Backpacking – Level 4

Advanced Tips

Blister Avoidance

If you've ever been on a long hike, you have probably had a few blisters in your day. Avoiding blisters is not as hard as it may seem.

1 - A lot of hikers swear by putting duct tape over their heels before putting on their boots. Some claim this will prevent blistering. Try it out you might be surprised.

2 - Secondly, wear liner socks. These help wick moisture away from your feet, making it harder for blisters to form.

3 - Lastly, wear good boots and make sure to break them in before you go hiking. This may seem like a beginner lesson but I'm always surprised to see people wearing flip-flops or tennis shoes on long and arduous hikes. Good boots provide ankle support and keep your feet dry. Additionally, Moleskin is a great product to use in the field if a blister should begin.

Research your hike

Research your hike before you go. Again, this may seem elementary, but you would be surprised at how many people just go hiking up into the mountains before actually familiarizing themselves with a map of the area. If you're planning a long hike, take the time to look at the routes and trails and any escape routes you may need to use if the weather gets bad

Lightning Avoidance

Avoid hiking in the afternoon above tree line. Lightning does not kill a lot of people in Colorado, but it does have the potential to. Lightning safety is very important and it's also really simple. If you can, start your hikes as early as possible, even before sunrise. This will ensure that you are down from tree line before the afternoon thunderstorms. Granted, there is always the possibility for morning storms, so be sure to research the weather report before you begin hiking. Learn the saying, "If you can hear thunder, you can be hit by lightning."

Pace yourself

The key to a long and steep hike is to keep an even and slow pace. A lot of difficult hikes are accomplished simply through mental endurance. A slow pace will ensure that your mental attitude is positive.

First Aid

Learn wilderness first aid and bring a first aid kit with you. Wilderness first aid is a different type of first aid class that teaches you first aid techniques for wilderness situations. For example, you might learn how to create a sling out of materials found in the woods. You will also learn about how to recognize the signs of altitude sickness and how to treat and prevent it.

Foot work
Have you ever observed the footwork of a very experienced hiker? They tend to walk very efficiently, at a constant pace, often without looking at their feet.

For example, there are a lot of very rocky trails in New England, especially in the White Mountains in New Hampshire. If you were to try hiking them by climbing up or over all of the rocks on the trail, you'd quickly burn out the big leg muscles in your legs and run out of gas.

However, there's a way to preserve your energy on these long approach hikes. Instead of stepping on and over the big rocks, try to walk between them, taking the route with the smallest elevation gain possible. Taking small steps like this will preserve your leg muscles all day. It also makes it possible to keep a steady pace, which is physically and mentally less taxing.

Check local weather reports.
Preparing for the elements is one of the most important things to remember when planning a hike. Stay informed by using the internet, radio or tv to find your local weather conditions and remember that conditions can change rapidly while you are hiking.

- Always check weather conditions before heading out.
- Warm weather hikes may require 2 or more liters of water.
- Make sure to bring the appropriate gear for the conditions you will be facing.
- Avoid dangerous conditions like extreme cold, or thunderstorms.
- Waterways can become dangerous after and during storms, be aware of flash flooding and slippery conditions.

Remember! There are lots of ways to get weather reports. Use them all when you are headed outdoors.

Clothing

Clothing will depend on only a few things, including your personal preference.

- Comfort - *obviously you want clothing that is comfortable.*
- Price - *choose the gear or clothing that will give you the most bang for your buck but stay within your means.*
- Necessity - *only bring what you will need. A wool sweater wouldn't be needed for a summer afternoon hike.*
- Durability - *use clothing that is tough yet flexible to allow for greater range of motion.*

- Layers work best for cold and cool temperatures, it traps heat in the airspaces and makes it easy to remove a layer if you get too warm.
- Staying covered up in warm weather will actually help keep you cooler and protects against UV exposure.
- Hike boots or shoes should not be "broken in" on a long hike.
- A good hat will protect against the sun and rain.
- Dress for the temperature
- Hiking boots or shoes should be comfortable
- Try to keep the color neutral unless you need to be seen like at night or during hunting season. Many hiking purists can't stand brightly colored backpacks because they are an eyesore in the woods.

Remember! Shop around for the best prices on shoes and gear. Off season can be a great time to stock up.

Learn Trail Etiquette



Some simple etiquette can go a long way in making everyones trail experience more enjoyable. Though the actual "rules" for trail use very area to area there are some that are common knowledge..... and common courtesy.

Some universal rules regarding trail use:

- **Share the trail** - common rule is bikers yield to horses and hikers, hikers yield to horses and horses yield to none.

- **Leave only footprints and take only pictures** - many government protected areas carry stiff fines for disobeying these 2 common courtesy rules.

- **Stay on marked trails** - keeps you safe and protects flora and fauna.

- **When in a group remain in single file** - this keeps the trail from widening and will allow others to pass more easily.

- **Avoid hiking after heavy rains or severe storms** - Not only will the trails be muddy and slippery, there could be downed trees, washed out bridges or other hazards. Not hiking on wet paths also preserves the trail conditions.

- **Read any trail guides available for the area you wish to hike** - this will keep you informed of any special information or restrictions in effect for the area, like camp fire bans, dangerous trail conditions or threatening animals.

- **Keep the noise to a minimum** - you may be surprised to find that there is a world of things you will hear if you just listen

- **Report any problems to park authorities** - trail damage, vandalism or people disregarding the rules may be a harm to you and themselves

Remember! You will always run into someone who has no concept of trail etiquette. It may be a cyclist who doesn't have a bell to notify you of their approach or a dog owner who doesn't pick up after Spot. Keep an eye open for them because they probably aren't keeping one open for you.

Plan your route.

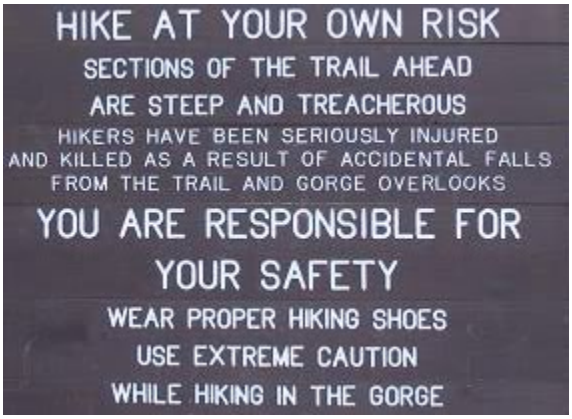
Know where you are going and how long it will take. A few minutes spent looking for a map online or plotting out a walk using a local road map could save hours of frustration later on.

Local parks and hike trails usually have a group or organization that takes care of them. Do a google map search in your area and you might be surprised what you find. Or just search for a website using the name of the trail system you will be using, you are bound to turn something up. One last place you can check is your city's website or city hall, they may have local maps available for free as tourist give-aways.

- Plan your route ahead of time and follow it.
- Tell someone where you intend on hiking or walking and when you plan on returning.
- Use maps or trail guides to keep track of you position in the woods and stick to clearly marked trails.
- Talk to local hikers to learn about new trails.

Remember! Local trail guides contain tons of useful information. Things like the types of animals and plants you will see and what the trail difficulties are will be included. They usually included emergency information, special trail information and history as well.

Know your limitations.



Let the slowest member of the group set the pace is an old hiking saying and for the most part it's a great summary for this category. Knowing what you can do will save you from getting into areas or circumstances that are dangerous or uncomfortable.

I have seen people hiking steep hills and rugged terrain in flip flops and sandals. Not knowing what type of gear is needed to keep you safe is a limitation in my opinion. Without knowing what gear should be used can be dangerous at the worst of times and uncomfortable at the best of times.

Physical conditioning is the most obvious limitation people will face when hiking. Just stay within your means and hike at a pace that will allow you to continue for the length of the hike. Stop if necessary to rest and get moving when you are ready.

- Put the slowest member of the hike group in the lead and let them set the pace.
- Improper gear is a limitation.
- Start out small and work your way up to bigger and better trails.
- Hiking can be demanding physically, if in doubt about your condition, consult your physician.

Remember! Honestly assess your condition and have every member of the hike group do the same. It's best to be honest about things before starting than to wait till you are 2 hours into a hike to let everyone know you have a bad hip.

Backpacking Level 4 Requirements

1 – What are the four steps to plan your route?
2 – What does it mean to assess your health?
3 – What is Trail Etiquette? What are the 8 rules?
4 – What are the three things you can do to avoid blisters?
5 – What is the saying for lightning?
6 – What is the saying for thirst?