
TRAIL TIPS

Helpful Hints for Hiking

GOT WATER?

As we've all noticed, it's gotten quite a bit warmer over the last few weeks here in the Southwest, so I thought I'd touch on one of the most important items one needs to have in one's backpack.

Water. And how much is needed for any given hike. And the many different ways to carry said water from point A to point B. A gallon of water weighs approximately eight pounds. So how one carries that water can be an important factor contributing to an enjoyable hike or a shoulder aching forced march.

Most outdoors organizations agree that the basic rule of thumb is one liter of water per two hours of hiking. There are, of course, many variables that dictate the right amount of water to lug up the trail in one's pack. Difficulty of hike, ambient temperature and humidity, and pre-hike hydration to name a few. And let's bear in mind that a liter of water weighs around two pounds, so it adds up quickly.



Speaking of pre-hydration, when you wake up in the morning, you've hopefully slept for six to eight hours. During that time, you probably didn't drink much water. Most people are dehydrated immediately upon waking. It's a very good idea to drink a liter or so of water before you leave the house to head for the trail.

Know the weather and hike conditions you are going to experience on the day of your hike. These factors will weigh heavily on how much water you should bring. Many of our trails have no shade. If the humidity level is going to be 30% or less, your body will be evaporating water even if it's relatively cool on the trail. One should take a sip of water every fifteen minutes or so when hiking.

By the time you feel thirsty, you're already starting to get dehydrated. If you need a drink, be sure and let the Hike Leader know you need a stop. If you don't have to urinate by the end of a two or three hour hike, you have probably not been getting enough hydration. Unless you already purged some hydration during your hike behind a convenient bush.

Early signs of dehydration are headache, slight nausea, and disorientation. Additional symptoms include dry, hot skin, flushed appearance, and lack of any sweat. Treatment is cool compresses, move victim to cool shade, and fluids with electrolytes.

I generally am a B hiker, and I always take a minimum of two liters of water with me. More often than not, I schlep three liters of water up and down the trail. Why? I'd rather have a little too much water than not enough. I recently completed a three hour, six mile hike in Skyline Regional Park with the B's, and only had about half a liter left of the three I started out with.

I'm not going to say much about water additives that some hikers prefer to use, only that they're out there. There are many good electrolyte supplements available for those that desire them, but I personally feel that supplements are only necessary for extreme conditions or extended hikes. Although, if and when I ever steel myself to do an A hike in October or April in Arizona, you just might find a packet of electrolytes or a bottle of Gatorade in my pack. Over-hydration can be just as bad as under-hydration.

So how does one carry one's precious liquid out into the wilderness? There are many containers available, and whatever works for you is just dandy.



Until recently, I used reusable water bottles. They usually come in one liter sizes, can be thrown in the dishwasher, and are relatively inexpensive. Camelback makes very good ones that I can recommend. There are many others on the market, with threaded caps, sippy tops, straws, etc. Most all are fairly durable and long lasting.

Having said that, a couple of months ago I experimented with using a Camelback water bladder in my backpack. When bladders first came on the scene many years ago, I scoffed at them. With their narrow fill necks and hard-to-clean interiors, they seemed a bacterial colony waiting for a place to happen. Since then, water bladders have improved greatly. Many have wide-mouth openings that you can get a dishrag into to clean easily, and are made of materials that are germ resistant.

I am now a water bladder fan. I like the fact that I can now have a sip of water whilst ambling down the trail; no scrabbling for the bottle in my pack side pocket, which often required slipping my pack off of one shoulder to reach. My water also stays cooler in the shade inside of my pack. One

unexpected advantage was how the load felt in my pack. The same amount of water in my bottles felt distinctly heavier. This is because the bladder rides right next to your back, moving it closer to your center of mass. I don't get that pendulum feeling from all that weight hanging out on the sides of my pack.

Disposable bottles work, too, but I personally am not a fan of lugging four or five bottles around. The average disposable water bottle is a half liter or less, so it would take six of them to hold my desired quantity of fluid. I shan't get into the environmental impacts of disposable bottles, but that's a factor as well.

So, in summary, it really does not matter how you carry your water into the desert, only that you carry plenty of it. It is the single most important piece of gear that you will need. I would much rather carry too much water instead of having three or four of you carry me back to the trailhead.

That wraps up this issue, and this season's editions of Trail Tips as well. TT will be back in October. I am including my email address at the bottom; please feel free to send me any questions, comments or suggestions for future topics. I wish you all a SAFE, active, and hydrated summer. Happy Trails!

Burt

burt.hill@gmail.com