

# Overnight Hiking Trip Proposal

*3/15/16 Final*

**Objective:** Develop more reasonable requirements for overnight hiking participants that help ensure their safety and those of other PCHC members.

**Premise:** PCHC is a hiking club that wants to schedule at least 1-2 overnight trips per year to access special places that are not within easy driving distance of Pebble Creek with a same day return. There have been seven overnight trips in the last 3 ½ years and it's an appropriate time to re-evaluate our requirements to ensure they are doing what was intended.

## **Current Requirements:**

1. Be a PCHC member in good standing. Members in good standing are paid up on their dues, have signed the waiver and agree to adhere to PCHC rules.
2. Complete at least two hikes at the level you intend to hike on the overnight trip within six weeks of leaving.

## **Issues:**

1. Some of the key ingredients to being able to hike safely are proper physical conditioning, commitment to follow PCHC 'rules of the road', and the ability to effectively communicate with other team members.
2. Hikers that are infrequent or occasional hikers may not be suitably fit for overnight trips with only two hikes prior to the overnight. There is a tendency on overnight trips to take advantage of the opportunity to hike more miles than might be done around Phoenix, thus increasing the risk. For example, C hikers on the Moab trip averaged 8-10 miles per day vs the normal 7 miles closer to home. It is an option to reduce hike length but most avid hikers want to use their time as fully as possible when surrounded by special country and there is an upper limit to how many days participants are willing to be away from home. Also, infrequent hikers may struggle more when hiking 2-3 days in a row, which is commonly done on overnight trips.
3. The level of physical condition of hikers should be reflective of the rigor of the terrain and climate: temperatures, altitude, trail conditions, signage. We frequently find ourselves hiking at higher elevations than is available around Phoenix, which demands better conditioning as well.
4. It is difficult for hike leaders to assess how hikers will respond in the case of an incident or medical emergency. There have been several instances within PCHC that the lack of effective communication resulted in undesirable incidents. We used to let guests come on our overnight trips but eliminated that when poor communication led to undesirable incidents during the Zion and Palm Springs trips. Also, cumulative fatigue from hiking multiple days further stresses achieving adequate communication. Effective communication is a challenge even with people that are well known so why increase the risk with people you don't know?

5. Of the 39 hikers on the most recent overnight trip, 10 of them had done 3 hikes or less this season despite being aware of the trip for the entire hiking season from late September 2015 until late February 2016. Six of the 10 had done the bare minimum of only two hikes. Eight people on this trip stated informally that they had no intention of hiking routinely with PCHC but were very interested in future overnight trips. Their motivation appears to be to have a great trip fully planned for them and be able to share the camaraderie of others without having to do any work themselves.
6. The more participants you have, the more difficult it is to arrange and keep people on the same page with what you are trying to accomplish. Previous trips limited the hiking number to 30 although we have never left anyone behind that really wanted to go on an overnight trip.

#### **Options:**

1. Increase the number of hikes required for qualification to attend to attract more frequent hikers within PCHC.
2. For new members, communicate overnight plans early enough so they can get their hikes in and develop relationships with hike leaders.
3. Reduce the rigor of overnight hikes so they are more easily accomplished.
4. Increase the number of days hiking on overnight hikes to reduce fatigue.
5. Reduce the number of hikes required if participants can perform a more rigorous hike than they intend to do during the overnight. For example, a C hiker who can successfully climb Caterpillar Hill might use that as qualification for 2 pre hikes instead of one. However, this still does not solve the communication issue of hiking with a relative unknown.
6. Create a special travel club within the hiking club with higher dues that will discourage casual participation. The funds collected can be used to offset expenses for needed equipment like better walkie-talkies or a social gathering during the trip to promote teamwork.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Increase the requirement for number of hikes in both the four weeks prior to departure and the several months of hiking season prior to the trip. **For the fall trip, require completion of at least 3 hikes in the immediate four weeks prior to departure and a total of 10 hikes completed between departure and the beginning of the previous hiking season. For the spring trip, require completion of at least 3 hikes in the four weeks immediately prior to departure and 10 hikes total (includes the 3) within the present hiking season.** All hikes should be at the intended levels the participant proposes to hike at during the overnight.
2. Announce requirements to PCHC to promote something new members can aspire to as a special perk.
3. At their discretion, the Board can waive these requirements but consistency is considered to be very important to ensure proper participant conditioning.