

## Chapter 8: Outings

### **Role and Responsibilities of Activities Committee or Coordinator**

The outings or activities coordinator is key to the success of a section. She or he is responsible for soliciting volunteer leaders and putting together an outings schedule which provides activities for various interests and ability levels. Often the first experience a member has with a section is when they attend a scheduled outing. Outings create interest in a section. They introduce new members to the GMC. They allow members to get to know each other and build friendships. They lead people to places they have never before explored. They give volunteers a chance to develop and sharpen their leadership skills. They are a source for recruiting new section leaders. They teach an appreciation for the outdoors. They showcase the beauty of Vermont. Best of all, outings are fun.

Every section generates their outings schedule in a different manner. The work may be done by an outings committee, an outings coordinator, or in an informal planning group meeting at regular intervals (e.g., quarterly). What follows are guidelines for how to organize and run section outings, gleaned from information provided by coordinators from the various sections. They are by no means exhaustive, but are meant to spark ideas and guide newly formed or revived sections.

### **Developing a Method for Generating an Outings Schedule**

#### ***Potluck***

Food draws people. Schedule a potluck or dessert get-together two weeks or a month before the schedule needs to be ready for the newsletter. For example, meet in May to work on outings for July, August, etc. Invite all trip leaders, potential trip leaders, and anyone else interested. Rotate the location — people's homes, local libraries (if they allow food), and restaurants are possibilities. By getting together, volunteers can come up with ideas for new trips and commiserate (if need be) over problems they have encountered. Leaders are more likely to schedule an outing if you and the calendar are sitting right in front of them. The potluck is a great way to generate interest and volunteers.

#### ***Meeting***

A potluck without the food.

#### ***Telephone***

The key to using the telephone for scheduling is an outings coordinator or two who are willing to make the calls. The coordinator has a list of potential trip leaders and their phone numbers. In some sections, one person makes the calls and another handles the paperwork, i.e. sending trip

forms to the leaders and organizing the information for the newsletter editor. In other sections, the coordinators get together to make the calls.

### ***Internet***

Provided most trip leaders have e-mail, this works well. Two weeks (or whatever amount of time the coordinator decides works best) before the schedule is due for the newsletter, the coordinator sends an e-mail asking for outings and dates. The coordinator then fits them into the calendar, using e-mail to work out any conflicts. E-mail is fast, easy, and virtually free. It can save the section time, paper work, and postage. The section may also develop a web-based calendar, allowing members to see what has been entered and then enter their own events.

### **Information Needed for the Outings Schedule**

Date of the trip

Destination

Type of trip (hike, bike, canoe, ski, snowshoe, visit to museum, etc.)

Distance

Difficulty rating (difficult, moderate, easy – See box below)

What to bring (lunch, money, weather gear, day pack, etc.)

Leader's name and contact information – e-mail or telephone number (when is the best time to call, do you want your name, e-mail address, or telephone number in the newspaper)

A brief trip description

Any other helpful information (family outing, for experienced hikers only, etc.)

### Rating Outings for Level of Difficulty

**GMC Turtle Outings:** Turtle outings are designed for people who like a slower pace and a shorter day. They offer an excellent way for a section to attract new members, especially families with small children or people who move slowly. To qualify as a “turtle” trip, an outing must be less than 5 miles in length, gain less than 500 ft. in elevation and take less than 4 hours.

**Easy:** available to almost anyone.

For hikes: less than 5 miles and less than 1,000 ft. of elevation gain.

For bike trips: less than 15 miles, fairly flat.

For ski trips: less than 6 miles, fairly flat.

For snowshoe trips: less than 3 miles, less than 800 ft. of elevation gain.

For canoe trips: less than 5 miles, flat water.

**Moderate:** for the average participant with some experience.

For hikes: 5 to 8 miles, 1,000 to 2,400 ft. of elevation gain.

For bike trips: 15 to 35 miles, flat or moderate hills.

For ski trips: 6 to 10 miles with less than 1,000 ft. of elevation gain.

For snowshoe trips: 3 to 6 miles with 800 to 2,000 ft. of elevation gain.

For canoe trips: 5 to 8 miles for flat water, less than 5 miles for Class I or II rapids.

**Difficult:** outings where the participant needs to be fit and should be experienced in the activity.

For hikes: more than 8 miles or more than 2,400 ft. of elevation gain.

For bike trips: more than 35 miles or with long uphill sections.

For ski trips: more than 10 miles or more than 1,000 ft. of elevation gain.

For snowshoe trips: more than 6 miles or more than 2,000 ft. of elevation gain.

For canoe trips: more than 8 miles for flat water, more than 5 miles for Class I or II rapids, or any Class III or higher.

***You may develop an outings form requiring the above information to be filled in by your trip leaders.***

Usually, the coordinator collects the completed forms and generates a schedule which is provided to the newsletter editor by an agreed upon deadline. The forms may also aid newsletter editors because all necessary information is provided. Sample forms can be found in Appendix C.

While most information is straight forward, consistent difficulty ratings are not easy to arrive at. The GMC 's *A Trip Leader's Handbook* provides guidelines for rating outings. (See box above.)

## **Advising and Supporting Trip Leaders**

More gentle advice can be found in the *Trip Leader's Handbook* published by GMC in 1997. It is a great resource especially for new leaders. The outings coordinator should keep several copies on hand to pass around during an outings planning meeting or other occasions.

The outings coordinator needs to be familiar with the trails, waterways, and bike routes. Trip leaders sometimes look for advice on where to go and what conditions to expect or they just want to talk over the proposed outing. It helps if the coordinator knows the route. Certain trails on state land are closed during spring mud season (April 15 to Memorial Day weekend) and it is advisable to avoid some areas during November hunting season. The coordinator can make the leader aware of any fees or permits required. The coordinator also needs to consider Long Trail work hikes, GMC main club activities such as annual meeting, and holidays which will affect the schedule.

Other important considerations include:

### ***Observing Group Size***

To protect natural resources, the GMC actively educates the public to follow specific group size recommendations. Section trip leaders should not only be aware of these recommendations but should practice them as well.

### ***Day Hikes (numbers include leaders)***

In fragile areas such as alpine summits (Mt. Mansfield, Camel's Hump, Mt. Abraham), shorelines (Sterling Pond, Stratton Pond), and designated wilderness areas within the Green Mountain National Forest, the recommended maximum group size is 10.

For day hikes in most areas, the recommended maximum group size is 20. Ideally, groups should be much smaller than 20, or broken into subgroups with each subgroup having a leader.

If you must travel big, hike to less-popular areas (i.e. not Mt. Mansfield, Camel's Hump, Mt. Abraham). Break into smaller parties and use different trails to get to the same destination, or hike on the same trail, but leave at staggered times. Keep subgroups from converging at the same spot at the same time.

### ***Overnight Hikes (numbers include leaders)***

On overnight trips, the group size should be limited to 10. Most Long Trail and Appalachian Trail shelters are not designed for large groups, and due to limited space, the GMC recommends 4 to 6 in a party. Groups should not take up more than half of any shelter.

### ***Leader Replacement and Trip Cancellation Policy***

Because activities are planned so far in advance, sometimes leaders are unable to lead the scheduled trip: A business trip extends into the weekend or the leader gets injured. Stuff happens. It would be nice to have a list of substitutes, the way school systems replace teachers, but that is rare. Instead, the outings coordinator or trip leader can call around looking for a replacement. Often, there are people within the section who are willing to substitute, especially someone who was planning to participate in the outing anyway. If no replacement can be found, the trip will have to be canceled. If far enough in advance, it is possible to keep the outing from publication in local media. Otherwise the leader will have to tell people the bad news when they call, with appropriate apologies. For sections that include time and meeting place in the newsletter/media announcements, someone must be at the announced location to explain changes.

### **Liability and Insurance**

GMC offers recreational activities to people of all ages. However minors (below age 18) may participate in GMC outings only when accompanied by a parent or designated guardian.

A participant in a GMC outing should understand that hikes, ski or snowshoe trips, as well as other recreational activities involve some risks. Thus, while GMC volunteers provide leadership and guidance to an outings group, every participant is responsible for his or her own safety and cannot expect the club to assume liability for injuries or damages incurred during an outing.

Hopefully, every participant has some form of health insurance.

Trip leaders are covered by the GMC insurance against liability claims filed by a participant in their GMC listed outing. They are also expected to carry their own insurance. Outing leaders should be GMC members in good standing in order to maximize their standing as “agents of GMC in leading outings”

Certain “high risk” carrying activities (such as rock climbing) are not covered by the club liability insurance. More information can be obtained through the GMC Executive Director.

In any event, an outings leader is expected to know the inherent difficulties of his or her trip and use common sense as well as prudent safety precautions, and avoid taking unexpected risks.

### **Publicizing the Schedule**

Consider the following ways to get the word out:

- Section newsletter and web site

- Long Trail News*

- Local daily newspaper (community or outdoor bulletin board)

- Free weekly newspapers (most towns have them)

- Local radio stations

- Local television stations (especially those with a local cable access)

- Use your imagination!

Coordinate all media contacts (best to use one person). If possible, develop a rapport with a contact at the various local media outlets. Once you do, your announcements are more likely to be accurately printed or get air time. Check with each outlet to find the format they require as well as the lead time.

### **Keeping Track of Expenses**

The section should reimburse the coordinator or newsletter editor for expenses related to the schedule. These can include postage, envelopes, paper, and trip leader recognition. How the reimbursement is done is decided by the section's executive committee.

### **Developing Trip Report Forms**

Some sections use trip report forms. They are given or sent to trip leaders prior to the outing. Participants sign in (name, address, telephone, member status) and the trip leader completes the form with a brief narrative of the trip. They can be used in the newsletter, for the section's history and archives, and to monitor trail conditions. Sample forms can be found in Appendix C.

### **Outings Need Trip Leaders and Volunteers**

#### ***Recruiting Trip Leaders***

Although this isn't solely the responsibility of the outings coordinator, the coordinator is in an excellent position to recruit. Let's face it — who else is going to do it? The best people to recruit are those who have good leadership qualities and are interested in the section. Watch for outing participants who have a lot of outdoor experience, who attend section sponsored events regularly, and who have developed people skills. Sometimes people who are new to your area will attend a number of section sponsored activities as a way of getting to know the area. Often they've been involved with outdoor organizations elsewhere and are experienced leaders. Be sure to get the word out that you're looking for qualified leaders; mention it at your annual meeting. For interested people who have not lead outings before, have them co-lead with an experienced leader a couple of times so they can "learn the ropes." Make it easy for anyone interested in leading to contact you.

#### ***Recognizing Volunteers***

Volunteers lead outings for a number of reasons: They enjoy being with like-minded outdoor people; they like introducing others to some of their favorite geography; they have a leadership gene in their DNA which won't be denied. In general, they don't do it for public adulation. However, it is important to acknowledge their contribution, publicly as well as privately. They like knowing you appreciate what they do for the section. Some ways of thanking them are:

Send annual thank-you letters to all leaders.

Recognize exceptional volunteers in section newsletter.

Publicly recognize volunteers at annual meeting.

Give token awards such as whistles, flashlights, caps, patches, certificates, etc.

Host an appreciation dinner or potluck.

Say thank you every chance you get.