

## SAFE PRACTICES

Safe backcountry travel entails more than managing avalanche risk. Numerous other hazards need to be avoided, mitigated or protected against.

### Situational Awareness

Stay aware of what is happening around you, where you are, where you are traveling to, and whether there is a threat to you or the group. Assess the situation and take appropriate action.

### Pacing and Flow

Maintain a pace that works for all members, leaves some energy in the tank for emergencies and keeps the group together.

### Transitions

With a significant change in the terrain (e.g. slope incline, forest density, exposure to hazards) take time to assess and discuss possible consequences and mitigation strategies.

### Collisions and Falls

Hitting trees, falling in tree wells, collisions with other party members or just falling over can be serious issues in the backcountry. Ski in control; when appropriate, pair up.

### Environmental Conditions

Pay attention to temperature, changing snow conditions, visibility and other factors that impact safety; take appropriate actions

### Group and Individual Energy and Dynamics

Constantly monitor personal and group member condition. Stay in voice or visual contact.

### Team Work

Work as a team by sharing information, tasks and decision making. Be a good team member!

### Equipment Failure

Check gear before leaving and carry a good repair kit. Gear problems are common and serious in the backcountry.

### Time Management

Follow your route plan and time allocations. Be prepared to adjust your trip to ensure you are back with time to spare in case of an accident.

**Constantly observe and test snow stability in the field**

## RESOURCES

### Bulletins:

[avalanche.ca](http://avalanche.ca)

### Weather:

[weatheroffice.gc.ca](http://weatheroffice.gc.ca), [avalanche.ca](http://avalanche.ca)

### Mountain Conditions Report (MCR):

[mountainconditions.com](http://mountainconditions.com)

### Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES):

- [pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/mtn/securiteenmontagne-mountain-safety/avalanche](http://pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/mtn/securiteenmontagne-mountain-safety/avalanche)
- [albertaparks.ca/media/2939773/atr\\_ates.pdf](http://albertaparks.ca/media/2939773/atr_ates.pdf)


### Gear Lists:


[acmg.ca/03public/resources/gearlist.asp](http://acmg.ca/03public/resources/gearlist.asp)

Copyright Association of Canadian Mountain Guides 2018



## CONTACT US

 Box 8341  
Canmore, AB  
Canada T1W 2V1

 +1. 403. 678.2885

 [acmg@acmg.ca](mailto:acmg@acmg.ca)

 [www.acmg.ca](http://www.acmg.ca)



# ACMG

Association of Canadian Mountain Guides  
Association canadienne des guides de montagne

## How To Plan A Backcountry Ski Trip



Trip Selection

Pre-Trip Research

Trip Meeting

Safe Practices

# TRIP SELECTION

*Picking a trip right for the group and the current conditions is fundamental to planning a safe trip.*

## GROUP COMPOSITION

*Look at the group goals, experience and members*

- **Group and Personal Goals**  
Trip goals should be shared by group members. Group cohesiveness means a safer trip.
- **Assess Skill and Experience**  
Group members need the skills, training and gear for the chosen backcountry trip.
- **Risk Tolerance**  
Group members should have similar risk tolerance levels or be willing to adjust to a lower level of tolerance when needed by the group.
- **Group Size**  
Efficient groups of 3-5 skiers are faster, easier to manage and can engage everyone in decision making. Larger groups should choose easier trips in less demanding terrain.
- **Leadership**  
Although the whole group should be involved in decision making, a designated leader can be key in case of an emergency.

**Now that the group is known, research trips of appropriate length and difficulty.**



## PRE-TRIP RESEARCH

*Based on group goals, and the current and forecasted conditions, choose potential trips and options. A final decision will be made in the trip meeting.*

### 1 Conditions Research

- **Avalanche Bulletins** - Read bulletins regularly, even when not skiing, for a more complete picture of the snowpack and potential problems
- **Weather** - There are a number of sources for weather. Research and observe to narrow the field to those most accurate for your area.
- **Mountain Conditions Report (MCR)** - Real-time field observations from mountain professionals
- **Other Online Sources** - There are a number of resources available to help with planning

*See "Resources" in this pamphlet*

### 2 Terrain Difficulty

Choose terrain difficulty based on conditions and group goals. When available use the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES). The ATES is designed to categorize avalanche exposure based on terrain configuration.

*As avalanche danger increases or weather deteriorates, terrain choices will decrease. Conversely, as conditions improve, terrain choices will increase.*

### 3 Route Research

There are numerous sources of route information: route books, maps, online sources, as well as local knowledge.

### 4 Create a Route Plan

For your chosen trip, create a route plan including:

- Estimate total trip time
- Turn-around time and return time
- Hazards en route and mitigation
- Emergency Services contacts and procedure
- Route Options – local and regional
- If specialized equipment is required

### 5 Let a responsible party know your trip plan and options

# TRIP MEETING

*Taking place in a coffee shop or at the trail head on the morning of the trip, include all group members in this meeting and process.*

### 1 Review

- Avalanche bulletin - danger rating and problems
- Current and forecast weather - any significant change?
- Group well being - any change since your initial review?

### 2 Observations

Consider current information and observations made that morning. What effect might it have on your chosen trip?

- Signs of recent avalanche activity - elevation, aspect, incline? Similarity to the area you plan to ski?
- Recent snow amounts - significant enough load to increase danger?
- Wind effect - elevation and aspect? Are effects prevalent in the area you plan to ski?
- Temperature - a sudden rise near or above 0 °C

### 3 Discuss

- Have conditions or the situation changed since you selected your trip? Is the trip still reasonable or does it need to be modified?
- What terrain features should be avoided and what field observations will impact your route choice?

### 4 Confirm Route or Choose Option

- Review route plan
- Group roles
- Check group, personal and safety equipment
- Communication - group has at least one device to contact backcountry emergency services e.g. Spot, InReach, satellite phone, VHF radio
- Check each person's transceiver is on "transmit"

