

New Mexico Cross Country Ski Club

GUIDELINES FOR TOUR LEADERS

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of these **Leaders' Guidelines** is to help you to be a better cross-country ski tour leader. These guidelines present general duties and responsibilities of tour leaders. A separate set of guidelines apply to tour participants. These guidelines apply to all NMCCSC tours.

A ski tour includes day trips, ski tours on bus trips and hut trips, and includes transportation to and from the trailhead. The NMCCSC Leadership Committee strongly encourages all leaders, current or future, to familiarize themselves with these guidelines and to lead their ski tours accordingly.

The responsibility of the leader is to help everyone enjoy the tour and return safely. The best leaders are organized, patient and thoughtful.

II. PRE-TOUR PROCEDURES

Leaders can publicize a tour through the Club newsletter or egroup messages without pre-approval. All tour postings must include the trail CLASS rating (*see TERRAIN AND DIFFICULTY RATINGS, page 3*), any expected variation to the rating, and any special equipment or other requirements for the tour. All tours posted in the newsletter or egroups require the leader to obtain properly completed and signed *Release of Liability* forms from all participants and forward them to the Day Tour Chair.

Day tours start at a pre-determined meeting place in town. Bus trips begin at a bus-accessible trailhead and hut trips begin at a point designated by the hut trip leader. The typical ski tour lasts one day and involves vehicle travel to and from the destination.

It is strongly suggested that the leader learn about the road and weather conditions before he/she leaves home. If possible, the leader should attempt to evaluate all would-be participants before the day of the ski tour. If participants appear to have inadequate skills or equipment, the leader has the right and the responsibility to decline their participation. For Class III tours the announcement should explicitly state that participants **must** call the leader in advance.

The ski tour leader should bring the following important, if not essential, items as appropriate:

1. Map of the area in which you will ski
2. Compass
3. Water
4. Food for expected consumption and high-energy food for emergencies
5. Clothing appropriate for extreme cold and worst imaginable conditions (*i.e. polypropylene underwear, fleece shirts, and extra headgear and gloves/mittens*)
6. Sunglasses and sunscreen
7. First aid kit
8. A tool for cutting, e.g. knife, scissors or Leatherman

9. Space blanket and insulating pad
10. Whistle
11. Headlamp and extra batteries
12. Cell phone if you have one
13. Matches or lighter and a firestarter.
14. Avalanche equipment if you have it

III. TOUR LOGISTICS – MEETING PLACE

The tour leader should arrive at the meeting place early and perform the following functions:

- A. Introduce yourself as the leader and have each participant introduce themselves.
- B. Make sure that all participants coming on the tour sign a *Release of Liability* form. Copies of the form are available on the NMCCSC website. **After the trip has taken place, send the release form to the Day Tour Chair within seven days of the trip. This applies to all leaders with no exceptions.**
- C. Describe the road and ski route conditions as determined from personal experience, weather forecasts, friends, State Police, etc. as available.
- D. Ask who would like to drive and evaluate whether their vehicle is suitable for the road conditions expected. Explain the Club policy on reimbursing drivers.
- E. Check to make sure the skiers are adequately prepared for the weather conditions, have proper and functioning gear, and adequate food and water for the tour.
- F. Ask questions to determine if the skier has adequate skills for the ski tour. Decline the participation of those who lack adequate skills, equipment and clothing. If the participant calls you prior to the tour ask questions then and determine if the tour is appropriate for them.
- G. Provide explicit driving directions to the trailhead, and if necessary, directions for shuttles or the return. A few sketched maps would be helpful.
- H. Exchange cell phone numbers if available.
- I. Make sure skiers are in the same vehicle as their gear if possible.
- J. Encourage caravanning and be aware that drivers may arrive at the trailhead at different times.

IV. TOUR LOGISTICS - TRAILHEAD

Here are some general guidelines for tour leaders to consider before the ski tour begins:

- A. **Think** about several techniques to keep the outing manageable, especially if the group is large. If you have more than 15 skiers, **consider** dividing the group into two groups. Appoint a co-leader and give him/her some instructions. If the group consists of slow and fast skiers **consider** appointing a sweep and give him/her instructions (*a sweep is a person who stays at the end of the group and watches over the slower skiers*). If the leader and the sweep both have two-way radios or cell phones, they may be able to maintain effective communications.
- B. **Know** the names of all the skiers and determine in advance if any car group intends to turn around early. If there is an agreement that several people may turn around early, **make sure** they have car keys. Turning around early is a less desirable option on a loop tour than an in-out ski tour, since returning skiers will not be re-tracing their route to detect any problems encountered by the early-returning skiers.
- C. Set a turn around time on an in-out ski tour so slower skiers will be sure they can return to the cars at the same time as faster skiers.
- D. **State** explicitly before you begin that Club policy discourages solitary skiing.

- E. **Be** aware of potential difficulties associated with shuttle tours, one in which the ski party exits at a trailhead different from the entry trailhead. Such a tour is more demanding because all skiers should arrive at the exit trailhead at about the same time. **Be forewarned** that complications can develop with a shuttle tour, particularly if a skier should become injured or exhausted and needs to return to the entry trailhead. Keep in mind that skiers should not ski solo and have a **plan** for dealing with an injured skier.

V. TERRAIN AND DIFFICULTY RATINGS

Ski tours in the Club may have a large range of abilities. For that reason the Club has three tour ratings (I, II and III). The ratings are described in the newsletters with the goal of helping people choose tours compatible with their abilities. Be aware of the situation where someone shows up for the tour, but lacks the skills or endurance to complete the tour safely and in a timely manner. Sometimes the tour is underrated for the snow conditions. At other times, neither the skier nor the leader knows what the skier's rating really is. Also, ratings do not separate skill from endurance when rating the difficulty.

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

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

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

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

Trail slopes are categorized as follows:

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

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

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

The following checklist is provided as an aid to tour planning:

- A. Find out what the snow conditions are.
- B. Know the road conditions.
- C. Get permission well in advance if you plan to lead a tour on private land.
- D. Know the route options for the tour and choose those that are consistent with the advertised ratings of the tour.
- E. Think about what special equipment may be needed: skins, GPS receivers, two-way radios, avalanche equipment, first-aid kit, tape for poles, wire for binding repair, screw driver, ski tips, etc. Inform participants what special equipment is required **before** the day of the ski tour.
- F. Figure out what maps are needed for the ski tour or the trip to the trailhead and make copies for the drivers and participants.
- G. Find emergency telephone numbers in advance for area Search and Rescue, Colorado Avalanche Information Center, local/state Police, County Sheriff, etc.
- H. Take *Release of Liability* forms and pens.
- I. Consider taking several cell phones into the touring area with different service providers, which may increase your chance that one will work. Remember the most important emergency telephone number: **911**

VI. POTENTIAL HAZARDS

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

A. Injury, particularly an immobilizing injury —

The cold weather will compound the situation and create a sense of urgency about getting the injured person out. Be prepared to assign tasks to members in the group. If possible try not to become too involved in the hands-on work of assisting the injured person. The leader should stay focused on planning the course of action. Determine if you have cell phone coverage. If necessary, contact **911** and request assistance from Search and Rescue, State Police or the County Sheriff; or contact the agency directly if you have their telephone numbers. Inventory the group for useful equipment such as space blankets, tents or insulating pads that might protect them against hypothermia. Fast skiers could ski ahead to contact the authorities and/or mobilize resources for getting the person out.

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

B. Other medical emergencies —

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

C. Exhaustion —

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

D. Hypothermia —

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

E. Equipment Failures —

Here are common equipment failures and possible solutions:

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

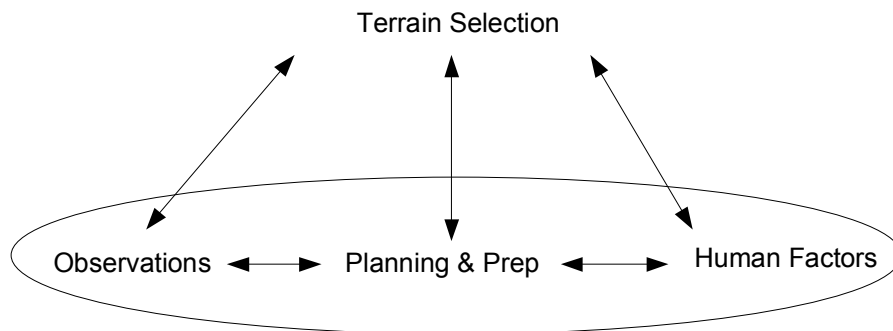
F. Avalanche —

Most avalanches occur on slopes with angles between 35° and 45°; slopes that are convex are typically more at risk than those that are concave. Clues indicating potential avalanche paths are lower runout areas that have broken and bent trees with higher areas above that have been swept clear of trees. A tour leader should be continually scanning the slopes above his current and upcoming route, assessing the possibility that they may be entering a potential avalanche area.

A leader's best defense against avalanche danger is to obtain information about the proposed route to see if the potential exists. Weigh the potential hazard against your knowledge of avalanche safety; if you don't know, don't go! The Club highly recommends that leaders who will lead trips in avalanche terrain should obtain additional knowledge by attending avalanche safety schools and reading avalanche reference books. After determining that you have the knowledge and equipment to attempt the tour, check the weather and avalanche information sites (such as the Colorado Avalanche Information Center at www.avalanche.state.co.us or 303.499.9650); or www.avalanchemapping.org/avatlas.htm to obtain the current conditions of your route just before you go.

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

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



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

ALPTRUTH

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

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

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

VII. CONDUCTING THE SKI TOUR

Once the tour is underway, the tour leader should consider several areas so that participants are comfortable and that the tour is safe and successful.

A. General Comfort —

Start off at a slow pace; build up the pace gradually. The leader should try to ski at a steady pace that can be maintained by all, which might be preferable to the jackrabbit (*stop and go pace*) where faster skiers may become cold while waiting. Let the skiers know that they can ask the leader for a break for equipment/clothing adjustments, food and water, rest or personal needs at any time. Discourage skiers from stopping randomly without the knowledge of the leader. Monitor the condition and behavior of the slower skiers and take breaks accordingly. During the break, give all participants adequate time to rest, eat and drink. After a break, do not resume skiing until all are accounted for.

B. Tour Management —

Practice counting heads to make sure no one is left behind. If different skill levels lead to wide separations of skiers, think about breaking the group into two groups. This would require appointing an Assistant Leader. If there are slow skiers, consider appointing a “sweep” to make sure the slow ones are not abandoned or go astray. Also encourage skiers identify a *buddy* to ski with and to keep that person in sight throughout the tour.

C. Avoid Solitary Skiing —

It is potentially dangerous for skiers to ski by themselves in situations such as skiing well behind the pack, taking alternate routes or returning to the trailhead by themselves. Tell skiers at the beginning of the tour that solitary skiing is discouraged. Tell them that if they must return to the trailhead, they should inform you first and negotiate the terms for their return. It may be possible to find a companion for the returning skier. Insist that you be informed so that you won't be compelled to mount an unnecessary search for the missing skier.

VIII. LEADERSHIP STYLES

No single personality type makes the ideal outdoor activity leader. People with different personalities bring different positive traits to their leadership role. However, **confidence** is an essential personality trait, which serves as the glue that holds the other leadership skills together.

Most serious writings on outdoor leadership advocate some form of **situational leadership**, under which the same leader employs different leadership styles based on the situation that exists at the time. The four basic leadership styles are as follows:

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

There are also four primary situation variables:

1. **Ability** is the level of knowledge and skill participants possess with respect to the task involved.
2. **Willingness** depends on the confidence and motivation of participants with respect to the task involved.
3. **Time** is the amount of time available to accomplish the task involved. The leadership styles listed above takes an increasing amount of time as one moves down the list.
4. **Risk** is the potential for suffering some harm or loss.

Situations combining low participant ability and willingness, little time and high risk are most appropriate for the directing leadership style. Situations combining high participant ability and willingness, ample time and low risk are most appropriate for the delegating leadership style. Situations falling in between these extremes are often most appropriate for the selling or participating leadership styles. However, most cross country ski tours are too short to get participants to work together to the extent necessary to make the participating and delegating leadership styles effective.

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

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

IX. BACKCOUNTRY SKILLS

A leader who has backcountry skills is an asset to all. The following skills can be useful: first aid, winter travel and survival techniques, weather forecasting, map reading, compass orienteering, GPS navigation, waxing, and cross-country ski techniques. A list of references is provided by subject that may be useful to a tour leader. The NMCCSC encourages and supports its members in developing these skills.

First Aid

- A. *Wilderness First Aid*, by the National Outdoor Leadership School.
- B. *First Aid- A Pocket Guide*, by Christopher Van Tilburg, 2001, MD, Mountaineer's Book.
- C. *First Aid Textbook*, by the American National Red Cross, Doubleday and Company, Inc.
- D. *Medicine for Mountaineering*, edited by J. A. Wilkerson, M.D., published by The Mountaineers, Seattle, WA.

Map Reading and Ski Routes

- A. *Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills*, by The Mountaineers, Seattle, WA.
- B. *Ski Touring in Northern New Mexico, Second Edition*, Sam Beard, 374 Juniper Hill Road, NE, Albuquerque, N.M., 87122-1404, 98 pages, 1988.
- C. *Be Expert with Map and Compass*, by Bjorn Kellstrom, Chas Scribner's Sons.
- D. *18 Ski Touring Trails Around Taos*, Red River and Angel Fire including Wheeler Peak Wilderness, Brian Shields and Richard Erickson; Taos Mountain Outfitters, P. O. Box 1862, Taos, N.M., 18571; 24 pages, 1978.
- E. *Central Colorado Ski Tours*, Tom and Sanse Sudduth; Pruett Publishing, 3235 Prairie Ave., Boulder, CO, 80301, 140 pages. Covers 58 tours in the area, 1977.
- F. *Colorado Front Range Tours*, Tom and Sanse Sudduth; Touchstone Press, P. O. Box 81, Beaverton, ORE, 97005; 128 pages. Ski Tours near Denver and Boulder, 1975.
- G. *Northern Colorado Ski Tours*, Tom and Sanse Sudduth; Touchstone Press, P. O.-Box 81, Beaverton, ORE, 97005, 141 pages. Covers 65 tours in the area, 1976.
- H. *Yellowstone Ski Tours*, John F. Barber, The Rocky Mountain Trading Company, P. O. Box 512, Yellowstone National Park, WYO, 82190, 80 pages, 1979.
- I. *Cross Country Ski Trails in the Rockies*, John Williams; Contemporary Books, Inc., 180 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, ILL, 60601; 140 pages. (Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado), 1978.

Weather Forecasting, Snow and Avalanche

- A. *Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills*, by-the Mountaineers, Seattle, WA.
- B. *The Avalanche Handbook*, David McClung and Peter Schaefer, The Mountaineers Books, 2006.
- C. *Backcountry Skier*, by Jean Vives, Human Kinetics, 1999.
- D. *Snow Sense - A Guide for Evaluating Avalanche Hazard*, by Jill Fredston and Doug Fester, Alaska Mountain Safety Center, 1999.
- E. *Wilderness Skiing*, L. Tejada - Flores and A. Steck, Sierra Club totebook.
- F. *The ABC of Avalanche Safety*, E.R. LaChappelle, Highlander Publishing Co., 1970.
- G. *Snow Avalanches*, US Dept of Agriculture, Handbook #194.

GPS Navigation

- A. *GPS Land Navigation*, Michael Ferguson, Glassford Publishing, Boise, ID, 1998.

Cross-Country Ski Guidebooks

- A. *The New Cross Country Ski Book*, John Caldwell, The Stephen Greene Press, Brattleboro, Vermont.
- B. *Cross Country Skiing - Building Skills for Fun and Fitness*, by Steve Hindman.
- C. *Backcountry Skiing: Skills for Ski Touring and Ski Mountaineering*; Martin Volken, Scott Schell and Margaret Wheeler; The Mountaineers Books, 2007.

- D. *Dawson's Guide to Colorado Backcountry Skiing*, Volume 1, Louis Dawson, 260 pages, covers great backcountry descents and routes, 2005.
- E. *Cross Country Skiing*, by Ned Gillette, The Mountaineers, 1979.
- F. *Nordic Touring and Cross Country Skiing*, Michael Brady, Dreyers Forlag, Oslo, Norway.
- G. *Cross-Country Downhill*, by Steve Barnett, Pacific Search Press, Seattle, WA, 1978.

Outdoor Leadership

- A. *AMC Guide to Outdoor Leadership: Trip Planning, Risk Management, Group Dynamics, Decision Making*, by Alex Kosseff, published by Appalachian Mountain Club Books, Boston, Massachusetts, ISBN 1-929173-21-0, 2003.
- B. *Outdoor Leadership; Technique, Common Sense and Self-Confidence* by John Graham, published by The Mountaineers, Seattle, WA, ISBN 0-89886-502-6, 2004.
- C. *The Backpacker's Field Manual (especially chapter 10)*, by Rick Curtis, Princeton University.