How to Write a Hike Description

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Introduction

Hike leaders may develop new hikes to be added to the hikes collection on the Albuquerque Senior Centers' Hiking Groups (ASCHG) website. A hike description "in process" can begin as a reference to a hike in a

published hiking book, or with distances estimated using a pedometer, a track sketched on a topo map, and elevation gain estimated from contour lines. Most hikes "published" on the ASCHG website have hike data determined using a GPS.

A hike description consists of:

- The hike name and region
- Hike data to help a hiker assess the level of difficulty
- Highlights of the hike
- Cautions to hikers about hazards on the hike.
- How to get to the trailhead.
- How to do the hike
- Comments
- A map of the hike
- GPS track and/or waypoints

A successful hike description will help another hiker:

- Lead the hike without getting lost.
- Decide whether the hike will be worth doing.
- Decide whether the hike is compatible with the hiker's fitness level.

See the Editor Checklist for characteristics of a good, complete hike description.

For help in working with GPS files, mapping software, and image editing software to create the hike description, see <u>Tools for GPS Data</u>.

Developing a New Hike

Some ideas for places to look for possible new hikes are:

- Public lands (use the BLM maps that show land ownership to make sure the hike is not on pueblo or private land). See <u>online BLM maps</u>.
- Hikes written up in hiking books (try the most recent edition of 60 Hikes within 60 miles of Albuquerque, for example). Also see the hiking books table under the Resources tab.
- Sections of the Continental Divide Trail that aren't yet covered by senior hikes but are accessible from paved or good dirt roads.
- Extensions or significant changes to existing hikes.
- Trips to pueblos, national monuments, open space, or state parks that involve walking or hiking.
- Inactive hikes in the burn scar of a forest fire that might have recovered enough to be interesting (e.g., Corral Canyon, Capilla Peak, Sanchez Canyon).
- Urban hikes in Albuquerque or Santa Fe that involve walking to interesting locations (e.g., ABQ Art and History) or along city bike trails (e.g., Bear Canyon Arroyo). These can make great winter hikes.

You could also ask hikers who have written hike descriptions if they have exploratory hike data in the region of interest to you that they would be willing to share.

Before you start, create a folder on your hard drive where you will be storing the results of your work (text files, GPS data, and map files). Label the folder so you can find it again, and label each file that supports the hike description with your preliminary hike name.

Usually several exploratory hikes are necessary to record the track, create waypoints for interesting features or trail intersections, obtain the distance and time to travel to the trailhead, and locate a good lunch spot. It's a good idea to have several other hike leaders along on an exploratory hike who can record the track, suggest alternatives, and call your attention to things you might otherwise have missed.

Things to consider in deciding whether to create a description for a potential new hike that you've explored are:

- Is the hike within a 2-3 hr drive from Albuquerque? Many hikers won't go on a hike if the drive time is more than the hike time.
- Is the hike long enough to make the drive worth it? A very short hike might not draw many hikers. In this case, consider creating a "Multiple Hikes" type of hike description that combines several short hikes in the same general area.
- Are there unusual features or beauty in the rocks, wildflowers, trees, etc?
- If there are other hikes in the same general area already in the hikes collection, are hike leaders likely to choose your new hike some of the time rather than the others?
- What is the hike class? B and C hikes will be attractive to more hikers than the more difficult D or E hikes. (This means no more than 9 miles and no more than 1500 feet uphill.)
- How bad is the access road? Unless a hike is really special, there's no sense in defining a hike that often can't be reached (the Tapia Canyon hike is one of those exceptions).
- If the hike requires a shuttle, how long would it take for the shuttle car and the van to leave and the shuttle car to come back? Try for 30 min or less. If the hike is about the same difficulty going each way, consider the option of taking 2 vans and exchanging keys midway. Will it be possible for the van drivers/hike leaders to communicate during the trip (in cell phone range or using walkie-talkies)?

Hike Place Holders

A hike place holder is a minimal description of a hike. Only the hike name and region are necessary to save the file, and hike place holders (as well as hikes "in process") can be added to a hiking group's schedule. Often a hike description starts out life as a hike place holder. We expect most hike place holders eventually to become published hikes.

All of our hikes involve walking. Some are trips to interesting places that can be arranged with pueblos, national monuments, or even private individuals. The main difference between these and our usual hikes is that in these cases we depend on others to control what happens. The Actual Hike part of the description can often only say what might be included and who to contact to arrange a visit. These "hikes" can remain hike place holders and never become hike descriptions.

Assembling the Content for a Hike Description

The Hike GPS Data

Definitions

GPS data (tracks and waypoints) are very useful in describing and leading a hike. GPS stands for "global positioning system" and is a protocol that uses signals from satellites in orbit around the earth to determine the position of a signal receiver such as a GPS hand-held device (or simply "GPS").

The position can be expressed in different coordinate systems and different units. The units used on the website are latitude and longitude in degrees, decimal minutes (e.g., lat = N 35 46.399, long = W 105 42.069).

Other common units are:

- decimal degrees (the default output from a GPS)
- degrees, minutes, and seconds.

A waypoint is a geographical location of a feature that is created using the GPS command "Mark" or within mapping software. A track is a series of points generated by the GPS when recording is turned on. These trackpoints are also called "bread crumbs" because they record where the person moves. Bread crumbs are treated differently in the GPS than separate waypoints.

GPS Exchange Format (file extension .gpx) is a standard file format that can be read by any of the common mapping software programs and utilities for exchanging files between the GPS and the computer. The .gpx file is a text file, composed of numbers, the data, and words/symbols that tag what the data are (technically, it is an XML file).

The examples that follow are from a .gpx file exported from a Garmin GPS. The waypoints and trackpoints are in decimal degrees, measured from the WGS84 datum. A Google search on "map datum" will tell you more, if you're interested.

An example of a waypoint in a .gpx file is:

A segment of a track file looks like this:

Hike Track

Your preliminary track may have been drawn in one of the mapping software programs (e.g., Garmin BaseCamp) or recorded during an exploratory hike.

Many of the mapping software programs can export a .gpx file originally downloaded from your GPS; alternatively, for PCs, you can use the free program EasyGPS. (See <u>Tools for GPS Data, EasyGPS section</u> for help in using EasyGPS. You should configure your GPS and software to use the same coordinate format and datum.

Use one of the mapping software programs to split tracks and recombine the pieces into the track you want to

keep. Fine-tune the track to remove trackpoints that head off in the wrong direction or resulted from the GPS recording data while you aren't actually hiking (such as during lunch). Sometimes you'll need to hike this final track and record it again.

Hike Waypoints

Develop waypoint labels that allow the text to flow around them in writing can blend in with the text in writing the Actual Hike section. Short labels are preferred because they are less apt to overlap when you create the hike map. When you're happy with the waypoint labels, create the Waypoints List. (See <u>Tools for GPS Data</u> for ways to get the waypoints into a form that you can copy then paste.

Identifying the waypoints by naming them in all capital letters helps them stand out from the rest of the text. The preferred format is:

```
WAYPOINT NAME: N degrees decimal minutes, W degrees decimal minutes
```

(Listing the distance from PARK here is optional)

An example is:

```
POWERLINE: N 35 04.783, W 106 28.717 (1.2 mi)
```

The space between the compass direction and the degrees may be omitted.)

The waypoints in the Waypoints List should be listed in the order encountered on the hike, and shown on the hike map unless they are provided for assistance in getting to the trailhead. You may include the waypoints important for reaching the trailhead in a separate section of the Waypoints List. For example:

```
Access
```

```
US550 MM41: N 35 42.697, W 106 56.303

TURN1: N 35 37.926, W 107 06.500

TURN2: N 35 38.135, W 107 07.938

Hike

PARK: N 35 41.151, W 107 10.830

CDTCRN: N 35 40.775, W 107 10.692
```

Save the waypoints and track together in a .gpx file (called the "waytrack" file). Name the file with the hike name first (no spaces) followed by "WayTrack_" then your initials.

An example of a waytrack name is:

LaLenaSouthWayTrack_MW.gpx

The Hike Name

Names are important. A unique name is required so that the people who schedule the hike for a center and the hikers who decide to go on a hike can be confident when they look at the hike description on the website they are looking at the right hike.

Naming conventions are an attempt to set standards for naming hikes to avoid confusion. Adjusting hike names will probably be an on-going process as we define more hikes in a given area.

In-Out Hike

For an in-out hike, list the name of the trail (if there is one), a nearby feature shown on a topo map (such as a wash, peak, road), and/or a destination. Some examples of in-out hikes are Bosque Peak (a named trail), Bear Canyon Arroyo, Sandia Eye, Chupadera Peak, Continental Divide Trail South to La Lena, and Winsor Trail to Puerto Nambe. The destination is helpful to define the length of a hike when it is along a long trail such as the Winsor or Sandia Crest trail.

Loop or Other Closed Shape

For a hike shaped like a loop, there are usually several main sections, though they may not always have names. Include the main sections in the hike name. If it's the only hike in a general area, the area name could suffice. If it could still be confusing, include the word "Loop" at the end. Some examples of loop hikes are Bear Wallow-Borrego Loop, Navajo Draw, Ceja Pelon, and Strip Mine Loop.

For a hike with a different closed shape, you can include that shape in the hike name. An example of this is Tomas Baca Well Figure 8.

One-Way Hikes

Some of the hikes are one-way hikes that require a shuttle vehicle. The hike name should include the names of the starting and ending trailheads in the order hiked, along with any trail or destination in the middle (unless that makes the name too long). Some examples are East Fork – Las Conchas, Bosque Peak – Crest – Trail Canyon, Holy Ghost - Stewart Lake - Winsor Creek, and Embudo – Three Gun Spring - Embudito.

Hikes in National Monuments or Parks

For hikes in national monuments or parks, such as Pecos National Historical Park (Pecos NHP) or Bandelier National Monument (Bandelier), preface the hike with the name of the monument or park. Some examples are Pecos NHP – Glorieta Battlefield and Pecos Ruins and Bandelier - Lower Frijoles Canyon. (A few hikes in the collection are older ones that were named before we adopted naming conventions.)

Hikes with Several Components

Some hikes are short enough so that a second or third small hike nearby can be added to make up one hike. Write a separate hike description for each of the components, then write another hike description that puts them together described as a "Multiple Hikes" type. See [add example - none published yet]

Region

The Region helps categorize the hike and makes it easier for people to find similar hikes.

Region definitions are maintained by the Region Coordinator. You can see the regions and the hikes within the regions by going to the "Regions" tab on the main menu.

If your hike does not fit within the defined regions, contact the Region Coordinator for assistance. Locate the Region Coordinator under the "Hikers" tab on the main menu.

The Hike Data

For the definitions of the hike data, see Help Topics, section <u>Hike Information</u>.

Get most of the hike data (hike distance, elevation gain, total uphill, total downhill, grade) from mapping software and the track. Also use mapping software to get the distance from the PARK waypoint where the hike starts to each of the other waypoints. (You'll use those distances in the Actual Hike section.) It may be helpful to include these distances in the Waypoints List, then copy & paste them into the Actual Hike section.

Hike Distance

The hike distance can be calculated or estimated in a number of ways. Some examples are:

- Calibrated pedometer
- Track length in mapping software
- Reported track length from the GPS when a track is saved or imported
- Paper topo map and string

Usually the most reliable method is to import a track into mapping software and let it determine the distance. However, if the hike is in a valley with steep cliffs on both sides, the GPS may not receive strong enough signals from enough satellites to get a reliable track. Then one of the other methods may give a better estimate of the distance.

For an urban hike, you may estimate the distance based on city blocks.

Elevation Gain

The elevation gain is the difference between the maximum and minimum elevation. The maximum and minimum elevation may be determined from:

- Elevation profile generated in mapping software
- GPS elevation data
- Paper topo map

Total Uphill/Downhill

Ways of determining the total uphill/downhill distance are:

- "Gain" or "Climbing Elevation" reported by mapping software.
- Recorded by a GPS while doing the hike.
- Manually from the elevation profile from mapping software or from a topo map by breaking the track into major uphill segments, measuring the elevation change for each segment, and adding them together.

Different mapping software programs can give different values for total uphill. See the section "Comparisons

of Total Uphill Calculations" in <u>Tools for GPS Data</u> for examples. In the past, we have used National Geographic TOPO values for consistency. As GPS sensors improve, we probably will move towards using the data recorded by a newer GPS as our standard.

Route Type

The route type is both a description of the shape of the hike track and its direction. If the hike is a loop, write the directions for conducting the hike for either the clockwise (CW) or counter clockwise (CCW) direction, and choose the appropriate loop direction as the route type (e.g., CW Loop).

Drive Miles Round-Trip

Compute the one-way travel distance as the distance you measured on your exploratory hikes from your starting point to where you parked, plus the estimated distance from that location to the intersection of I-40 & I-25, then multiply by two. (For simplicity, we use the same driving distance for all centers; differences usually average out.)

Drive Time One-Way

This is an estimate, based on your experience in driving the route you describe in the Trailhead Directions. You can also use internet resources such as MapQuest. The Drive Time One-Way is useful in determining whether we should notify the center of a probable late return, pay in advance, or leave earlier than usual. Do not include time for pit stops before or after the hike in the drive time estimate. The Drive Time One-way multipled by two, plus allowances for lunch & pit stops, plus the estimated hike time is added to the leave time to get the expected return time for the hike that is shown on the printed Call-in Sign-up sheet (aka Trip Release Form).)

Minimum Elevation

This is the lowest point on the hike, determined from an elevation profile of the track in mapping software or from a paper topo map.

Grade

The grade indicates the average steepness of the hike (either uphill or downhill). Mapping software can often output this value. You may need to split the hike into two parts (mostly uphill and mostly downhill, if possible) to get a value for the grade.

Hiking Seasons

From your knowledge of the hike location and access, determine which seasons of the year are appropriate to schedule the hike. If you need to explain why, add that information to the Comments section. If the hike is at a low elevation, it's likely to be too hot in the summer. If it's at a high elevation, there probably will be too much snow in the winter. Some dirt roads are impassable when wet, so are chancy during the summer monsoon or at times when the road is freezing then thawing. Use your common sense.

Hike Class

The hike class system is based on the hike distance and total uphill, which provide a good estimate of the work involved in doing a hike. The classes go from A to E, increasing in level of difficulty, and are:

- A Easy, not more than 5 miles and not more than 200 feet total vertical.
- B Moderate, not more than 7 miles and not more than 700 feet total vertical.
- C Challenging, not more than 9 miles and not more than 1500 feet total vertical.
- D Difficult, not more than 11 miles and not more than 2300 feet total vertical.
- E Demanding, more than 11 miles and/or more than 2300 feet total vertical.

Classes may be adjusted up a level to reflect hazards. Many seniors' primary concern is falling, so be sure to consider loose rocks, exceptionally steep sections, tree roots, and any steep dropoffs next to the trail. Classes may also be adjusted down a level when footing and balance aren't a concern, such as on a paved or well-maintained trail. Add your reason for adjusting the class to the Comments section.

The Hike Text

Highlights

Describe why a hiker might want to do this hike. A hike may stick in your memory in a good way because of:

- Petroglyphs, ruins, caves, or artifacts.
- Scenic vistas.
- Wildflower displays in season
- Colorful leaves in season
- Unusual rock formations.
- Signs of wildlife.

Cautions

List what to bring or to look out for that aren't common to all of our hikes, such as:

- Recommended hiking gear (e.g., hiking/trekking poles for steep sections and/or stability, water shoes for stream crossings).
- Insect repellant.
- Very steep ascents or descents.
- Extended or extremely rocky parts of the trail.
- Mostly off-trail.
- Steep dropoffs
- Not much shade

Be sufficiently descriptive so that a hiker can say "that sounds too hard, I'll skip that one".

Directions to the Trailhead

Start providing directions from approximately the center of Albuquerque. If one of the major highways is involved, you can say either of the following, for example:

- From Albuquerque, take I-25 to ...
- I-25 to ...

Provide enough road data so that someone without a GPS could get to the trailhead (also provide GPS waypoints if access is tricky). Give turns in compass directions as well as "left" or "right". If possible, provide the approximate distances between intersections, especially in cases where the roads don't have signs (e.g., BLM roads). Use the car's odometer or record a track and use mapping software to measure distances. We use PARK as the waypoint where the van is parked, and measure hike distances from there.

Actual Hike

Now you're ready to write the Actual Hike section. The purpose of this section is to help a hike leader lead the hike successfully. You'll almost certainly have a list of trail intersections or GPS data. If you will be hiking on established trails with reliable signs, describing the trail intersections may be sufficient. Otherwise, create waypoints at points of interest, at turns, or at possibly confusing intersections. If there is a trail, describe it so that a hiker can say, "this looks like it" with confidence. Describe any visual cues, such as "turn at the water tank" or "turn left (north) at the large flat rock in the trail after the lake" or "straight ahead as shown on the trail sign". Give compass directions as well as "left" and "right" where changes in direction are involved. Occasionally it's important to know the elevation to be sure that you're on track (especially on hills with multiple logging roads). Try to create waypoint names that allow the text to flow around them.

Listing the distance along the track from PARK to each waypoint helps to determine where to have lunch, how far until the trail levels out, etc. Hikers are always interested in where the trail levels off and they can stop going uphill. If there is a high point, identify it, such as "TOP (2.3 mi)".

Even when the hike is on an established trail, waypoints are helpful when creating a map to accompany the text. The waypoints in the waypoints list should match the waypoints shown on the map and the waypoints discussed in the text (with the exception of waypoints needed to locate the trailhead).

Don't provide so many waypoints that the map becomes unreadable. If you have extra waypoints that can help if a hike leader misses a turn and needs to "go to" a waypoint (e.g., cairn locations on the Manzano Crest Trail), you can provide them in a separate "additional waypoints" file and post that on the hike's supplemental page.

If there are things to see or do at specific waypoints, describe them here. General features of the hike should be discussed in the Comments section.

Comments

Some types of additional information that often are listed in the Comments section are:

- Other hikes similar to this one.
- Options for doing the hike that don't change the hike rating such as side excursions to overlooks.
- If the hike rating was adjusted, the reasons why.
- If the hike is one-way, some ways of doing the hike (e.g., with another center, with a van driver who drives the van to the other trailhead and hikes towards the main group of hikers).
- Cautions to hike leaders about conditions that might result in cancelling the hike (e.g., rain leading to slick roads or dangerous arroyos, hot weather).

You can link to another hike by enclosing the hike name with specific tags. For example, to link to the Pyramid Rock hike which has a hike ID of H10406, use the code:

Pyramid Rock

Another thing to add to this section is the method used to determine the hike data. For example: "Hike data were determined using a Garmin GPSMap 62 and Garmin BaseCamp's DEM for TOPO US 24K Southwest." or "Hike data were determined using a Garmin GPSMap 62 and the elevation data measured by the GPS, " where "DEM" is an abbreviation for "Digital Elevation Model."

The Hike Map

The map we display as part of a hike description is usually a topographic map of an area showing the hike track and waypoints. Maps should be 600x800 pixels (width x height). The maximum allowed file size is 300 KB. You'll want to crop the image to show the hike information to best advantage. Sometimes you'll need to create an image that is 800 x 600 pixels, then rotate it 90 degrees to the left.

A map can be exported as an image from a computer program ("mapping software") or obtained by saving a "screenshot" of the map. In either case, the result can be edited in an image editing program.

Sometimes the appropriate image is already located on the web (e.g., the map for the Bosque del Apache Tour Loop Trails hike). In that case, you can either reference the map or make a copy of it for our site. (We'll need to get permission from the image owner.)

An acceptable map can be sketched on a paper map, then scanned to make a digital image.

If waypoint labels overlap, reconsider whether you need all those waypoints or if you could shorten their labels. Some mapping software programs (e.g., Delorme Topo North America) allow you to hide the waypoint labels and create text labels that can be relocated so that they don't overlap. (As far as I can tell, with Garmin BaseCamp you are stuck with the locations of the labels, although you can change their font.)

Various versions of PhotoShop are probably the most common image editing software, but there are also free software programs for doing simple editing. An example is IrfanView (http://www.irfanview.com/) for Windows. For information for what you can do with IrfanView, see the IrfanView section in Tools for Photos and Web Albums (TBD).

Working with the Website "Add Hike" Input Form

Any hike leader can create a hike description. If you aren't yet a hike leader but want to develop a hike description, contact the Webmaster or any hike coordinator to be designated a hike leader on the website.

To begin the process of adding a hike, log in to the ASCHG website, go to the Hikes tab, and select Hike, add. Click on the box next to "Show help" (the third line of the form from the top). Detailed instructions for each entry are then displayed in red text.

Note the session timer shown at the upper right of the browser screen. Each time you go to a different page on the website, the session timer is reset to 40 minutes. You'd be surprised at how long it can take to generate all of the data and files for a hike description. It's good practice to create all of the required text in a word processing file, then copy and paste into the data input form. An added benefit is that you have a record of all the text you entered. Just be sure to view your description to locate any problems translating the word

processing text into the website HTML (such as "curly" quotes), and correct anything that looks strange.

You can save your work by going to the bottom of the form and clicking on any one of the "Add Hike" buttons. Once you've added a hike, you'll need to go to the Hikes tab and select the Hike, change menu option to make corrections, add text, or upload files.

You must choose one of the editors from the drop-down list. The website notifies the editor when the hike is available for editing. The editor will review your hike according to the Editor Checklist for Publication of a Hike (see below) and either send you a separate email message containing any comments or list the comments in the Editing Comments text box on the data input form. Only the editor can publish the hike.

When a hike is published and added to the ASCHG hike collection, you can request one of the current Maintainers to take on your hike. The Maintainer is responsible for keeping a hike up to date. Hike leaders can find errors, identify a feature that should be mentioned in the hike description, or discover that the trail is washed out and the track should be changed. After you have written several hike descriptions, consider becoming a hike Maintainer yourself.

Appendix: Editor Checklist for Publication of a Hike

The person who edits your hike description will work from the following set of criteria. All of the answers should be "yes" for a hike description to be considered complete. At an editor's discretion, a hike may be published that has a few "no's", with the assumption that another hiker will improve the hike description later. In this case, the Maintainer should be left as "Not Assigned".

A Hike must have a map, a waypoints list, and a GPS waytrack file.

Hike Data

The website software checks to see that all of the required data fields are filled in and that the hike name is unique. The required data fields are Editor, Record Type, Hike Name, Hike Region, Hike Class, Hike Miles, Elevation Gain, Route Type, Drive Miles Round Trip, and Drive Time OneWay.

Criteria:

- 1. Does the Region chosen appear correct? If not, refer the author to the Region map and/or Region Coordinator.
- 2. Does the name sufficiently differentiate the hike from other similar hikes?
- 3. Is the hike distance consistent with the hike distance given in one of the mapping software programs?
- 4. Is the total uphill consistent with the total gain given in one of the mapping software programs, calculation from an elevation profile, or total gain recorded in a GPS with an altimeter, and greater than or equal to the elevation change value?
- 5. Is the Hike Rating/Class consistent with the definitions on the General Hike Information page? If not, is a reason stated in the "Comments" section why the rating is different?
- 6. Are appropriate seasons of the year for the hike identified?

Map

Criteria:

- 7. Is the map software source identified?
- 8. Are the waypoints that start, change direction, or flag some special place (viewpoint, petroglyphs, etc.) shown on the map?
- 9. Are the waypoint labels legible?
- 10. Are the waypoint labels in all capital letters?

Waypoints

Criteria:

- 11. Are the waypoints shown on the map listed in the Waypoints section (there may be additional waypoints listed)?
- 12. Are the waypoints listed in the correct format?

Trailhead Directions

Criteria:

- 13. Are the directions consistent with directions in other existing hike descriptions?
- 14. Do the directions appear sufficient to locate the trailhead?

Actual Hike

Criteria:

- 15. Is there sufficient information for another hike leader to lead the hike successfully?
- 16. Are the waypoints shown on the map referred to in the description?
- 17. Is the description consistent with the map?

Highlights and Cautions

Criteria:

- 18. Are highlights of the hike provided for a hiker to determine whether he/she would enjoy doing the hike?
- 19. Is there sufficient information in the Hike Data and Cautions for a hiker to judge whether he/she is fit enough to do the hike?

Comments

Criteria:

20. Is appropriate additional information included to help hike leaders determine when to schedule the hike?

Credits

21. Is someone identified for text author, map author, track author, and waypoints author?
Overall
Criteria:
22. Does the text pass a spell check?

Criteria: