



# The Halton Outdoor Club

## 1. Why can't the ski bus start its route in Hamilton?

We are very happy that our club attracts members from beyond Halton region. Every year the club manager sources the best price for a reputable bus company to take the skiers to various destinations in central Ontario from our Burlington and Oakville pick up locations. Given that the bus driver has to be the first to arrive and the last to go home, this makes for a very long day for the driver.

All bus companies have regulations about the length of time a driver can work on a given day. A pick up/drop off in Hamilton would add approximately 2 hours to the work day and would result in increased bus costs for all members. Trips that require more than 10-12 hours of a driver's time are almost double in price.

Since there are fewer skiers from the Hamilton area, this option would not be equitable at this time. However, as our membership from other areas increases (Hamilton, St. Catharines, Peel region), to facilitate communication among the members, HOC is looking into how the club can make information searchable so members can find and contact other members in their location. Also, members can use the forums on the website to contact other members. When logged in, go to the Members tab, then click on the Forums page, and select the forum you would like to use.

## 2. Why aren't there more mid-week trips?

To respond to changing demographics, including modern workforce schedules and membership age ranges, the club has begun to offer more weekday events (daytime and evening). In the 2018 season, we had regular hiking excursions on Wednesday and Friday evenings, as well as a weekly cycle on Friday nights. In addition, there were frequent cycle day trips offered during the summer, and at least one hiking trip. The 2018-19 ski schedule will also explore mid-week trips. We have had mid-week ski trips in the past but unfortunately attendance was low and we could not sustain the practice. Hopefully the current membership will take advantage of mid-week trips.

We will monitor attendance at the mid-week events to assess their popularity.

## 3. Why doesn't the club canoe or paddle board or downhill ski?

The club would love to consider other sports. In order to determine the popularity of additional sports we would need a member to volunteer to lead a program. If you are interested in setting up a new sports program please contact the club general manager: [info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca](mailto:info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca). Historically the club was set up to fill a gap in cross country skiing, as there already are downhill ski clubs in Burlington. The club has had canoeing in the past however currently there isn't anyone who has come forward to lead a program.

#### **4. Is carpooling available?**

The club cannot offer carpooling or set up carpooling services. HOC is looking into how the club can make information searchable to facilitate communication among the members.

Also, members can use the forums on the website to contact other members. When logged in, go to the Members tab, then click on the Forums page, and select the forum you would like to use.

#### **5. Why can't there be more sightseeing activities in the extended trips?**

HOC is a sports-based activity club with a primary mandate to promote year-round outdoor activities which include cycling, hiking, kayaking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing. All extended trips must meet club policy with respect to extent of sport activities offered. The purpose of extended trips is to offer members additional locations in which to practise Club sports. That being said though, leaders of extended trips do offer participants the opportunity to sight see and visit the destination involved. HOC's insurance policy provides coverage for "...all sports activities- hiking, cycling, snowshoeing, Nordic skiing and paddling. That said, each trip leader can provide ancillary activities that are limited only by the imagination of the trip leader and the budget of the participating members. Of course, the health and safety of the participants is a high priority.

HOC is not a travel club so the focus of any extended trip will always be on the particular sport(s).

#### **6. Why are the trail rides (ski days) so long? Why are the trail rides (ski days) so short?**

HOC has tried many variations of length of day trips. The current model seems to match the desire of the majority of the participants for each sport. On day trips requiring a bus driver, it is possible that the length of the day will be influenced by the number of hours a driver is permitted to work. Each trip is carefully planned by the sport director who considers several factors including travel distance from Halton, difficulty of planned excursion, length of a particular excursion (e.g. natural breaking points, suitable rest stops), and general knowledge of the members most likely to participate.

If you have a suggestion for a particular longer or shorter day trip, please contact the relevant sport director or the club's general manager to discuss ([info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca](mailto:info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca)).

#### **7. Can I bring a friend? Can I bring my son/daughter along?**

Absolutely! We always welcome people who are interested in our club activities. Any individual can attend a maximum of 2 day trips without committing to a membership. If

costs are involved (e.g. ski bus) guests must pay. Registration is required through your membership portal on Wild Apricot.

Membership is limited to adults age 18+. However, family members who are 17 and under are welcome to register for club activities as long as they are accompanied by a member.

### **8. We always seem to go to the same places. Can you add more variety in the destinations?**

HOC is always willing to consider different destinations. As a volunteer organization we rely on the willingness of our members to suggest new routes or destinations. Often "scouting" is involved - so that we can determine if a destination or excursion is suitable for our members (e.g. driving distance, availability of parking, level of difficulty, amenities, etc.). In winter, variety of locations is limited by weather as well as road and trail conditions. Some resorts have better grooming equipment than others and so because of poor weather, we frequently have to go where the conditions are safe.

If you have any suggestions for destinations or activities, please contact the relevant sport director or the club's general manager ([info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca](mailto:info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca)). HOC is always looking for fresh ideas and for people to step forward to lead trips.

### **9. Why does the quality of the busses seem poor?**

Members' health and safety is HOC's top priority. The club contracts only with reputable service providers. HOC also obtains quotes from various bus companies before committing in order to maximize value for money. Depending on destination and type of activity, HOC might hire "yellow buses" which are converted school buses. School buses do not offer the same level of comfort as what you can expect on a ski bus, but they are considerably cheaper (and safe!).

### **10. What do my membership fees cover?**

HOC is a registered not-for-profit organization with a 45 year corporate history, working within a highly regulated industry. One of the true "value-ads" of the club is its formal structure, as well as commitment by a large number of volunteers who keep the club running.

The fees are set so that they cover the administration of the organization. Key costs include insurance, technology (e.g. online membership and event management software), PayPal service charges, general manager stipend, costs of information fairs and other activities designed to increase membership, and general office expenses such as telephone, paper, and photocopying. Membership fees do not go towards sports activities. The financial statements for the year ended Aug 31/17 will be posted online.

Also, the club has an insurance policy specifically for the Board of Directors, any Executive officer, Committee member and all leaders. This policy insures these people beyond the limits of the policies for general members. You will also find that anyone who has previously led a trip for HOC is always willing to share his/her experiences and offer a guiding hand. We sincerely hope that you will consider running a trip soon!

### **11. What extended trips has the club done in the past?**

HOC has been doing extended trips for many years, in all of our sports. We have some favourites that members don't seem to tire of (skiing at Silverstar) and each year we seem to have a member willing to take on a new adventure (hiking in Patagonia). We also do repeats from time to time, such as Belize kayaking. The club's general manager has records of trips taken in the past 10 years, so if you are thinking about a particular destination please reach out to HOC's general manager at [info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca](mailto:info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca).

### **12. Why do some of the extended trips seem to be full before they are even posted?**

Yes - some trips are quite popular and sell out quickly. That is one of the greatest things about our website registration system. Only trip leaders are added in advance - it is "equal opportunity" for all other members. No one else can sign up for anything until the system is opened up. Here's how it works: The club provides about 2 weeks' notice for upcoming extended trips. This might be in the newsletter, an Updater, or a special email blast, depending on timing. You will know, in advance, the date registration is set to open. Currently the software limits us to midnight on that date. For example if registration is set to open on January 1<sup>st</sup> you need to stay up late the night before (which is December 31<sup>st</sup> in this example) if you want to be the first to register just after midnight in the wee wee hours of January 1. Have your credit card with you to pay the \$25 registration fee. If you are only registering for yourself and are willing to share a room, don't select "single accommodation" as those have limited availability. Let us know you are "willing to share".

### **13. Why do I have to pay \$25 to register for a club extended trip?**

Even if an extended trip is managed through a travel agent, HOC also incurs some expenses on each trip. For example, our online payment processor (PayPal) charges a fee for each transaction, including refunds. The \$25 fee is non-refundable and covers these kinds of administration costs. Since not all members go on extended trips, it is not equitable to ask the general membership to pay for trip-specific costs.

### **14. Why does the club use a travel agent?**

According to the *Travel Industry Act 2002*, HOC, as "a not-for-profit corporation without share capital, operating as a club that provides overland travel services to members of the club" must use a registered travel agent for travel services to destinations located more than 2,000 kilometres from the departure point.

### **15. Why aren't there any social events associated with day trips?**

As a sport club, we do focus more attention on the sporting aspects of any trip. Post trip socials at local cafes and restaurants are always an option. Given the varying nature of each trip, it is difficult to plan social events as part of the sporting calendar. We do encourage members to volunteer to organize their own post-event function, respecting that many of the participants will be tired after a full day out (including the leader!) and may just prefer to head home.

As part of the survey response, HOC will be looking into the possibility of offering members social activities that are separate from the sport events. Some of the sports-hiking and paddling and often cycling do offer have optional social activity at the end of the day. Don't hesitate to propose an outing!

### **16. Why does it take so long to take a trip from concept to approval?**

Sometimes it does seem to take a long time to get a trip "off the ground". If it is a new trip, some research is required to determine logistics, pricing, schedules, etc. Once that research is complete, a proposal is required to be submitted to the board. All extended trips (more than a weekend) require board approval. The board only meets 11 times a year. Once board approval is received, then all the details must be confirmed. Next, members need to be notified in advance of the pending trip. Not all trips sell out in a few days, so we need to leave sufficient time for members to consider whether or not they want to participate. At all times we need to balance HOC's optimal travel dates with availability of hotels, airlines/transportation providers, and tour providers. With the large groups we have (15-40 people) this takes more time to organize than a family vacation. In general, we have to be planning 10-16 months in advance.

### **17. Why can't I just show up at the bus stop if I decide at the last minute to go skiing?**

Your ski program team (ski director, day trip leader, and general manager) put a lot of effort into monitoring weather, assessing conditions, discussing trail conditions with the various ski operators and making changes as necessary, communicating with the bus operators, and of course, doing a snow dance. A final decision has to be communicated to the bus company by Friday morning at 9 am if a trip is to be made or not. They in turn have to confirm with the driver with respect to availability and route. So, it is very important that members let us know by Thursday evening if they are going. Please trust your ski program team and let them make the call with respect to conditions. What you see out your front door can be very different from what those living in the ski regions see. If people were allowed to just show up, the trip leader would have to collect bus fees on the bus and more important, we might have had to cancel a trip, thinking that there were too few people to warrant the hiring of a bus.

### **18. I would like to lead trips my but I don't feel confident - what if something goes wrong?**

The HOC welcomes new leaders and we certainly appreciate your concerns. All who have led HOC day or extended trips were once a first-time leader and remember that nervous feeling.

You will never feel alone as a trip leader. You have the wealth of knowledge from many people backing you up, and the sport director or general manager is always a phone call or email away.

HOC has developed “Guidelines for Major Trips” as well as best practices related to each sport. These resources are available on our website. Go to “Members” and click on “Leading Trips”. You will find the “Trip Leaders Handbook” and information about leading major trips and day trips.

In addition, the club is creating a new leadership development program which will pair newer leaders with more experienced leaders, and offer more members an opportunity to develop confidence as an assistant leader before making a commitment to lead a day or extended trip.

### **19. I have an idea of a trip and would like to volunteer to lead a trip, who do I contact to begin the process?**

Fantastic! To start, contact the relevant Sports Director to share your ideas. The Sports Director will offer feedback and some general guidance on what to think about as you develop your proposal. Make sure to keep the club’s general manager “in the loop” as well. Also, go to the Members section of the website. Here, you will find Guidelines for leading day trips and major trips as well as the Trip Leader’s Handbook and other useful information.

### **20. What is the process to lead a trip?**

The process varies from trip to trip, depending on the sport and the destination. What is common to all trips:

- The leader is responsible for designing and costing the trip
- All trips longer than a weekend need to be approved by the Board
- All trips going further than 2,000 kms from Burlington must be organized through a registered travel agent.

Check out the leadership materials in the “Member” section of the website. Here you will find some helpful information on leading trips, as well as a template you can use for budgeting. If you still have questions, you can contact the Sport Director or the club’s general manager – [info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca](mailto:info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca)

### **21. Are trip leaders paid?**

No – all trip leaders volunteer their time and effort into making sure each trip is a successful and memorable event for all participants. This includes a lot of pre-trip research and negotiation with tour providers, hotels, and transportation companies. Usually, the cost of the trip leader's transportation, accommodations, and other costs are absorbed into the overall cost of the trip.

## **22. What skills or certifications do I need to leader?**

Mostly – you need to be enthusiastic about traveling with a group doing a sporting activity that you love! Good skills to have would include an ability to plan and organize a trip with adults, communication skills, and moreover, a willingness to lead or co-lead a group.

Depending on the sport and the destination, specific accreditation might be required (e.g. for hiking or kayaking) – contact the Sport director to confirm, or contact the general manager – [info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca](mailto:info@haltonoutdoorclub.ca)

## **23. I haven't lead a trip before, if there someone who could help me in coordination and co-lead with me?**

Absolutely! Contact the Sport Director who will find you a mentor to assist in the trip from idea to execution. Not all trips require a co-leader. If this is your preferred style, then approach other members who are leading a trip you are planning on going on, and ask if there is a way for you to assist. The Club Manager and the Sports Director are willing always to assist and make suggestions.

## **24. What are the risks and liabilities of leading a trip?**

The safety and security of the members is the overriding focus on all HOC trips. The club will only go to destinations, and participate in activities, that it feels offers adequate safety and security for its members.

The risks and liabilities are pretty much the same as for all travel. The club strongly encourages the members to have travel medical insurance when travelling out of province. Trip cancellation insurance is also recommended.

The club has a comprehensive insurance policy that offers additional protection to members and it has a second policy that has additional coverage for all Executive and leaders.

## **25. Does the club support leadership development? How does this work?**

Yes. The club welcomes people to take initiative and volunteer to lead trips that are consistent with the clubs mandate. In 2018-19 the club will be implementing a leadership development program. This will be a mentorship type of program, with some

funding available for specific initiatives. Watch your email for leadership development activities coming this fiscal year.

**26. Are there leadership orientation workshops that I would be able to participate in if I'm interesting in leading a trip?**

HOC will be setting up some leadership orientation workshops over the winter/spring. Details will be posted in the newsletter and/or via an Updater. Be sure to read the communications from the club.

**27. Is there a planning template tool that would help me draft a trip idea?**

Yes, there is a budget template available online in the "Members" section of the website. Also, the Guidelines for leading major trips includes a "Major Trip Proposal Template" to guide you through the trip development process and help you address all the relevant information necessary to get your trip approved.