Tips for Hike Leaders

The aim of this document is to give a few practical tips for hike leaders on the non-navigation matters, specific to our club.

Out & About: the social dimension

Out & About is a hiking club for the LGBTQ+ community in which the social dimension and inclusivity is at the core. Most of our hikers come out expecting to meet friends and make friends.

City meeting point

To facilitate hikers that don't have cars, with minimal administration, the club arranges lifts at a designated meeting point in the city, e.g. National Concert Hall on Sundays. The rostered hike leaders should, where possible, be at the meeting point to coordinate the departure and decide together what to do should any issues arise, e.g. bad weather, shortage of cars.

At the meeting point, willing drivers are identified and hikers are allocated to cars. It can be sometimes useful to allocate a hiker to a car who can help the driver with navigating to hike start, when the driver is unfamiliar with where it is. A few minutes' grace is usually allowed before departure from the National Concert Hall, but we rarely depart later than 10.05 on Sundays. When allocating hikers to cars it is not necessary to split hikers into faster and slower paced groups. As we aim to finish both hiking groups around the same
time in the evening, this is not seen as an issue.

In the scenario where driving is not possible, public transport alternatives can include Luas Green Line to Brides Glen or Glencairn or Dart to Shankill, Howth or Bray. A message could be posted to Facebook with the new hike start.

First-time hikers

Although clear advice is provided on our website, it is inevitable that some first-timers will arrive under-dressed or under-equipped. Lunch, water,a rain jacket and usually hiking footwear are the absolute essentials, and when in doubt, it is best to establish, discreetly, before the hike starts, that first-time hikers have these.

Hike leaders will have to make a judgement call, taking weather, fitness etc. into account when deciding whether or not the person is suitably attired and provisioned to go on the hike. However, the club's ethos is inclusive and accommodating.

Leader's checklist for start of hike

Hike leaders have a lot to do at the start of a hike, including:
- Collect €2, which can often be delegated to a suitable hiker.
- Look out for lost or late hikers.
- Make decisions about the route. A faster-/slower- paced split for the whole hike will make sense on some occasions. On other occasions the group may stick together for part or all the hike and this facilitates more socialising. Should there be a split, hike leaders need to try and get two groups back to cars around the same time. Hike leaders may consult with other hike leaders there.
- Record name(s) of first-time hiker(s) (this can otherwise be done during a break) for including in the hike report. Tell the hiker they can attend 3 hikes and then decide if they wish to join the club. Give them the club card with details of how to sign up to the email newsletter. New hikers are recommended to go on the slower-paced group.
- Address the group:
    - make any necessary announcements, or facilitate announcements from others

- ○ introduce self and other rostered hike leader to the group
- ○ introduce first-time hikers to others attending
- ○ you may wish to advise about route planned
- Pick an initial backmarker.
- Count hikers
- Assemble hikers for a group photo (the photos, when posted to the closed Facebook group or attached to hike reports, are a very useful record of attendance)

Hike breaks

Breaks are one of the most important parts of the hike – for rest, eating and socialising. Short pauses will allow hikers to catch up and draw breath.

For lunch and other long breaks, location is key. Choice should take into account shelter from wind, dry ground (if possible) and sufficient space for the group. On warmer days an extended lunch break may be appreciated by hikers. On colder winter days, leaders should be aware that some hikers might get very cold on an extended break.

Backmarkers

The hike leader should nominate a backmarker. This role can be passed to different people throughout the hike. The back marker will usually be the first to notice if a hiker is struggling to keep up and bring it to the attention of the hike leader who may decide to moderate the pace of the group. Sometimes the hike leader may ask someone else to navigate a section and backmark.

Regular contact (which may be eye contact or hand signals) between leader and backmarker is essential to ensure all hikers are comfortable with the pace. The leader should always be aware of the backmarker and they must not be out of sight for more than short periods, and never in poor visibility. Hike leaders must be mindful at junctions that those behind should take the correct turn.

The backmarker needs to be aware of hikers who may become separated by stopping for toilet breaks, taking photos, etc.

Furthermore, hike leaders should take into account that on long ascents some hikers, even fitter hikers, will need to reduce their pace.

Hike reports

The leader(s) should email a report to leaders@gay-hiking.org after the hike
The report should be concise, but should include:
- number of hikers, and of names of first-time hikers (if any)
- brief description of the route, and estimate of length
- mention of weather conditions and any other notable facts that occurred on the day.

Tracked route maps are welcome, but of course not required.

First Aid

All hike leaders have first aid training and are responsible for bringing a first aid kit to all hikes they are leading and ideally all hikes.

Supporting Fellow Hike Leaders

The club has always fostered a culture of respect amongst fellow members. It is paramount that we work together to give each other encouragement and support. In the event of disagreement in relation to leading it should be referred to the Chair or Committee for consideration and any such issues should never be raised publicly on a hike.

Thank you for volunteering as a hike leader. Without this support the extensive calendar of events would not be possible.