

These are common questions about hiking, bicycling, paddling, and cross-country skiing with the New Haven Hiking Club.

Website: <https://www.newhavenhikingclub.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/NHHChike/>

Email: nhhchiker@gmail.com

Do I need to be a New Haven Hiking Club (NHHC) member to participate?

The NHHC welcomes non-members to participate in our events. The main consideration for participation is that the person is prepared physically and has the correct equipment to safely complete the event. We hope you will like the group so much that you will join and support our organization.

Membership is a mere \$15 per year per member. Membership runs from Nov. 1 of one year to Oct. 31 of the following year. You can join by filling out the form on our website and mailing \$15 (check or cash) to NHHC, 61 Eramo Terrace, Hamden, Conn. 06518

How do I find out about club events?

Events are NOT posted to the club website. Instead, members receive emails about club activities as leaders submit them, which is typically between two to seven days before an event. The weekday events tend to come as individual emails. The weekend events usually are grouped in one email. The club does not have an advance schedule, such as a monthly or quarterly schedule.

Is there a charge for the event?

There is never a charge for the event itself. Some places may charge a parking fee. If an event involves carpooling to a distant location, passengers should work out an arrangement with the driver to cover the cost of gas and tolls.

Will the event take place?

Events can generally be expected to take place and would usually only be canceled for weather-related reasons. The club will send out an email with cancellation information. The best approach is to contact the leader directly if unsure about the status of an event.

Do I need to RSVP?

You only need to RSVP if the events specifically requests that you do so. Such an RSVP would typically be accompanied by the need to find the meeting time and/or place. An RSVP can be helpful because then the leader knows you are interested and can contact you if there are any changes (usually weather-related ones).

I am interested in carpooling. Do you know if someone is coming from my area?

Sometimes members will contact the leader and say they want to be put in contact with someone from their area who is carpooling. Since most people just show up for an event, the leader is unlikely to know in advance who plans to attend.

I don't have a car. Can someone give me a ride to the event?

You can contact the leader to see if they are available to give a ride. The general expectation is that people need to find their own transportation to an event.

Can I bring my dog on a hike?

NHHC policy is that leader permission is required to bring dogs on hikes. This information is usually included in the listing, and if it is not, contact the leader to clarify. Dog should stay on leashes on most trails. Some hiking areas do not permit dogs, including trails on water company land, Nature Conservancy properties and Audubon centers.

Can I bring my child on a hike, bicycle ride, or paddle trip?

The focus of the NHHC is adults. Parents should seek advance permission from the leader about bringing children, and if the leader is okay with children, the parents must accompany their children for the duration of the event. In general, our bicycle rides are not suitable for children.

For a hike, what do I need to wear and bring?

At a minimum, you should wear hiking boots for any woods hike. Boots protect your feet and ankles from Connecticut's uneven and sometimes slippery terrain. Wear wool socks, which keep you warm, even if they get wet. You are asking for trouble, particularly if your feet get wet.

Dress in layers appropriate to the weather. For winter hikes, avoid wearing cotton, which gets wet and stays wet. Synthetics and wool are the better choice for winter hikes. If the weather calls for rain, bring a rain jacket of some sort. Even an inexpensive poncho is fine.

You should ALWAYS bring water and something to eat. Bring one 20-ounce water bottle for hikes up to 4 miles and two 20-ounce water bottles for hikes between 4 and 8 miles. On a hike up to 4 miles, a piece of fruit and a granola bar may be all you need. For hikes in excess of four miles, bring a sandwich or other equivalent lunch, in addition to the fruit and granola bar. Carry your food and water in a pack of your choice.

Hiking poles are recommended as a safety feature. They can stop you from falling if you trip. They give extra stability, particularly on climbs and descents. They are useful for balance when crossing a stream on rocks.

If the hike is in an area where hunting is permitted, wear blaze orange. Prime hunting season occurs from late October to the end of December. It does not take place in nature preserves and land trust properties, with the exception of limited bow hunting for deer. Hunting is not permitted on Sundays in Connecticut. The state allows hunting in state forests, but not most state parks.

Gaiters are waterproof clothing accessories that keep snow and water out of your boots and keep the lower parts of your pants dry. Traction devices for icy trails can provide peace of mind. These creepers and crampons come in various forms, providing different levels of traction for different types of conditions.

If there is more than 12 inches of snow on the ground, snowshoes provide stability for your feet to keep you from slipping and sliding. Snowshoes typically have crampons built into them, so they help with icy snow, as well as powdery snow.

How many people will be on the hike? Who does these hikes?

Any number of people can attend a hike. On average, about 8 to 12 people will attend a hike. The shorter the hike and the slower the pace, the more people attend. The earlier the start time, the fewer people attend. Weather is a huge factor. Pleasant weather brings out more people. Colder and unsettled weather keeps many people home.

The age range on most events seems to be people in their 50s to 70s. No matter what your age, you are sure to find people with common interests.

What types of hikes do you offer?

The club has a Monday group that hikes year-round, hiking about 5-6 miles and finishing around noon. There is a hike offered on most Wednesdays throughout the year, weather dependent, hiking about 5-6 miles. There is also a hike once a month on Fridays, usually 3 to 4 miles in length.

Weekend hikes are a regular feature of the schedule in the colder months, usually October to March, and vary in length from five to nine miles. There are some weekend hikes from spring to fall.

How do I know which hike is appropriate for me?

Think through all these factors when selecting a hike: distance, pace, and terrain. If you are new to the group, it is best to choose something easier than you think you can comfortably do. If you choose something that is more than you can handle, you will frustrate both yourself and the group, as you will always be hurrying to keep up.

Having a participant who is not physically prepared for event makes it fun for no one and potentially hazardous for everyone. The tired person feels rushed and others may feel they are lagging. A tired person is more likely to make mistakes and possibly get hurt.

If you are in reasonable physical shape and engage in some sort of physical activity on a regular basis, then hikes up to 5 miles over varied terrain should not present a problem. Hikes in excess of 6 miles require being in good physical shape. Do not attempt a hike of more than 8 miles if you cannot comfortably hike at least 6 miles.

What time will the event end?

How long an event takes depends on the following factors: distance, terrain, advertised pace, ability of those who attend, and number of participants. A large group (15 or more hikers) tends to move much slower than a group of less than 10 people. If you have a hiker who took on more than they can handle, this, too, can slow the pace. Longer hikes (8 miles or more) tend to take longer in the second half as people tire and slow down.

I need to be back by a certain time. Can I cut it short?

Hikes are designed for exercise, enjoyment, and relaxation. If someone has a certain time they need to be back, they tend to want to hurry the group, taking away from everyone's enjoyment. If you have a certain time you need to be somewhere and the hike may make you late for that appointment, quite frankly, it is best not to come.

The related question from hikers is this, "Can I cut it short?" Sometimes hikes can be shortened and other times there is no bailout point. As a leader, it would be irresponsible to send someone away from the group in the woods without a map or a clear direction as to where they are going. It is a very real possibility that someone leaving early will get turned around and actually end up arriving back later than the group. If you want to hike shorter than the advertised hike, it is best to choose another hike.

What do you mean by these terms: loop hike, through hike, and car spot?

A loop hike means that the hike will begin and end at the same place. A through hike means that the hike will take place in one direction along a particular trail. The group will leave cars at the beginning and end of the hike. This type of hike involves a "car spot" which means that the beginning portion of the hike will involve moving people and cars to one end of the hike, while leaving some cars at the other end of the hike.

How can I get a map of the area where we are hiking?

If a map is available online, that link may be included in the write-up. Participants are encouraged to print their own map. This way they have their own reference copy for where the group is going. Hiking maps can be found in any number of sources. Trailheads typically do not have a supply of maps. Those that do promise them will frequently be out of the maps. Some hiking maps are available only from the local land trusts that publish them.

The state of Connecticut publishes excellent maps for many state parks and forests at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Connecticut-State-Parks-and-Forests>

The Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA) maintains the 825 miles of Blue-Blazed Trails in Connecticut. Trail information and maps are available in the Connecticut Walk Book, which may be purchased at bookstores and outdoors shops. The CFPA has an interactive map providing an overview of the trails, trail updates, and parking information with a link to directions at <https://www.ctwoodlands.org/blue-blazed-hiking-trails/blue-blazed-hiking-trails-interactive-map>

The South Central Regional Council of Governments (SCROG) has an extensive collection of maps for trails in the greater New Haven region, which were updated in 2016: <http://scrcog.org/regional-planning/regional-trails/>

The Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) of Hartford offers public access to the West Hartford Reservoirs and Reservoir #6: <https://themdc.org/recreation-areas/reservoirs>

An overview map of hiking areas in portions of the Litchfield Hills with links to local land trusts is available from the Northwest Hills Council of Governments at

<http://hvatoday.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=511b845dfd441d85c94ca0a7a0abb6>

The Lower Connecticut River and Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange is a listing of land trusts in the southeastern Connecticut: <http://www.lcrclandtrustexchange.org/>

The best resource for hikes in the tri-state New York area, including Hudson Valley is the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, which provides hiking information on its website, which also sells maps and books at <https://www.nynjtc.org/hike-finder-map>

Cross Country Skiing Information

During the winter, the club offers cross-country skiing trips, which may take place in the woods, or at a facility that specializes in the sport. Winding Trails in Farmington is a popular destination for cross country skiing, and charges a fee for use of its trails.

Bicycle Information

The club has an active bicycling group that rides on Wednesdays in the warmer months, typically April to October. Rides are usually about 25 to 30 miles over moderate terrain and are led at a 10 to 11 mph average pace. The leader will provide route sheets and/or a map for cyclists to follow. These rides often attract 10 to 20 people, who cluster by the pace they are riding. For safety reasons, rides are canceled when it rains.

The group stops for lunch and sometimes ice cream or coffee. Cyclists are expected to pack a lunch, as the lunch stop is often in a park where there are no places to buy food and water. Some rides may have a particular restaurant as the destination during the ride, giving riders the option to buy a lunch or bring their own.

Cyclists need to provide their own bicycle and wear a bicycle helmet that is approved by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Cyclists should bring supplies to deal with a flat, including a spare tube, a patch kit, tire levers, and a working pump. For their own comfort, some cyclists wear bicycling clothing, and others are content to wear regular clothing appropriate to the weather.

Class 1 electric bicycles are permitted on club rides; however, Connecticut does not permit them on bicycle trails. Details: <https://evelo.com/blogs/ebike-laws/connecticut>

Route sheets are available on the website Connecticut Bicycle Routes: <http://www.ctbikeroutes.org/>

The state bicycle map (online only) with links to regional bicycle plans: <http://www.ctbikemap.org/plans-guides.html>

East Coast Greenway: <https://www.greenway.org/index.shtml>

Rail trail information is available from the following organizations:

Farmington Valley Trail Council: <http://fchtrail.org/pages/default.asp>

The Connecticut Rail Trail explorer provides information on the four state-owned rail trails: <http://www.depdata.ct.gov/maps/ctrailtrail/index.html>

Rails to Trails, the national rail trail advocacy organization: <https://www.railstotrails.org/index.html>

Paddling Information

The club has an active group that paddles on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the warmer months, typically May to October. There are also occasional weekend paddling trips. Paddling trips are usually about 8 to 10 miles and take 4 to 5 hours. Some trips may be about 6 miles. Trips take place along tidal rivers, such as the Connecticut River, Salmon River and Mystic River. The club also enjoys paddling the Long Island Sound, such as the Thimble Islands and along the coast in Groton. The weekday trips get 10 to 20 paddlers, while the weekend trips may get 5 to 10 people.

The group stops for lunch, which frequently is an opportunity to swim.

Paddlers are expected to supply their own equipment, including a boat (canoe or kayak), paddle, life jacket, pump, paddle float, sponge, whistle, and boat shoes or sandals. Spray skirts for kayaks are recommended in case conditions become unexpectedly rough, due to boat wakes and/or high winds. Bring an extra layer that will keep you warm and dry.

All paddlers should bring at least two water bottles because you will get thirsty paddling, particularly if there is little shade, which is frequently the case when on the water. Staying hydrated is important to safe paddling, especially on hot summer days. Paddlers should bring a snack and lunch.

For comfort, a wide brimmed hat, gloves, sunscreen, and sunglasses are recommended.

The state of Connecticut has extensive information on its Boating and Paddling website:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Boating/Boating-and-Paddling>

The state publishes an annual Connecticut Boater's Guide available here:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Boating/Connecticut-Boaters-Guide>

This is a list of state-owned boat launches: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Boating/Boat-Launches--Access--Transient-Slips>

The many town-owned launches are not listed on this page, nor are the boat launches at the state Wildlife Management Areas.

The Connecticut Coastal Access Guide has information on recreational opportunities along the coast, including all boat launches in these areas:

<http://www.depdata.ct.gov/maps/coastalaccess/index.html>

Does the club have any meetings?

The club's annual meeting takes place on the first Saturday in November. In recent years, this meeting takes place at the Cheshire Grange with a non-alcoholic social hour at 12 p.m., a dinner at 1 p.m., and a meeting at 2 p.m. with a presentation on an outdoors topic at 2:30 p.m. The dinner cost is modest, about \$26. There is no charge for those who attend just the meeting and presentation.

The club sometimes has potluck dinners, which may take place at a member's house or a local park. As the name implies, people bring food and beverages to share. These have become less common in recent years.