



Radar Hill Hiking Club

Planning a Hike

Pick a Trail

Hikes should take place in natural areas on marked trails, rather than streets or public thoroughfares. Pick a route that interests you. See our web pages about [local trails](#) and [West Michigan trails](#) for ideas. Most leaders will choose local trails, but we also want some more exotic “field trips.”

Scout the Trail

Walk the route at least once in advance. Before you go, see the “Description” section (at right) to find out what you’ll need to know. After you get there, you’ll probably want to make notes or take photos. Use the **Hiking Project** app to record a track to review later (unless it’s already there). Make sure to look into fees, parking, and restrooms.

Choose a hike that requires less than 70 percent of your energy. If 5 miles is your limit, a hike shorter than 3.5 miles won’t be a distracting struggle. Usually we’ll want to avoid very steep trails.

If this is the first time you’ve seen the trail, make a second scouting trip to become more comfortable. If you’re worried about the route, you’re too distracted to enjoy the hike.

Learn More about the Trail?

You don’t have to act as a tour guide unless you want to, but your knowledge and enthusiasm can make a hike more interesting and enjoyable. You may want to learn about the flora, fauna, and historic points of interest. Make notes if you don’t think you’ll remember what you learn.

Write a Description

The hike description is what hikers will use to decide if the difficulty is appropriate for them. You’ll find a lot of local trail information on the club website. Also use the track you recorded with the Hiking Project app while scouting.

- Date and time
- Location and basic directions
- Map: link to Hiking Project or club website
- Difficulty: to decide a level, compare to known trails
- Length (mi.)
- Duration (min.): plan on a pace of 1.5-2.0 mph.
- Grade (%): average steepness of terrain (rise/run)
- Surface: pavement, gravel, sand, dirt, or mud
- Challenges: rocks, roots, ruts, hills, deep sand, etc.
- Trailhead info: restrooms, parking, fees
- Recommended gear: hiking shoes or poles?

Gather Materials

Print a [waiver](#) and a [sign-in sheet](#). If desired, print a map of the trail and your notes about flora, fauna, and history.

Foul Weather Check

If there is severe weather just before the hike, consider whether downed tree limbs, slippery terrain, or other factors require canceling the hike or changing the route.



Radar Hill Hiking Club

Leading a Hike

Materials

Bring the [waiver](#), [sign-in sheet](#), a clipboard and pens.

Sweep

In advance or on-site, recruit a "sweep" - an able, friendly walker who will remain at the back of the group and make sure no hikers get left behind.

Gather

Greet hikers and introduce yourself. Let them ask questions. Informed hikers are more relaxed. Consider giving out your cell number so they can contact you if they get separated.

Sign In

Everyone MUST sign in! Agreeing to the waiver is important legal protection and the sign-in sheet tracks how many hikers you have. The emergency phone number may be important if a hiker gets separated from the group.

Starting

A few minutes after the scheduled time, introduce yourself, give a brief rundown of the route, and answer questions. If you have a sweep, introduce them. For an extra long hike, you may want people to buddy-up. Tell hikers to let you know if they decide to drop out of the hike. If someone does leave early, be sure they know the way back.

Stick to Your Route

You planned the hike, but a well-meaning person may tempt you to a different path. Don't take a route you didn't plan. Thank the person; say you'll consider it for next time.

Safety

- Point out potentially dangerous spots.
- When turning corners, make sure everyone sees.
- At a fork, make sure hikers know which way to go.
- Periodically stop to let people who are lagging catch up.
- If someone gets injured, call 911.

Pace

Each hiker has a different speed. Set an even pace and monitor the group. You can let impatient hikers walk ahead and meet at a set spot. Slow down if people lag too far back.

Break to Talk

When you want to share information, stop (in the shade if it's hot) and wait for people to gather. This also lets hikers catch up, take a rest, or drink water.

Disruption

You don't have to put up with disrespect, but avoid confrontation. Most hikers are courteous and supportive. If a disruptive hiker can't be ignored, suggest that it might be better if they left. If they persist, it may be best to end the hike. If the individual is dangerous, call 911.

Ending

Thank the hikers and make sure everyone knows how to get home. Ask how they enjoyed the hike; get some feedback.

We want to hear about your experience as a leader. Alert us immediately if anybody is injured, gets ill, or engages in inappropriate behavior. Give us your feedback on how to make leadership easier and more enjoyable.

For record-keeping purposes, keep your sign-in sheet in a safe place for three years.