



High Trails Outdoor Science School

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RUNNING PROGRAM IN THE
SAN BERNARDINO NATIONAL FOREST

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Understanding How We Can All Fit Together On One Healthy Planet

Re: Driving to High Trails in the Snow

The weather forecast is telling us that there's snow predicted for next week. Though this white snowy stuff is welcome (and needed...), it does bring with it some challenges, especially when it comes to convincing schools, teachers and parents that High Trails is a safe place to visit.

Accurate weather forecasting is difficult. Though we can make plans, it's best to just have some patience and take things day by day. If you're going to arrive on Monday, we'll contact you all through the weekend; Saturday, Sunday, and Sunday Evening; to let you know exactly what the on ground conditions are like. Early Monday morning is when we'll start talking more, checking the roads and making decisions. Here's a general timeline:

1. **CHP:** The first thing we do on snowy travel mornings is call the California Highway Patrol (based in Running Springs) and check their recommendations for school bus travel. The most common road condition in the winter is "R2", which means that all vehicles (except 4WD vehicles with designate Mud/Snow tires) must have chains installed on the drive wheels. Chains are a fantastic thing in the snow; they force people to slow down, and slow is safe in the winter. As long as CHP says "yes", we feel confident in the safety of the roads.

Bear in mind that Highway 38, the road up to High Trails, is also one of the main roads up to Big Bear. In the snow, this road becomes a major thoroughfare for all of the skiers and snowboarders who want to take advantage of fresh powder. This is a big benefit for us; more drivers means that the road gets a lot of attention from CalTrans. There are snowplows and gravel trucks out on the roads as soon as any kind of weather starts, and they keep going until the storm is over.

2. **Our Facilities and Program:** We'll then check our camp roads and facilities for ease of access and safety of students. We've got snow plows, tow vehicles, lots of shovels and experience in the white stuff. For your students, we have lots of extra warm snow gear and a program that has plans and contingencies for success in the winter. As long as our answer is "Yes, we can still run a safe and quality program!" we're still ready for you.
3. **Your Buses:** take some time before the morning of departure and talk with your transportation department. Any buses headed into the mountains during the winter are required to carry chains and have drivers trained for inclement weather. Are your buses ready for the snow? Please make certain that your drivers have chains and know how to install them. As long as your buses are safe, we can keep moving.

4. **Decisions:** once we're satisfied that it's safe to head up to High Trails, it's time to start talking with your school and transportation department. Here is a rundown of options that all of us will discuss as the day progresses:

- **Normal Departure Time:** many times storms will come in over the weekends, or they will arrive with light enough conditions that it's easy for CalTrans to keep up on the roads. If the roads are well maintained early in the morning on your departure day, it's a good sign that they will remain that way until you are up in the mountains driving on them. 70% of time.
- **Delayed Departure Time:** sometime storms will arrive with more precipitation or will arrive closer to driving day. If this happens, we will often recommend that schools don't start driving until late morning. This gives CalTrans more time to get the roads up to speed, and it gives the sun time to shine and start melting things away. In snow conditions you can add an extra hour to your drive time, so you may want to consider sending snacks along with the students as well as games/books/music to keep them entertained. 25% of time.

Bear in mind that once you hit the mountain roads you're not alone. As situations progress and warrant, we may drive down to meet buses, to install chains, to entertain students, and to bring snacks and treats. Our job is to support you on the drive up the mountain; if we can help, we will.

- **Delay a Day:** If CalTrans can't keep up with the roads on the day you're slated to be at High Trails, we will ask you to come up a day late. We'll continue the dialog process throughout the day and make decisions once again the next morning. 4% of time.
- **Program Cancellation:** if we've run through all of the above and we're still not making anything happen safely, the last option is to cancel your program. Though we can't guarantee it, we'll do our best to find a spot later in the year for your school. 1% of time.
- **Leaving High Trails:** snow and storms may arrive while you are up at High Trails. When this happens we follow the same steps as above, making sure safety is first all of the time.

Hopefully this lets you know that when the snow starts falling, we have a solid plan to rely upon. Please pass this information along to your administrators, fellow teachers, and parents, and let them know that if the roads aren't safe, the busses will stay home.

Please consider giving your cell phone number to your High Trails Site Director, so that last minute communication is made simple and easy. You can reach us anytime, night and day, at 1 800 428-1851, or email hello@thehightrails.com.

Thanks!



Drizt Cook
Director, High Trails

When your parents have questions, please refer them to our website, www.thehightrails.com. We have several good links directly off the main page dealing with current weather and road conditions. Encourage them to use this as a resource instead of calling us on the telephone.