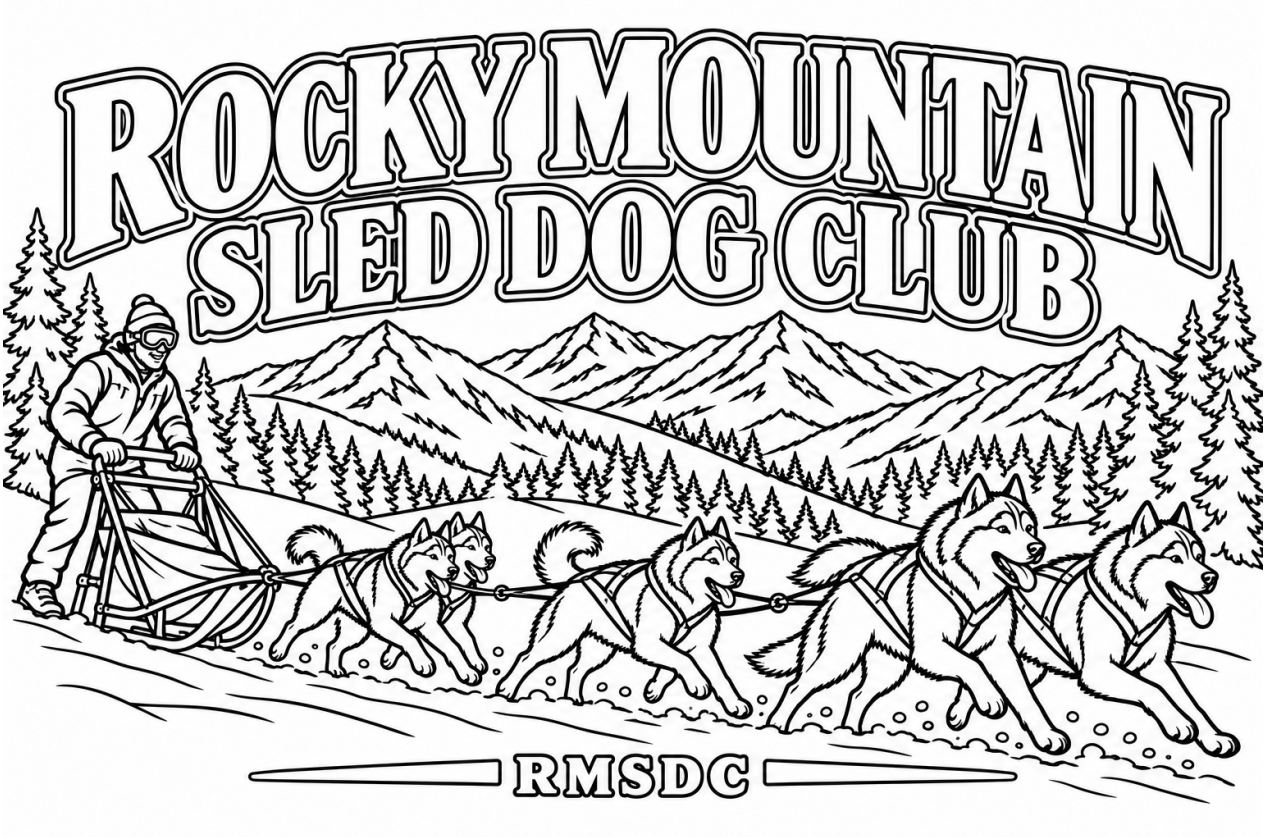
Trail Navigators

Good judgment is a trail skill.



Map scale, route timing and realistic safety decisions. Practice with an adult leader, not on a solo expedition.

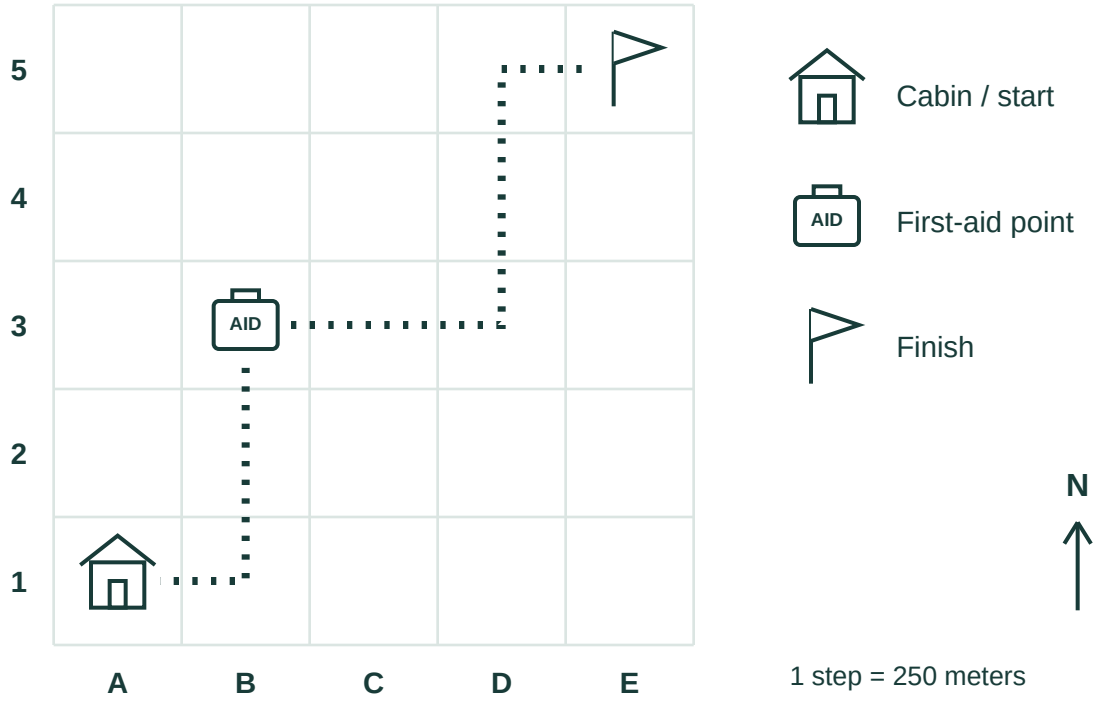
MAP QUESTS / PACKING MISSIONS / SAFETY SMARTS

Explore with a responsible adult. These activities are not medical training or permission to travel alone. In a U.S. emergency, call 911. Never make a real emergency call for practice.

Free to print. No membership needed. Answers and grown-up notes on page 8.

Navigate the paper course

This fictional course uses a simple scale: one dotted grid step equals 250 meters. Only the marked route is part of the exercise.



A compass needle follows magnetic north, which may differ from map north. That difference is declination. Learn local adjustments with an instructor before real navigation. This diagram is not a field map.

YOUR MISSION

1. Count the route steps from A1 to E5. Convert to kilometers.
2. At 3 km/h, how many minutes would that distance take, without stops?
3. Why is that calculation not a promise of a real arrival time?

Fictional practice map. Not for real navigation.

Every item needs a job

A teammate says a full phone battery is all the navigation and light you need. Build a more resilient plan together.



TRAIL KNOW-HOW

Discuss physical navigation backup, water, extra food, layers, a headlamp and first-aid supplies. Your adult leader checks the full Ten Essentials and route needs. Carry tools only with appropriate permission and training.

YOUR MISSION

1. Name two different problems a phone could have on a trail.
2. List a backup for navigation and a separate source of light.
3. Which supplies depend on the forecast, route or medical needs?

Draw, sketch or jot down your ideas here.

Practice with a grown-up. Use a pretend phone for any role-play.

Decisions under pressure

You cannot confidently locate the group on the map. One person wants to follow a stream to a road. Another wants to split up.



TRAIL KNOW-HOW

Stop and keep the group together. If lost, remain in place unless it is unsafe. Contact emergency services when needed. Report confirmed facts, not guesses, and follow instructions. Do not chase unknown routes.

YOUR MISSION

1. Write a calm sentence that stops the group splitting up.
2. Separate KNOWN / UNKNOWN: last checkpoint / hoped-for road.
3. Draft a help report: location, people, problem, immediate hazards.

Draw, sketch or jot down your ideas here.

Practice with a grown-up. Use a pretend phone for any role-play.

Build a useful response

First aid is a learned skill, not a test of bravery. Practice communication here and take a certified class for hands-on care.



TRAIL KNOW-HOW

Check scene safety and seek consent when possible. Call 911 for life-threatening signs such as severe bleeding or abnormal breathing. Follow dispatcher instructions and your training. Avoid moving a possibly spinal-injured person unless safety requires it.

YOUR MISSION

1. Assign safe roles: CALLER / ADULT HELPER / GROUP ORGANIZER.
2. Write the location information a caller should have ready.
3. Find an appropriate first-aid/CPR class with your adult leader.

Draw, sketch or jot down your ideas here.

Practice with a grown-up. Use a pretend phone for any role-play.

A turnaround is a win

Your plan says turn around at noon. At 11:50 you are short of your goal and hear thunder. The goal can wait.



TRAIL KNOW-HOW

Thunder means seek a substantial building or enclosed hard-topped vehicle immediately. Trees and tents are not safe lightning shelter. Remain sheltered at least 30 minutes after the last thunder. Plan access to shelter before the outing.

YOUR MISSION

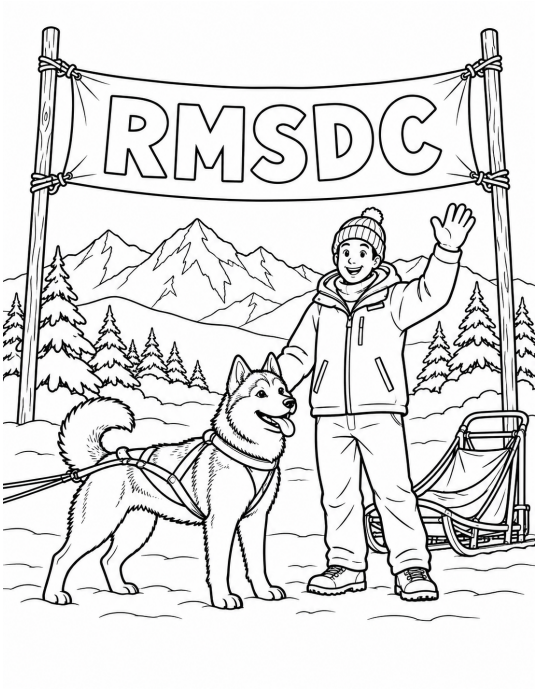
1. Explain why the destination does not override the safety plan.
2. List two checks to make before choosing a route tomorrow.
3. Write a team phrase that makes speaking up about risk welcome.

Draw, sketch or jot down your ideas here.

Practice with a grown-up. Use a pretend phone for any role-play.

Run the pre-trip briefing

Create a plan for a supervised outing. Your leader approves it. Keep the completed plan private with your trusted contact.



TRAIL KNOW-HOW

Use the paper-course timing as an estimate, not a schedule guarantee. Add rest and contingency time. Agree on a turnaround point, communicate changes and account for everyone before moving.

YOUR MISSION

1. Route / expected return / turnaround: _____
2. Trusted contact / adult leader: _____
3. Our weather alternative and group check: _____

Draw, sketch or jot down your ideas here.

Practice with a grown-up. Use a pretend phone for any role-play.

Trail debrief

Talk through the choices together. Good judgment matters more than finishing quickly.

Page 2: Navigate the paper course. 8 steps x 250 m = 2,000 m = 2 km. At 3 km/h: 40 minutes without stops. Terrain, weather, rests and the group change pace.

Page 3: Every item needs a job. Examples: lost signal, damage or battery loss. A paper map and trained compass use support navigation; a headlamp provides independent light.

Page 4: Decisions under pressure. Known: the last checkpoint. Unknown: whether a road is reachable. Keep everyone together; do not invent a location.

Page 5: Build a useful response. Roles depend on who is trained and available. Share location and observed facts. This booklet does not teach CPR or qualify anyone to provide treatment.

Page 6: A turnaround is a win. Safety overrides the goal. Check forecast and route/shelter options. Turning back early can be the successful outcome.

Page 7: Run the pre-trip briefing. A useful briefing covers route, time, people, conditions and an alternative. Have the adult leader verify assumptions before going.

For adults: Adapt to your child's abilities. Activities are supervised practice, not medical advice or a substitute for certified first-aid training. Do not practice risky scenarios outdoors. No fire-making, wild-food tasting or solo exploration is required.

Sources and further learning

NPS: Ten Essentials
https://www.nps.gov/articles/10essentials.htm

NPS: Outdoor Emergency Plan
https://www.nps.gov/articles/gtgemergencyplan.htm

American Red Cross: First Aid Steps
https://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/first-aid/performing-first-aid/first-aid-steps

National Weather Service: Lightning Safety
https://www.weather.gov/safety/lightning-tips

NPS: Compass and Magnetic Declination
https://home.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/compass.htm

Original RMSDC activities and illustrations; no endorsement by the source organizations. Source review: 2026-10-17