

January 17, 2020

To: RSHS Students and Parents

From: Gary Banks

Subject: Spring Break Backpacking Trip

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Dear Parents and Students,

I'm writing to provide information about the Hiking Club adventure to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park over Spring Break. The next 3 months will go by quickly, so it is time to start planning. The trip dates are April 6-11. If you have gone on the Smokies trip before, much of the information will be the same as previous years but be sure to at least skim the letter. Any student is eligible to join the Hiking Club and it is not necessary to have previously attended a trip to go. Note that **seniors can go on this trip** this year due to the earlier return of the Italy trip than the previous few years.

The trip will take us to one of the most beautiful and ecologically rich areas in the Appalachian Mountains. It is home to many familiar mammals, such as the famous black bears, but also humbler creatures such as the very diverse and abundant salamander population. The number of species of trees in the park exceeds the number of native tree species in all of Europe. We hike 7-12 miles per day (occasionally longer!), carrying all we need on our backs. Camping takes place in established campsites and shelters, often situated on beautiful ridges or by bubbling mountain brooks. Because it is a National Park, there is a good safety network of rangers in case of emergency.

This is the first letter about this year's trip. Below is an outline of the essentials.

Information Meeting: The informational meeting about the trip for students will be on Tuesday, January 21 at lunch, from 12:00-12:40. This meeting is required even for those who have gone on the trip before. Parents who would like additional information should contact me (Mr. Banks).

Commitment Form and Deposit: Students wishing to attend must return the attached commitment form along with a \$75 commitment fee and the permission slip for the training activities **by Monday, January 31**. Please note that there are many expenses related to this trip that are incurred beforehand, and the \$75 fee is non-refundable after February 15. The total fee for the trip is \$250.

Commitment versus Involvement: This trip is much different than the fall trip that we take annually. We will be traveling in rugged terrain with a number of potential dangers. It is important that everyone be fully prepared. The Hiking Club sponsors require that any student going on the trip is truly committed; anyone who is half-hearted in their participation will not be allowed to attend. Here is an outline of the requirements:

- make a commitment to be part of the group, recognizing that personal desires may be superseded by the needs of the group in the formation of car groups and Smokies hiking groups (this means you may not be in the same group as your friends)
- behave in a supportive way at all workouts, meetings, and training sessions
- abide by the behavior contract at all Hiking Club events
- attend Tuesday lunch meetings (dates listed on calendar) to plan the trip
- Participate actively in at least 8 of the strength training sessions on Tuesdays and Fridays. If participating in RSHS varsity sports practice with a workout component (basketball, girls' soccer and softball) you will be excused from workouts in season.
- attend at least 4 training hikes (including February 8 winter cold test, March 7 training hike and skills session, at least one pack test, plus at least one other training hike)
- attend and pass the February 8 winter cold test using only clothing on the Hiking Club Equipment List
- attend and pass at least one pack test

- ❑ hike at least 30 miles with a loaded pack prior to the trip
- ❑ help the student leaders plan meals and dehydrate and pack food
- ❑ abide by the student behavioral contract and behave in an appropriate way at all Hiking Club activities

Should you really do this? Students who are involved in many other activities or who are struggling to keep up with schoolwork may not be able to keep all these commitments, and you should seriously consider what is required before requesting to be considered for the trip. A quick glance at the Hiking Club calendar (attached) will show that there is a Hiking Club activity of some kind the majority of days between the end of the February break and trip. Those who would like to be involved in the club but who feel they cannot meet these requirements may still be involved in Hiking Club meetings, training hikes, or workouts.

What to expect: Expect beautiful vistas, steep mountain trails, old growth forests, colorful wildflowers, cold mountain streams, laughter and conversation around the campfire, good trail food, and tired feet. The weather can be variable. On several trips we have had significant snowstorms, but because of our extensive preparations we were able to cope with these situations successfully. Some years we've had warmer temperatures and clear weather, and yet others we've had cool weather with a lot of rain. Nobody knows what to expect. "Whatever the weather, we'll weather the weather, whether we like it or not!" We will be carrying everything on our backs, which generally amounts to loads of 25-40 pounds, depending on the base weight of your pack and how much food, water, and group equipment you are carrying, and whether we are at the beginning of the trip with full packs.

Groups: The Smokies are a popular destination. Campsites require reservations to prevent too many people from being in the park. Because of the popularity of the Smokies, group size is limited to 8. Therefore, we will be breaking into three groups, each with 2 or 3 adult chaperones. At this time, there are enough chaperones to allow for a maximum of 18 students on this year's trip.

Group Selection: The Hiking Club Sponsors (Mr. Banks, Ms. Choberka, Ms. Frerichs, and Mr. Paz) are responsible for selecting the groups for this trip. We generally gather requests and ideas from the students and student leaders. However, all students participating should understand that we make our group selection based on many factors, and your requests are only one of those. In other words, you can't always get what you want, but you might just find that you get what you need!

Chaperones: Each group will have a male and female chaperone. So far, we have a solid group of experienced chaperones including Mr. Banks, Ms. Choberka, Ms. Frerichs, Mr. Benedict, Mr. Paz, and Ms. Tucker. Other chaperones will be announced as we finalize them.

## TIME COMMITMENTS

Dates of Trip: During spring break. Departure: Monday, April 6. Return: Saturday, April 11. **Please see the attached calendar.**

Meetings: Students will be required to attend some Hiking Club meetings on Tuesdays at lunch to prepare for the trip. There is also a **mandatory first aid training session after the training hike on Saturday, March 7, from 12-4 pm. This is required, and if anyone foresees they will be unable to attend you must contact me.** There's really no way to make this session up, but if you have done first aid training before I will excuse you for a good reason. See the calendar for the days of meetings.

Strength Training: Strength training sessions are required in preparation for the rigors of the trail. There are 16 strength training sessions between February 4 and April 4. You should try to make it to at least 12 of these, and preferably to all. The minimum number is 8 (unless you are in a varsity sport). Workouts will be on Tuesdays and Fridays. This will mean that students in RSHS sports will not be able to do workouts in season. However, those who are involved in a varsity sport that involves rigorous conditioning may be excused from these practices during your season, but your parents must inform Mr. Banks on the permission slip. Working out at the YMCA after school or going to other workout classes is encouraged but will not be considered as a replacement for the Hiking Club workouts. If you have missed a lot of the workouts, or if you are goofing off and not taking the workouts seriously,

you may expect for me to talk to you about your commitment to your preparation, and possibly remove you from the trip.

Total Number of Training Hikes Required: Students must attend a minimum of 4 total training hikes, including February 8 winter cold test, March 7 training hike and skills sessions, and at least one of the two pack tests. There are six total training hikes scheduled, so if you need to miss one or two you will still be able to fulfill this requirement. I suggest that you set a goal of hiking 30 miles with a loaded pack in training to help you best enjoy the trip. Even walking with a backpack on for 20 to 30 minutes extra several times a week can help. The pack tests will be on Sunday, March 22 and Saturday, March 28. See the attached schedule of training activities.

Other Time Commitments: I personally spend a lot of time planning meals, purchasing food, and cooking for the trip, but students are generally in charge of dehydrating food and assembling the meals. Students also do a lot of the work of outfitting. This needs to be shared by everyone so too much of the burden doesn't fall on a few students. Generally, these tasks are done at lunch.

## **OTHER MATTERS**

Skills: The Hiking Club Student Leaders and sponsors will be training the Hiking Club students in such skills as knot tying, use of map and compass, first aid, setting up a tent, and keeping dry in rain. All students will need to master these and some other basic skills before the trip.

Food: We prepare meals together, and the Hiking Club owns all the stoves, cooking gear, and water filters that typically cost in excess of \$300 to outfit a small group. All students will be required to help with food dehydration and packing. The cost of all food for the trail is included in the trip fee, and a portion of the fee goes to a fund to replace worn out group equipment.

Equipment: Equipment is essential to a good experience. Using lightweight, good quality equipment is one way to make your trip more pleasurable. Remember that you will have to carry around everything you bring, plus your water, your share of food, and some group equipment and a portion of your tent. Heavy, bulky equipment such as a 5-pound sleeping bag or heavy, excessive clothes will really slow you down. Less expensive and good quality, lightweight items are widely available these days. There are also a number of items available to rent (see below) and we have plenty of tents to outfit the group.

While I think it is a great idea to use as much clothing and other equipment that you own as possible, it seems inevitable that you will need to purchase some items unless you really like sewing. The cost of all this can really add up if you purchase all new equipment. One consolation is that you are investing in items that will mostly have a usable life of 5-10 years. There is a cost up front, but the equipment you have will enable you to backpack on your own for years to come. As explained below, you can also borrow many items. Please contact one of the Hiking Club sponsors for advice or questions about equipment.

Hiking Club Equipment Sharing: The Hiking Club owns a significant number of sleeping bags, sleeping pads, and backpacks for Hiking Club students to rent. These are typically the costliest items. I have also collected various boots, clothing and other miscellaneous items through the years that can be loaned out. In exchange, I ask for a donation to the Hiking Club to make this sustainable into the future. I will loan things on a first come, first served basis. Please fill out the attached Hiking Club Equipment Sharing Form and attach an extra payment if you would like to use some of the Hiking Club equipment.

Discounts: Bivouac, an outfitting store in downtown Ann Arbor, will give Hiking Club students a 15% discount on all equipment purchases for the trip. If you go shopping there, tell them you are a part of the RSHS Hiking Club and give them your name at the register and they will give you the discount. I also recommend REI as an outfitter that sells their own name brand at reasonable prices. If you become an REI member then you earn a yearly dividend that can be used toward purchases, and they also have several good sales at intervals through the year.

Equipment List: Please see the attached equipment list for a more complete idea of what is needed. Everyone needs to obtain all equipment on the list.

Boots: Most important is to obtain waterproof backpacking boots and wear them until they are comfortably broken in. Blisters from new boots are one of the most debilitating difficulties with backpacking. Please speak to one of the Hiking Club sponsors about boots if you need some guidance. Helpful and knowledgeable people at Bivouac, REI, or other wilderness outfitters can help with finding the proper backpacking boots. Please do not buy hiking boots online, since the fit is so critical. Many students wear new boots daily to school before the trip to break them in, and you should certainly be wearing them regularly by the time of the first training hike.

Cold Test: You need to have the majority of your hiking clothing in hand by the time of the winter cold test on February 8. The purpose of this day is to make certain that your hiking clothing (without your regular winter jacket!) will be sufficient if the weather gets really cold in the Smokies as it has in several recent years.

Tents: The school owns all the backpacking tents we will need.

Cost: The cost for the trip is based on my best guess for the number of students and chaperones, the price of gas, food, car rental if needed, etc. Based on previous experience, I am setting the cost at \$250 (\$75 deposit due on January 28, balance of \$175 due on Friday, March 2). This is substantially below the cost of any other comparable hiking trip through just about any organization and is based on the chaperones volunteering the use of their time and vehicles. The cost may need to be increased if we need to rent any vehicles. This cost includes camping fees, transportation costs, and food while we are camping, but does not include student's personal equipment. Students are also responsible for food on travel days to and from the Smokies.

Communication: Except for this letter, all communication will be via ParentSquare and StudentSquare. A copy of all the forms, letters, and permission slips will be posted on the [steinerschool.org](http://steinerschool.org) website.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
Gary Banks  
603-769-0055 (cell)  
734-669-9394 ext. 23 (school)  
[gbanks@steinerschool.org](mailto:gbanks@steinerschool.org)

**RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL OF ANN ARBOR  
HIKING CLUB SPRING BREAK SMOKIES TRIP  
INTENT TO PARTICIPATE**

Please return this form to Gary Banks with a \$75 nonrefundable commitment check (*made to Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor*) by **Friday, January 31, 2020**

What: Hiking Club Spring Break Backpacking Adventure

When: April 6-11, 2020

Where: The Great Smoky Mountains in Eastern Tennessee

**Parents:**

My son/daughter, \_\_\_\_\_, has discussed the Hiking Club Spring Break Smokies Trip with me and I agree to support their participation. (Note: This is not a permission slip.) I understand the \$75 deposit will be refunded only in the case of injury or illness that prevents my student from attending since non-refundable costs will be incurred before the trip begins. The deposit will not be refunded if withdrawing from the trip after February 15. Deposit of \$75 due on January 31, balance of \$175 due on March 2. (The fee will possibly be more depending on transportation costs).

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (parent)                      E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ (PRINT CLEARLY!)

**Students:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name) request to be considered for the Hiking Club Smokies Trip. If chosen to participate in this trip, I agree the following requirements:

- make a commitment to be part of the group, recognizing that personal desires may be superseded by the needs of the group in the formation of car groups and Smokies hiking groups (this means you may not be in the same group as your friends)
- behave in a supportive way at all workouts, meetings, and training sessions
- abide by the behavior contract at all Hiking Club events
- attend Tuesday lunch meetings (dates listed on calendar) to plan the trip
- Participate actively in at least 8 of the strength training sessions on Tuesdays and Fridays. If participating in RSHS varsity sports practice with a workout component (basketball, girls' soccer and softball) you will be excused from workouts in season.
- attend at least 4 training hikes (including February 8 winter cold test, March 7 training hike and skills session, at least one pack test, plus at least one other training hike)
- attend and pass the winter cold test using only clothing on the Hiking Club Equipment List
- attend and pass at least one pack test
- hike at least 30 miles with a loaded pack prior to the trip
- help the student leaders plan meals and dehydrate and pack food
- abide by the student behavioral contract and behave in an appropriate way at all Hiking Club activities

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (student)                      E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ (PRINT CLEARLY!)

**Equipment Sharing Request:** Please fill out the attached Equipment Sharing Agreement.

**Permission Slips:** Please fill out the attached activity permission slip and return with this form. Additional permission forms for the Smokies will be distributed in March.

## Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor Hiking Club Equipment Sharing Agreement

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_

- I do not need to borrow any equipment
- I am willing to loan the following items: \_\_\_\_\_
- I would like to borrow the following items, if available:

*Following is a list of items currently available to borrow from the RSHS Hiking Club:*

Item requested	Item	Description/Comments	Items loaned (filled out by Mr. Banks)
	Backpack (many available)		
	Sleeping bag (many available)		
	Sleeping pad (a few available)		
	Stuff sack/dry bag(s) (a few available)		
	Clothing (boots, rain gear, and some other clothing available) – please list what you need		
	Other items requested – please list		

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (student), agree to take good care of these items and to return them in cleaned and good condition within three (3) days of the end of the trip for which they were borrowed. In the event of unusual damage, the Hiking Club Sponsor agrees to attempt to get manufacture’s repairs. In the event of loss or repairs that cannot be made, I agree to pay a reasonable amount to replace the items up to the amount of the replacement cost.

To make it possible to continue sharing equipment, we suggest a rental fee of \$10-\$60 per trip, depending on your means, the number of items borrowed, and the length of the trip. Rental fees may be paid to the Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor and notated “Hiking Club Fee.”

Fee donation amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Hiking Club Sponsor: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor

## Hiking Club Trip – Training Activity & Field Trip Permission Slip 2020

My Child (Print child's name here): \_\_\_\_\_ has my permission (parent's signature below) to travel with his/her class via car with parent/employee/chaperone drivers and seat belts, on the Hiking Club Training trips. I understand that the participants of the activity will be hiking and preparing for the upcoming Hiking Club Trip to the Smoky Mountains. I understand that my child will be participating in outdoor education, wilderness skills and nature study.

The following activities are planned. Training sessions will not occur on snow days. Weekend activities will proceed in any type of weather unless severe weather would make travel unsafe. Mr. Banks will send notification by e-mail in this circumstance.

1. Afterschool Training Sessions:

Tuesdays from 3:20-4:30 & Fridays from 2:50-4:00 in the Gym or Assembly Hall on the following dates: 2/4, 2/7, 2/11, 2/14, 2/25 2/28, 3/3, 3/6, 3/10, 3/13, 3/17, 3/20, 3/24, 3/27, 3/31, 4/3

2. Preparation Hikes

2/8 Fire Skills, Orienteering, and Cold Test at the High School, 1-4pm

2/29 from 1-3:30 pm – Meet at Barton Dam

3/7 Mandatory Training Hike and First Aid Skills at the High School, 12-4 pm

3/14 from 1-3:30 pm – Meet at Barton Dam

3/22 from noon-5 pm – Pinkney Rec. Area, Meet at Mr. Banks House (3471 E Pineview Dr., Dexter)

3/28 from noon-5 pm – Pinkney Rec. Area, Meet at Mr. Banks House (3471 E Pineview Dr., Dexter)

As in all activities, I understand that there is an inherent risk in having my child participate in the field trips and activities described above. We (I) agree to release the Rudolf Steiner School and its faculty and staff from any and all claims, including claims for negligence, arising from or relating to my son or daughter's participation in these activities, including claims for injury, loss, damage, or expense resulting from accident, war, disaster, sickness, quarantine, terrorism, or government restrictions. We (I) also agree to indemnify the Rudolf Steiner School and its faculty and staff, and hold them harmless, of and from all released claims and all resulting actual attorneys fees and costs, settlements, judgments, interest and bonds. We (I) authorize the chaperones to seek medical treatment for my student if they deem it necessary.

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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\*Special Notes about this trip:

Students should have food, water, hiking clothes, boots, and backpacks for all training hikes with 25-40 pounds of weight (increasing as we get closer to the Smokies trip). The 3/22 and 3/28 hikes are pack tests and students should have packs loaded with 30-40 lb. Students should have their equipment at school on 3/20 for the mandatory equipment check.

**Please indicate the following:**

- My student is participating in the following varsity sport at RSHS and will be unable to attend workouts in season: \_\_\_\_\_
- My student will miss the following training sessions:
- My student will miss the following training hikes: