

Day Hiking: What works!

Go Early: One key to a successful long and satisfying day hike is to start in the night. Hey, I thought you said it was a "day" hike? Lose some sleep. Deal with it. It's OK. Think about it. Would you rather start out in the dark or end in the dark. You can always sleep after the hike is over. Getting on the trail at 3 or 4 in the morning sounds extreme, but it really makes sense. High altitude hikes can be prone to afternoon thunderstorms. It's much better to reach the summit by 10-11am and be well on the way back down during vulnerable afternoon hours. Another benefit of heading out at or before dawn is cooler weather. Less heat means less sweating, therefore less water needed and a lighter load.

One of the classic "day" hikes begins around midnight ascending Mt Whitney to watch the sunrise. Hiking on a trail at night during a full moon is an adventure everyone should experience. A flashlight is hardly needed.

Go Light: It's simple: carry less, go further. A minimalist approach is suggested to food, clothing, and other items. Each hike should be planned considering the risks involved. One advantage to extreme day hiking on well-established trails is the reduced need for survival items since it's harder to get lost or hurt yourself.

No one is suggesting you should not bring your single lens reflex camera with tripod, arctic parka for that summer blizzard, first aid kit capable of heart bypass surgery, enough food to feed everyone on the trail, and enough rain gear for the 100 year flood. However, every pound you carry will decrease the probability of your success. Of course, the tricky part is, the extra one pound you do carry could save your life.

Go Fast: Actually don't go fast. The goal is to minimize time on the trail by developing a consistent pace with a minimum of rest stops. One can usually spot a novice hiker by bursts of speed, followed by many rest stops. The net effect is usually a slower trip.

Go Far and Go High: Early+Light+Fast enables one to go Far+High in one day and return to the creature comforts of a roof and indoor plumbing. A marathon-like distance with large elevation changes are made possible by this thinking. The personal challenge is to go as far and high as you can ... what someone else does is not the point.

Trail Mix may not be the best food on the trail for a hike that has high levels of aerobic and anaerobic exercise. Nuts and other oily, fatty foods are harder to digest when your body is using your oxygen elsewhere. Also, fruit in excess can cause digestive distress. We have found the best

foods on the trail are sport bars like Clif Bar, Promax, Balance Bar, etc. ... and, for a sandwich that travels well and always seems to taste good: PB&J

Water: By studying the weather, the water sources, the trail, one can carry the minimum amount of water, which is probably the heaviest thing one carries on a day hike. An interesting idea is to stash water bottles on the way up, to be retrieved on the way down.

Clothing: If you have cotton or wool clothes don't even think about hiking with them. Burn them, or give them to homeless street people who are cold and don't move fast. This may be tax deductible. Consult your tax attorney.

There are many high tech fibers that wick (transport your sweat into the air) and are warm (since not wet it feels warmer) and are incredibly light. Some of these trademarked fibers are coolmax, ultralight microfleece, microfiber (microprocessors in these?), capilene, polartec, ultrawick, tactel, spandex, supplex, gortex, and lycra.

By layering these materials it is possible to hike with incredibly light clothing, even in freezing weather. Try it. It works. There is a company, GoLite that has adopted Jardines philosophy about light weight hiking. Check them both out.

Hats: This is easy. Wear the largest, lightest brim hat you can stomach. Yes, it's dorky looking but do it anyway. It keeps you cooler and lessens the chance for wrinkles and skin cancer.

Sunscreen: See the part of the last sentence on hats. High altitude and summer time are brutal to the skin. Low altitude and any sun are brutal to the skin. Put on sunscreen on all days, cloudy or not, preferably a moisturizing sunscreen to provide extra relief against the damaging UV Rays. Consult your local dermatologist.

Shoes: The success or failure of an extreme day hike is tied to shoe selection. Heavy, stiff hiking boots are at a decided disadvantage to a light, flexible, comfortable shoe. Every pound of shoe is equivalent to carrying 7-9 pounds on your back. Minimize shoe weight by selecting a cross-trainer with ankle support, a trail-running shoe, or one of the lighter hiking shoes that are readily available.

When you go to buy a "hiking" shoe you will almost always be encouraged to buy one with "great ankle support" and a steel shank so you won't "feel the rocks." This makes sense if you are carrying a 60 pounds pack and are going through scree (small rocks) and other rugged cross-country terrain. This also makes sense if you are the

shoe salesman trying to make a \$225 sale as opposed to an \$85 lighter shoe. If you are hiking on a trail these are not a priority, and a cheaper shoe will do.

"But I have weak ankles," is the lament. Fine: we suggest walking on a very hard surface with a full hiking boot for a whole day is not comfortable for a lot of people. The bottoms of your feet are in pain and blisters are usually not far behind. Comfort rules on a trail.

Regarding weak ankles - Consult your physician first, then consider this possibility: Rigorous exercise may correct your perceived impediment. Light jogging downhill or over a dry river bed full of smooth rocks may be just what the doctor ordered to get those ankles in shape.

Socks: It's amazing how important sock selection is when engaged in a long day hike of many hours. The coarse threads of hiking socks will eventually begin to dig into your skin causing much discomfort and blisters. Avoid this by wearing a thin nylon sock, a liner, as a first layer, or just on pair of light ones. Bring an extra pair for replacement half way. There is something really refreshing about putting on a pair of socks half-way through a killer hike.

One more thought: Before undertaking that marathon hike consider this - new socks, old shoes. It's not a good time to see if those new shoes work.

Hiking Poles: This is the best-kept secret for success on the extreme day hike. Common in Europe, and mandatory equipment for mountain climbers, trekking poles give an advantage, which most people don't understand until they try them. The uninformed usually comment or think, "Where's the snow?" "Aren't they heavy?" "Do they help?"

It is estimated the use of trekking poles can add up to 20% efficiency to the body by transferring some of the load to your arms. Even more significant is the stability the poles provide, greatly reducing the need for leg muscles to continually provide balance. The chances of a sprained or broken ankle, the bane of a hiker a long way from help, is greatly reduced by the use of poles. Stream crossings, wet rocks or logs, ice, loose rocks, and steep areas are made safer. Using a very light shoe that does not have much ankle support is made possible with poles.

A single walking stick is better than nothing, but is more awkward than two lightweight trekking poles. Additionally, telescoping poles can be stowed in your daypack at times when they are not needed. Some models have shock absorbers built in which allows less stress on the wrists when stroking hard with the poles. Another feature is a slight taper on the hand grips which make for a more ergonomically grasp.

A carefully planned long day trip must have an estimated time that you stop and go back to civilization no matter what. Since you have no overnight equipment, food and water are minimal, and you are dressed lightly, it's imperative to stick to a deadline for reaching your goal. In most cases you should be on your way back by noon, at the latest- especially when at high altitudes and/or when thunderstorms are probable.

If you don't do this, you might be the subject of a newspaper article chronicling the pros and cons of your survival techniques.

Why Day Hike?

Hike: It's elegant and egalitarian! Think about a hike: Low overhead and anyone can do this! No set of wheels to buy and master, as in bicycling, skateboarding, motorcycling, Indy 500 auto racing ... no ball to control - as in golf, tennis, baseball, football, bowling, basketball, hot air ballooning ... no fighting the elements for balance with a recalcitrant object - as in skiing, surfing, kayaking, sailing, flying ... no body threatening activity - as in boxing, wrestling, marathon running, ski diving.

Absolutely nothing wrong with any of the other sports mentioned above. The point is: Day Hiking is the ultimate recreational activity. Trails are everywhere. From easy walks around a lake to challenging hikes up a mountain, almost everyone can participate.

Anyone who can walk can do this. The goal is to walk (hike, trek) and come back the same day to indoor plumbing and a bed with an expensive mattress. The attractiveness of this "sport" is each person sets a goal and strives to achieve to it. Rather than a casual walk in the evening after dinner (also, a good thing to do), this endeavor requires some planning and a commitment. Whether it is a challenging, "extreme" or an easy hike, the answer is in the eye of the beholder (or in the feet of the hiker?); specific hikes will be too hard for some and too easy for others. The main goal is to achieve a sense of accomplishment similar to more rigorous sports like ultra-trail or marathon running but with a lot less stress on the body.

Day hiking is becoming popular with all ages, especially two aging baby boomer groups: The formerly active and the inactive.

Active Baby Boomers: The first group engaged in strenuous activities all their lives, perhaps as a serious runner, or some other competitive sport, now find knees and other body parts have slowed them down. Maybe backpacking and camping in the wilderness is not as much fun. The outdoors may have lost its allure due to the

heavy pack, the logistics of sleeping, the complications of cooking, and personal body maintenance. Or simply, they find the time commitment is too much for the extended overnight trip, and thus, day hiking is the answer.

Inactive Baby Boomers: The other group may not have been a fan of exercise, opting for the proverbial couch and TV. Perhaps, after abandoning their pot-induced hippie days, they coasted through their twenties and thirties with no exercise. During their forties as their weight increased and breathing labored, reality set in. In search for something more rigorous than lifting a can of beer, they are not motivated by jogging, tread mills, or triathlons. Day hiking is the answer ... easy to do and not boring.

Both groups may share the desire to do something sporting and rigorous, yet returning to the creature comforts of civilization: hot tub, Epicurean delights, and a good night's sleep. The quintessential day hike can satisfy the need for a renaissance of rigorous physical activity for the 40 plus age group, and, any other age group.

Health Benefits: Unless you have been living on or under a couch, you must have noticed the preponderance of evidence claiming rigorous physical exercise is great for your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Studies have shown brisk, low-sweating walking can help the heart just as well as more vigorous activities. Furthermore, brisk walking for 10 hours or more at high altitude is marathon-like achievement and a lot more interesting.

And for an extra bonus, rigorous physical activity may prevent or delay Alzheimer's Disease!

Conclusion: Hike!

Day Hiking Tips and Safety

For outdoor lovers the world over, day hiking is at the top of their lists for preferred ways to spend the day. Whether you're a weekend warrior or serious backpacker, there's something to be said for taking time out from contemporary life's ultra-fast pace to get back in touch with nature.

Heading out to the trails for the day brings with it many implicit benefits. Of course, there is the obvious fact that day hiking is a fantastic workout and quite enjoyable for nature enthusiasts. But it can also provide you the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors with your family or significant other. Whether you're trying to find some time for just yourself and the outdoors, or attempting to make time for the most important relationships in your life, day hiking is a great way to achieve either.

It's important to note that a good day hike requires a few necessities. Without them, a fun day in the outdoors can quickly take a turn for the miserable. Below are the key essentials that all day hikers – from beginners to seasoned veterans – should be familiar with.

- Proper planning is important. Obtain trail maps, guidebooks, trail distance, estimated time required and any other information before you leave on a hike. Then leave a copy of your plan with someone that's not going on the hike.
- Keep trail maps and guidebooks in a waterproof ziplock bag.
- Consider using a GPS.
- Check weather conditions and forecast.
- Consider the ability level of everyone in your group, when choosing a hike.
- It's very important to tell someone of your plans and when you expect to return. In an emergency, this could help with the rescue. Check in with them when you get back.
- Never hike alone. Always go with a friend.
- Don't pack too heavy. Keep your pack weight as light as possible.
- Take plenty of water – 2 or 3 quarts per person. Staying hydrated will help maintain your energy level.
- The temperature is always cooler in the mountains. Plan and dress accordingly. Dress in layers.
- Start early so that you have plenty of time to enjoy your hike and the destination. Plan to head back so you finish your hike well before dark.
- Hike only as fast as the slowest member of your group.
- Pace yourself. Don't hike too quickly. Save your energy.
- Stay on trails unless you have excellent navigational skills.
- Never approach wild animals. They may look cute and harmless but they are very unpredictable and can be very territorial and protective. Always be alert and aware of your surroundings. In most cases, the animals are more afraid of us and will run away. Do not attempt to feed wild animals. Most injuries occur when people try to feed them.
- Look out for snakes, spiders and other critters. Watch where you are walking, be careful when picking up sticks or rocks and look around before taking a seat. Again, snakes are usually more afraid of us, but if they feel threatened or if you make sudden movements they may strike. Stay calm and slowly move away from them.
- Be careful where you are walking. Watch out for low branches and loose rocks. Take it slow through mud and water and be careful of loose leaves on the trail. Stay away from steep cliffs and other drop off areas.

Look out for brush with thorns and learn to identify poisonous plants.

- Keep track of your progress on the map so that you know where you are at all times.
- Take turns leading and following trail markers. Share decisions.
- Pack high energy snacks like granola, energy or fruit bars, GORP trail mixes, fruit, candy, beef jerky, bagels, or pita bread, etc.
- Don't drink soda or alcohol when hiking. They will dehydrate you.
- Use a purification system for water from a natural resource.
- For blisters or hot spots use moleskin or bandages immediately to stop further damage and to relieve pain. Keep your feet dry – change socks often.
- Hiking sticks or poles may help make your trip a little easier by giving you some stability on wet trails, and reducing strain on your legs when going up or down slopes.

- Be aware of your increased exposure to ticks when hiking in the outdoors.
- Protect yourself against other insects such as bees, ants, mosquitoes, flies, etc. Not only can they be annoying, but they can cause quite a bit of pain and discomfort. Many people have severe allergic reactions to their bites and need to carry necessary medical supplies or seek medical attention. Again be aware of your surroundings. Refer to Keeping the Bugs Away for more details.
- Bring a whistle on hikes. Three short whistles mean you are in trouble and need assistance.
- Learn to identify the many things you will discover as you hike.

Day Hiking Checklist

Planning and preparation is necessary for all outdoor activities. A checklist is a great resource. Your lists will vary according to the type of hiking you have planned, the places you are going, the time of year and the length of your trip. Add or remove items to suit your individual needs.

- __ Day Pack
- __ Trail maps/guidebooks
- __ Compass/GPS
- __ Water in canteens/water bottles
- __ Water treatment system
- __ First aid kit/medications/moleskin
- __ Flashlight
- __ Pocket knife
- __ Waterproof matches/fire starters
- __ Snacks/extra snacks
- __ Rain gear
- __ Extra clothing
- __ Sunglasses
- __ Sunscreen/chap stick
- __ Extra socks
- __ Sweatshirt/jacket
- __ Whistle
- __ Insect repellent
- __ Hat
- __ Money/ID
- __ Camera/film/video
- __ Binoculars
- __ Toilet paper
- __ Watch
- __ Notepad/pen
- __ Hiking stick/poles
- __ Bandana

- __ Cell phone
- __ Ziplock bags

Basic First Aid Kit

- __ Personal medications
- __ Roll bandages
- __ Adhesive tape
- __ Antiseptic wipes
- __ Sterile gauze pads
- __ Cotton swabs
- __ Tweezers
- __ Safety pins
- __ Scissors
- __ Bee sting kit
- __ Sinus medications
- __ Tissues
- __ Bug repellent
- __ Sunscreen
- __ Notepad/pen
- __ Sterile compresses
- __ Splinting materials
- __ Personal information/contact person
- __ Ipecac
- __ Razor blades
- __ Plastic bags
- __ Small bottle of water

- __ Blanket
- __ Other personal needs
- __ Small mirror
- __ Triangular bandages
- __ Misc. Band Aides/bandages
- __ Anti-acids (Tums, Rolaides)
- __ Antibiotic cream
- __ Aspirin/Ibuprofen/Tylenol/Naproxin
- __ Ace bandages
- __ Sunburn lotion
- __ Burn ointment
- __ Eye drops
- __ Poison ivy cream/cleansers
- __ Heat/cold packs
- __ Small flashlight
- __ Latex gloves
- __ Antibacterial soap
- __ Thermometer
- __ Coins for emergency phone calls
- __ Antibiotic soap
- __ Butterfly bandages
- __ Twine
- __ Mole skin for blisters
- __ First aid manual
- __ Nail clippers