the vulnerable ones don't lose sight of the group ahead or stray from the route.

A more serious challenge is the person who refuses to follow instructions and disrupts the rest of the group. This can be difficult to deal with. Some useful advice is provided in the section on conflict resolution in Appendix G of this Guide. The objective is to create a relationship that enables you to keep control of the hike and others to enjoy it, rather than attempting to change a personality, which is not likely to be possible. Reasoning with the individual is one way to tackle the problem. Enlisting the help of one of your trusted participants to deal with the individual, explaining the effect of the individual's behaviour, may also help. It may be necessary to reinforce the fact, tactfully and firmly, that you are the leader on this event, and that you are the one who makes the decisions.

### **Independent hikers who don't or won't stay with the group**

There are hikers who will try to force the pace by passing the leader. The pace is usually described in the Newsletter and is also outlined at the meeting place and or at the trailhead as being fast, moderate or slow. It should be a comfortable speed that accommodates the needs of the group as a whole. This information should be tactfully related to the person who thinks the pace is too slow. In any case, it is best not to permit anyone to get ahead of the designated leader due to the difficulty of maintaining control if the group has to slow down or stop because of a problem.

can lead to finishing long after dark, or even having to improvise a shelter for the night.

### **OFF-TRAIL HIKING**

Off-trail hiking needs the explicit permission of the landowner, in the case of private land, or the park, conservation authority or other management agency in the case of public land. This rule applies to most land in Eastern Ontario, and emphatically to land on or near the Rideau Trail. Leaders are requested to respect this principle and, in the case of the Rideau Trail, are further discouraged from requesting such permission, simply to allow privacy to landowners who are already going to great lengths to accommodate hikers. An exception is the Gatineau Park where off-trail hiking is permitted.

Off-trail hiking is more demanding than on-trail hiking, and not just due to the physical effort required. Unlike a trail where the obvious direction is either forward or back along a defined path, in off-trail hiking there is no path, and the route that looks most obvious, if indeed there is one, may not be the route that is to be taken.

This calls for greater care in keeping the group together, as it is much more difficult to gather participants if they become separated, especially if they are moving fast in an attempt to catch up with where they think the leader has gone. It is also not practical to allow individual hikers to step aside for a moment for a pit stop, unless the leader is aware of the break and arranges for a group pause a short distance ahead. It is easy to become disoriented off-trail, and to think one is following a line while heading in an entirely different direction.

Good practice therefore includes a special briefing, at the point where the route leaves a defined trail. This briefing should explain:

- The importance of staying together, and why (as noted above);
- What people should do if they do nevertheless become separated;
- The general route and emergency exit routes if needed;
- How to move through the bush or terrain;
- The need to request pit stops clearly.

### ***Keeping the group together***

When instructing the group on staying together, explain the basic reasons given above, then ask everyone to keep the person ahead of them in view at all times. Any hiker losing sight of the person ahead should call out right away for the group to slow down or stop. In practice

there will often be those in the group who have difficulty following these instructions – they may be distracted by a discussion or personal interaction. Asking them to concentrate may be of little use, even if the leader is courageous enough to do so, so this is usually handled by adjusting the pace so that problem hikers are under supervision, either by the leader, the sweep or both.

Make sure that the sweep understands the importance of keeping the group together, as explained above.

### ***Instructions if separated***

It is especially critical on off-trail trips that participants be told to stay put and wait to be found if they become separated. A minimum wait-time for this helps avoid the lost person or group feeling the wait has been long enough and that they'd better start moving. One hour is enough for typical hikes, but should be extended if extra time is likely to be needed to notice that someone is missing then get back to them. If conditions are such that people need to move – for example to keep warm or avoid flies – advise them to move around in the same location, but not to leave their pack on the ground as a marker in case they get disoriented and lose it. It is better to use an obvious landmark, or to mark the area with marker tape, a visible object such as a spare item of clothing, or by breaking twigs.

The group should also be told the emergency exit route if even after the wait period they have to find their own way out. This can be by compass direction, or following an obvious feature like a downward flowing stream. Position of the sun can be used, if not obscured by clouds. They should also have an idea of what roads or features they are heading for, and should be advised to leave a prominent track by leaving marker tape or breaking small branches in their direction of travel so that searchers will know what route they have taken (or if they need to retrace the route themselves).

### ***How to travel off-trail***

If there are participants who are unfamiliar with travelling off-trail, it is a good idea to brief them on what and what not to do. This briefing is useful as a refresher even for those who know the routine. Apart from the instructions above, typical advice includes:

- Watch for the slip hazards of wet rocks and wood;
- Remember that loose rocks can move when stepped or pulled on;

out safely. Similarly, if despite the initial briefing someone has insufficient food or water, others may be able to supply enough to solve the problem.

### **Physical condition of participants**

Despite the precautions taken in planning and at the start, you may find later that the physical condition of some participants is not up to the event. Common reasons for this include fatigue, lack of experience, medical condition or injury. Whatever the reason, and whether the condition was pre-existing or occurs during the event, the leader should assess the situation to determine whether the person is capable of continuing with the event as planned (possibly after a suitable pause), whether the event should be changed for all participants, or whether the affected person should be assisted out (with or without the aid of emergency services).

Slower hikers who have difficulty keeping up may feel embarrassed that they are holding everyone else up. One possible solution is to have them stay right behind the leader, even though this will slow the group pace. If people have very different paces, for example on steep ascents or descents, it might be better to let them go at their own pace and regroup at the top or bottom, provided of course that all are under the oversight of experienced members of the group at all times. Other members of the group could also be recruited to provide help and encouragement to a slower hiker. Ultimately however, the pace will need to be reduced enough to accommodate the slower hiker, unless the problem is identified early in the event and arrangements made for a dropout (see instructions for this below).

The leader should have a contingency plan ready to shorten the hike if it is clear that any hikers are likely to have difficulty in finishing within a reasonable amount of time. The general rule is that the pace of the hike should match that of the slowest hiker.

### **Injuries**

For information on injuries, medical conditions and first aid, see Appendix H of this Guide. It is desirable, but not essential, that all leaders have first aid training. The leader should bring a basic first aid kit in all cases, to ensure that at least one kit is available if needed.

Ideally the leader should recruit an experienced participant to perform first aid if required and concentrate on crowd control and situation management. Alternatively, if the leader is the only experienced first aider, it may be better to delegate the leadership role temporarily, although the original leader always remains in charge.

The hunting season is clearly a hazardous time to be in the outdoors. The Rideau Trail Association policy is to schedule events only inside parks, well away from hunting areas, during this time. Be aware of park boundaries, and stay well inside during the season. If you happen to encounter hunters in an unauthorized area, you may discreetly ask them if you are right in thinking that there is no hunting allowed in the area you are travelling. Afterwards, you should report such encounters to park wardens and to the Activity Coordinator or Club Chair. Any illegal activity encountered along the trail should be similarly reported.

### **Bears**

Bears are normally shy of humans and will usually get out of the way when they see us. If you do come across a bear on the trail, never turn and run or approach the bear. Slowly back away while watching it. This might be difficult with a large group as some people might panic and run.

Stay together and make sure the bear has a clear escape route. Then yell and wave your arms around to make yourself look bigger. Appear to be aggressive, make noise, and blow the whistle. In most cases the bear will make a hasty retreat.

### **Internal Problems**

These range from participants not being properly fit or equipped – perhaps due to a change in their condition during the hike, such as an injury; to social and organizational factors such as conflicts within the group, for example over the pace or nature of the event; and the method of dealing with dropouts and missing participants or lost gear.

The leader's primary role in risk management during the event is to maintain control of the group and make decisions. The leader should gather the group together and prevent further trouble. You are in charge; act in a calm manner, take charge and delegate tasks. Use the resources within the group. Experienced leaders are almost always present on trips as participants; so if there is a problem during your hike, help will usually be available. Appoint people to specific tasks and make sure they understand your instructions.

### **Lack of water, food or proper equipment**

If a participant is left without adequate clothing by some mishap (accidentally leaving a sweater or parka behind on the trail, or falling in a stream and being left in cold, wet clothes), the leader may have to solicit loans of spare clothing from the rest of the participants to get the victim

- avoid hitting others or being hit by springy branches – move branches vertically rather than horizontally and, when following, leave adequate distance behind the hiker in front;
- Look for an easier route rather than following the leader rigorously through dense bush or obstacles, providing clear contact is maintained (see role of the second, below);

### **Leading off-trail**

Off-trail, the leader usually goes first, although sometimes a "trail blazer" other than the hike leader is designated for this purpose. When traveling through difficult bush or terrain on a compass bearing, group travel can be made easier and faster by designating another experienced hiker as "second". The role of this person is to keep close track of where the leader is going, but to lead the rest of the group on an easier path where possible, avoiding many of the difficult obstacles.

When off-trail, the leader may (a) know the location fairly well at all times, along a known line of travel; or (b) know the location only approximately, such that a broad objective like a road or lake will be reached, but the route is not specific and cannot necessarily be replicated. Both choices are defensible, but a leader should consider carefully the advantages of option (a). Staying on a known line makes it easier to recover lost participants or lost gear.

A consequence of staying on a known line is forgoing the use of faint trails that appear to offer less resistance in the general direction of travel. An explanation that can be given to those who question such decisions is that, not only is the group well served by having good knowledge of its location, but in many cases faint trails have died out and left groups in difficult terrain.

Staying on a known line also enables the leader to give participants a compass bearing. This provides a cross check that the leader's bearing is correct, and also gives those new to compass navigation a chance to practice it.

### **TYPICAL PROBLEMS AND HOW TO MANAGE THEM**

Risk management involves understanding what can go wrong during an event, ideally so that problems can be avoided or mitigated in the first place, but also properly dealt with if they still happen despite precautions.

So far this Guide has dealt with some common problems and how to avoid them. In this section we'll take a closer look at the range of things

that can go wrong and what to do about them if they happen despite best efforts to prevent them.

We can consider problems in two broad groups – those due to external conditions along the route, and those which are internal, caused by conditions within the group itself.

### **External Problems**

These are mainly environmental, in the sense that the route or conditions along it are not as planned.

### **Problems with the route itself**

Occasionally a group encounters an unexpected major obstacle on a hike; examples are an area that has recently been flooded by beavers, or a bridge that has been washed out. If this occurs, the leader should improvise. Options may include circumventing the obstacle (possibly by bushwhacking); proceeding despite the obstacle (e.g., by wading or fording); modifying the route strategically (using a different trail or even a different exit point); or retracing one's steps to the start. Variables to consider include: expertise of the group; time available; difficulty of coping with the obstacle; probability of encountering more trouble on the far side; and how far into the hike the trouble occurs.

Problems on the Rideau Trail or other designated trails – including minor problems like missing or obscured markers – should be reported to the Club Chair, Activity Coordinator or Trail Coordinator.

### **Losing the route**

Despite a leader's best efforts, sometimes the group strays off the trail. This happens easily and is not a serious issue. It can occur when another trail diverges with the main trail or the marker is missed. There have been cases where markers have been removed by vandals. Also, trails can be so faint or overgrown that it is almost impossible to see which way to go. This is especially common on faint trails that are just a small step better than bushwhacks, although it has happened on major trails too. As soon as it is apparent that the group is off course, the leader should call a halt, do a head count, explain the situation, and arrange for the group to stay in the same location while a backward search is done by a couple of experienced hikers. This avoids having the group disperse in all directions searching for the trail. Normally it takes only a few minutes to rectify the error.

If all the procedures up to this point are followed, it is highly unlikely that a group will be caught out by darkness. However, if a set of circumstances should bring that about, the leader should decide whether

to continue by natural light or flashlight, or to hunker down and bivouac for the night.

### **Weather**

Weather conditions can increase risk and endanger the safety of the group. Severe weather can be hazardous, and leaders should be aware of expected weather and able to react to changing weather conditions. Hikers should be kept together and monitored as closely as possible. It is often thought that hypothermia is only a risk in cold weather, but prolonged exposure to rain or a sudden drop in temperature in summer can also bring on a hypothermic condition. Very hot and humid conditions can also pose problems. Dangerous weather conditions, such as a lightning storm or high winds near large trees, may well call for adjusting the event. The best option is probably to find a safe location and wait until the danger is past. Be aware that lightning can be hazardous up to thirty minutes before and after the actual storm, and also that wind-damaged trees may be unstable even after the wind has moderated. Heavy rain can also lead to difficulties later in the day, if the route becomes flooded or impassable.

### **External relations**

Hiking groups often come in contact with outside groups during the course of the event. Some examples are other trail users, or people involved in other activities, such as hunters, and landowners.

If any part of a hike takes place on private property, the leader should obtain the permission of landowners before the event. In the case of the Rideau Trail itself, permission has already been obtained to conduct hikes on the Trail. A leader who encounters a landowner who is angry about the group's presence should explain tactfully the existence of the Trail and the understanding that permission existed; the leader should note down the name and address of the landowner and promise that the Association will contact him or her to resolve the misunderstanding. In this case the leader is obliged to forward all details of what happened to the Activity Coordinator, and/or any member of the Club executive.

Horses, ATVs and trail bikes are not allowed on the Rideau Trail where it crosses private land or in Conservation Areas or Provincial Parks unless permission from the land owner has been given. If hikers encounter such activities and the circumstances permit, it should tactfully pointed out that this is a hiking trail maintained by the RTA. Make sure, however, that the person you are talking to is not the landowner or a family member or friend as this could lead to an embarrassing situation. In any case, a leader should not press the point or become antagonistic.