

Our goal: DOC First-Year Trips seeks to provide a safe and positive outdoor experience for all incoming Dartmouth College students, so that they may be warmly welcomed to the Dartmouth community and have the opportunity to learn about our natural surroundings, bond with classmates, and connect with dedicated upperclassmen who are excited to act as role models and mentors.

DOC Trips is a student-run outdoors pre-orientation that provides a “comprehensive out-of-class room experience” including “service opportunities, engagement in the arts, and competitive athletic, recreational, and outdoor programs.” Every September, over 325 student volunteers make sure the program runs smoothly and efficiently. This year, 275 upperclassmen served as Trip Leaders - each leader is paired with one other, and then assigned six to ten first year students that comprise the Trip group. 53 other volunteers are assigned to one of five logistics and support Crews, which each perform a different role in the program. These students all color their hair (see <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~doc/www/downloads/2009/firstyeartrips/Hanover.Crew.2009.jpg> for an example) and wear outlandish clothing in order to help incoming students realize that at Dartmouth, the way you look has no bearing on who you actually are. These crews, as well as the rest of the Trips volunteers, encourage incoming students to be exactly the person they want to be. The Crews also surprise incoming students with two different, originally choreographed and written shows and the beginning and end of the program. The first such show is the “Safety Talk,” made out to be a serious and solemn affair given the first evening of the program in Hanover, which teaches students about Leave-No-Trace practices, sustainability, basic first-aid, and encourages good outdoor and teamwork skills. A similar “Dinner Show” occurs on the last day of the program at the Moosilauke Ravine Lodge, and is followed by an evening filled with Dartmouth tradition. Many Trips are also “raided” along the trail. “Raids” are surprise visits to Trips that are often comical, occasionally ingenious, and almost always include baked treats or hot drinks brought as presents for the raided group. The creativity and enthusiasm apparent in the shows and raids help incoming students realize how much the current Dartmouth student population is excited to welcome and embrace its new members.

While the shows and colorful crews are major parts of the Trips program, the real power of the entire experience comes from spending three days in the wilderness with a group of entirely new people. By spending time with other Dartmouth students, away from all modern day distractions (no cell phones, watches, etc allowed on Trips), participants are able to connect with other members of their Trip groups in a unique and positive way. The activities, all of which take place in the wilderness, range in difficulty and type from extreme hiking to cabin camping, and from nature photography to white water kayaking and rock climbing. Many of the activities are physically exhausting, completely new to students, and force them outside of their comfort zones. The wilderness, the activities, and the games facilitated by the trip leaders help the students create friendships that often last well beyond the official conclusion of their Trips experience.

Also unique about Trips is the make-up of each Trip group. The directors hand-assign all registered students to their Trips, intentionally scheduling people from all different backgrounds into each individual Trip. (DOC Trips is fortunate to be able to keep costs low while managing to offer differing amounts of financial aid to those students that require it. We worked with every student to be sure that finances weren't a barrier to going on a Trip, which we were extremely happy to be able to do.) Even given people's natural differences, there's something about not being able to shower, sleeping on dirt, and challenging one's self that bonds a group and helps individuals bring down their guards, ultimately aiding students in their transition to college and into a new diverse community.

After the days on the trail, each Trip group on a given section (we stagger the program into ten “sections,” one section per day, to make the numbers manageable) arrives at the Ravine Lodge at the base of Mount Moosilauke. There they are once again met with traditional songs and dances, including the alma mater and the “Salty Dog Rag.” The Ravine Lodge, built in 1939, has since become symbolic of the outgoing, welcoming spirit of DOC Trips, as well as of the Outing Club in general. At the Lodge, crew members and Faculty members speak to the first-year students and trip leaders about the academic and out-of-classroom opportunities awaiting them at Dartmouth, which helps prepare and excite these students for their time back in Hanover.

While Trips is a unifying experience for the first-year class, each individual Trip varies in character, sometimes dramatically. The Evening Program at the Ravine Lodge is an experience common to all participating first-year students, marking the end of Trips and the beginning of life at Dartmouth. Even as November finally rolls around, after the color of the crew members hair inevitably changes back to normal, after the music is packed up and speakers put away, memories of the Ravine Lodge still remain common not only to the newly welcomed class, but to generations of Dartmouth classes. It's become engrained

in Dartmouth's culture and legacy. DOC Trips is a common thread uniting the Dartmouth community as far back as most people can now remember.

It is hard to describe and sum up DOC Trips in 500 or even 1,250 words, and thus we have provided extra materials to explain the extensive planning that goes into the program, and the breadth of the program in general.

DOC Trips website (link): <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~doc/firstyeartrips/>

A short history of DOC Trips (PDF):

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~doc/www/downloads/2009/firstyeartrips/DOC.Trips.Short.History.pdf>

The DOC Trips Safety Binder (explains safety protocol, collaboration with College, PDF):

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~doc/www/downloads/2009/firstyeartrips/Trips09Safety.pdf>

Trips 2009 Annual Report (PDF):

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~doc/www/downloads/2009/firstyeartrips/Trips.09.Annual.Report.pdf>

Finally, we would leave the Awards committee with a quote that expands upon the importance of outdoor education, and that is frequently referenced in our program:

"I would insist that the man [or woman!] who spends four years in our North Country and does not learn to hear the melody of rustling leaves or does not learn to love the wash of racing brooks over their rocky beds in the spring, who has never experienced the repose to be found on lakes and rivers, who has not stood enthralled on the top of Moosilauke on a moonlit night or has not become a worshipper of color as he has seen the sunset from one of Hanover's hills, who has not thrilled at the whiteness of the snow-clad countryside in winter or at the flaming forest colors of the fall – I would insist that this man has not reached out for some of the most worthwhile educational values accessible to him at Dartmouth."

Earnest Martin Hopkins, 11th President of Dartmouth College from 1916-1945 (during the first ten years of Freshmen Trips!)