

The Right Stuff

by

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One of the most difficult things for a hike leader to do is watch hikers learn lessons the hard way. It truly is painful. Let's look at some areas that crop up time and again and look at solutions that will be less trying for everyone.

Water

Water is an essential of life and nowhere is that more clear than on a hot day on a long hike. It is difficult to get new hikers to realize how much water they will need and the consequences of dehydration which starts with a headache, then fatigue and exhaustion and can lead to kidney stones and bladder infections. You should pee frequently and your urine should be light coloured. Drink water when you get up in the morning, before the hike (from water kept in your car) and drink frequently on the trail. Most hikes will need two litres of water and if it is hot, three. Drink when you get back to your car. Avoid "sport drinks", coffee and juices. What you need is water.

Footwear

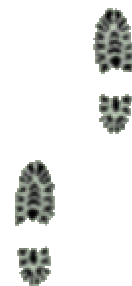
Many new hikers avoid buying good boots (I have heard all the "reasons" and none have convinced me). You need proper, sturdy hiking boots (and this does not include running shoes or "trail shoes"). They should be well fitted and well broken in. If you have paid much less than \$200.00 for them they probably won't do the job they are intended to do and that is to protect your feet. Please read the article on my web site on boots and socks.

Trail Guides

Trail Guides are just that and they should be current; again I have heard all the excuses for not carrying a current book and they just don't cut it. Trails change and if you are going to venture into unknown places have the best information that you can get.

Safety Equipment

Safety equipment includes a whistle, blister kit (moleskin and a small pair of scissors), space blanket (to cover yourself if you are on the ground for a while) and a first aid kit to deal with cuts, scrapes and sprains/strains. More information on first aid kits will appear in a future Right Stuff articles in the GVTA Newsletters.



Hat

The hat for the sun. I know why you don't like to wear a hat. they look funny and they mess your hair. Get over it! Wear one when the sun is hot, they protect your skin and could save you from heat exhaustion.

Other Clothing

When the weather is warm cotton clothing is not much of a problem, uncomfortable maybe, but not a real problem. However as the weather cools and becomes wet cotton clothing will wick the heat away from you and can lead to hypothermia. Look for the newer high tech fabrics and you will stay warmer, drier and safer. Please read my web site on Clothing and keeping Dry.

Poison Ivy

Unfortunately there is lots of it along our trails. The irritant is an oil from the plant. You can keep it away from you with long pants and a new product that is like a pancake makeup that is a clay which absorbs the oil. After a day on the trail have a hot shower and scrub with soap. Wash your socks and pants to get rid of the oil.

Wood

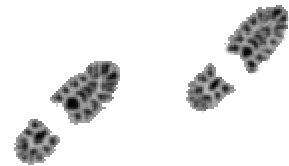
Wood on the trail can be very slippery when wet, especially those "water bars" that our good friends the trail captains use to divert water from gouging our trails. The rule here is to walk over or walk around wood on the trail, don't step on it or you could be in for a nasty fall.

Know Your Limitations

If you are new to this great activity start slowly, try some of the easier hikes at a slower pace. Once you are comfortable with this type of hike you can start to challenge yourself a little more. A hike once every week or two is not going to get you in good physical shape and may even be counter productive. If you want to get yourself ready for the longer faster hikes, you will need two or three periods of aerobic activity a week; that is, walking, running, aerobic classes, stair master, biking, etc.

Enjoy the trails safely!

Greg



Note:

This article first appeared in the 1999 Summer Newsletter of the Grand Valley Trails Association. It was reformatted for this article and for the GVTA website. Greg is a very experienced hike leader and instructor. He has been a longtime member of the Bruce Trail Association and serves on the GVTA Board of Directors. In his spare time Greg teaches hiking and map and compass courses through the Adult and Continuing Education division of the Waterloo Region District School Board.