

Guidelines for COMA Walk Leaders

Leader's responsibilities: The only responsibility for a leader of a COMA mushroom walk is to lead a safe walk. A walk leader need not be an expert mushroom identifier but must be familiar with the park and its trails. The walk leader should plan the walk itinerary in detail and walk through it ahead of time.

Walk Schedule: COMA publishes a list of walks and walk leaders in the spring issue of its newsletter, *Spores Illustrated*, for each mushroom season (April through October).

Time of Walk: Walks are scheduled to begin at 9:30 am, unless announced otherwise. The walk leader should arrive around 9:15 am. We usually wait a few minutes after 9:30 before we start the walk.

Length of Walk: COMA walks are usually 90 - 120 minutes in duration. Afterwards, some participants usually decide to stay and have lunch together and discuss the mushrooms.

Replacement: If the designated walk leader cannot attend the walk, he/she is responsible for finding a replacement person to lead the walk, since there is no guarantee all participants will hear about a cancellation.

Before the walk starts: The walk leader should welcome everyone, identify him/herself as the leader of the COMA walk, and give a brief description of the itinerary, points of safety, and points of interest. The leader should pass around the official COMA sign-up sheet, making sure that everyone signs it. The walk leader should be certain to explain the insurance policy requirement that all participants be members, noting that by signing up for the walk, they become provisional members, pending receipt of the membership application and yearly dues within one week. Visitors must be given a membership form to take home. After the walk, the leader should be sure to send (or give) the completed sign-up sheet to the president of COMA.

Safety: Leaders should inform participants about the hazards they might encounter. The most common ones are deer ticks, mosquitoes, poison ivy and getting lost. People should cover and spray themselves to avoid insect bites. *All participants are responsible for their own safety.*

Maps: Some parks have trail maps available. At the start of the walk, the leader should point out any posted or printed trail map. The map can then be used to inform everyone of the selected route.

Getting Lost: It is impossible for the walk leader to monitor everyone on a mushroom walk. Leaders should inform walkers that it is each person's responsibility to stay with the leader to avoid getting lost. The walk leader is not responsible for keeping track of all participants since some leave early and others stay in the woods late.

Children: Children are welcome on walks, but they must be supervised by a parent or guardian. All rules that apply to adults also apply to children.

Weather: Regardless of the weather, the leader should go to the walk site and arrive on time. We never cancel walks ahead of time. In fact, we often walk in the rain. If conditions are too unfavorable at the walk site, the leader may then cancel the walk.

Leaving the Walk Early: Those who decide to leave a walk early before its conclusion should inform the walk leader that they are leaving early. In practice, they do not always do so.

Equipment: It is helpful, but not required, for the walk leader to have a whistle, compass and cell phone, in addition to mushroom collecting equipment.

Park Regulations: The walk leader should inform all participants that they must observe the rules and regulations of the park. If such regulations are publicly posted, the walk leader should point them out. Occasionally COMA is given permission to use a site that normally forbids collecting.

Mushrooms: The leader should tell newcomers that some mushrooms are poisonous and that there is no simple way to differentiate edible from poisonous mushrooms. COMA is not responsible for mushroom identification and is not responsible for what any individual chooses to put in his or her mouth.

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