

Winter Hiking Workshop 2021

GROUP MANAGEMENT

Why do we want YOU to know about group management? Isn't that for the leaders?

Yes, it is, but we want you as participants to know why we are asking you to do the things we ask. An informed participant is a better participant for the leaders and for the group as a whole.





Why is WINTER group management different from THREE SEASON group management?

All of the issues that pertain to three-season group management are intensified in winter because of:

Colder Temperatures

This affects:

- Keeping our bodies warm

- Trail conditions and weather

- Trip safety

How do COLDER TEMPERATURES affect winter group management?

1. Arrive on time to the trailhead –

Everything takes longer to get ready at the winter trailhead. Give yourself extra time to drive to the trailhead, to get dressed and to pack your pack. You will be wearing more clothes and bringing more gear. Hands and fingers are slower working in the cold. It's not fun to be ready and waiting for late hikers at the trailhead. Late hikers are often rushing to get ready and can forget some items and start the hike in a stressed state.

2. Bring everything on the 'Poop Sheet' –

We give you along list of items to bring in the winter and you should bring all of them. Sometimes we make gear changes at the trailhead and decide for example, not to bring snowshoes, but you should have all gear in your car and ready to be attached to your backpack.

How do COLDER TEMPERATURES affect winter group management? continued

3. Check your winter gear before the trip and actually put it on (Maureen!) –

Put your snowshoes, microspikes and crampons on your winter boots. Check all straps; familiarize yourself with how they work so it is fresh in your mind. Last year I found my microspikes elastic was split and close to breaking at the trailhead and someone had an extra pair to lend me one. I should have checked that out beforehand. Bring extra gear in your car if you have some to share, like microspikes...

4. The number of stops on a hike has to be managed more closely –

Stopping for layer changes, separation breaks, water and snack breaks, and lunch has to be modified because of cold temperatures. As soon as we stop moving, our bodies start to cool down and everyone has a different 'thermostat' in them. Some people cool more quickly than others. Every time we stop, we ask participants to take a few sips of water, take a mouthful of a snack, adjust any clothing that needs it, check in with how they are feeling in order to reduce the number of stops we take. Lunch may be a short stop; our bodies pull blood into our digestive system from our extremities after we eat leaving many with cold hands and feet.



Photo by Ken Carson

How do COLDER TEMPERATURES affect winter group management? continued

5. Separation breaks –

Especially for the women, separation breaks are not easy in the winter. We have to be aware of ‘post-holing’ off the trail into waist-deep snow and skin exposure to the cold. We should not limit our intake of water though to prevent having to separate on a hike. Please try to separate when the group does to limit our number of stops.

6. Know yourself and how to keep yourself comfortable on a winter hike –

On any AMC hike, participants are responsible for themselves and this is even more important on a winter hike. Tell the leaders if you are having an issue EARLY! Hotspots on your feet, a headache, fatigue, breathing issues can all be dealt with and the symptoms lessened especially when we know early.

You must recognize when you are hot or cold and adjust your clothing. Though we usually begin with a lot of warm layers on the body, we have a ‘layer break’ 10 or 15 minutes into the hike because we have warmed up to the point of taking layers off. Winter hiking is continually putting layers on and taking them off, and every hiker has different layering strategies that keep their body temperature comfortable.





How do TRAIL CONDITIONS and Weather affect winter group management?

1. Pace –

The pace on a winter hike is usually slower than a 3-season hike and on mountain hikes, considerably slower. Hikers are carrying more weight on their bodies and in their packs. Is the trail broken out, meaning that someone has hiked there already and packed down the snow? If not, it will take more time and effort to break the fresh snow. If we get to steep icy sections, we may have to stop and put on crampons and take the time to get everyone over the section safely.

On the other hand, snow covered trails can speed up the pace! Snow covers roots and rocks making some trails easier to hike. Sometimes we can pick up the pace by sliding down snow-covered trails!

2. Conditions on the trails can change quickly –

Even if you check on conditions the day before the hike, one day can change the trail conditions from snow to ice, from ice to mud, from mud to snow. We need to be prepared for the possible condition changes. One trail may be bare ground at the trailhead, ice on rock slabs half-way up, and unbroken snow at the summit.





How do Trail Conditions and WEATHER affect winter group management?

3. Snow –

Snow covers rocks and roots smoothing out the trails. When trails have packed snow, we generally use microspikes for extra grip. Deep or unbroken snow requires snowshoes to allow you to 'float' over the snow. Snow is easier (and prettier) to hike in than rain, but it can cover the trail markers and cairns making it difficult to see them. Snow with wind can cause whiteout conditions where it is difficult to maintain your position on the trail or even your basic orientation.

4. Wind –

The amount of wind on a hike is a big factor in keeping warm. A twenty degree day with little wind is beautiful, but add 30 mph winds and it becomes freezing. Wind breaking clothes are necessary in open areas and at the summit. Keeping all skin covered is important to avoiding frostbite. Wind can blow snow over the trail covering the tracks you just made and making it hard to find the trail.

5. Weather changes quickly -

Knowing the forecast is important but the weather in the mountains is unpredictable. We have to watch the skies and make decisions about the hike as the day unfolds.





How does winter affect group SAFETY?

1. Winter hiking is a TEAM SPORT -

What affects each hiker affects the group. Let the leaders know if you have any issues early. No one wants to hold up a trip, but the earlier we deal with them the better. Be a good team member by taking care of yourself and looking out for others. After caring for yourself, check on your fellow hikers and see how they are doing. If they seem to be struggling, ask them if you can help.

2. Safety first, hiking goals second -

Safety of the group must come before reaching our hiking goal. Sometimes we have to adjust the goal of the trip or choose an alternate trip that day.

3. Don't expect quick rescue service in winter -

Rescue services are slowed tremendously in the winter. If an emergency happens, the group is at higher risk because there is less time to get the group out. Reduction of risks on a trip is even more important in the winter.

Winter conditions also intensify the beautiful
landscapes and the adventures with friends

We hope to see you out there!





















HER FALLS

