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# TRAIL TIPS

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## Helpful Hints for Hiking

### Whatever Shall I Wear?



It's that time of year here in the Greater Southwest, with big temperature swings from low to high. From frigid, frosty 40 degree mornings to warm, sunny 75 degree afternoons, one has to dress appropriately to venture out into the wilderness we are lucky enough to experience.

How to manage it without carrying that bulky getup you see on the left?

Layers. Lots and lots of layers, in my case.

I was born here in the Southwest, but moved to Michigan in the early 80's. Every February, I asked myself what on earth could I have been thinking?! If Man had been meant to survive there, he would have been designed with more fur.

Well, I'm back in the surroundings I love and temperatures that don't make my bones shriek in agony in the mornings. But I have noticed that the tolerance I built up for even moderately chilly temps has flown north permanently, and weather that I used to wear T-shirts and shorts in now requires at least a fleece over-shirt and pants. I'm perfectly fine with that, however. The benefits far outweigh the disadvantages.

Instead of the bulky Michelin Man suit pictured above, I now possess many lightweight and medium weight fleeces, windbreakers, sweatshirts, and long sleeve T-shirts. I own several different sets of hiking pants, made with varying weights of materials and zip-off legs. I choose my layers carefully after checking the forecast for the day of the hike.

Most of my outer layers can be compressed easily into my backpack. My heavier fleece jacket can be slung from the elastic bands on the outside of the pack. If needed, fleece gloves are stowed in an outer pocket. My heavier hiking pants are chosen, and the light GoreTex ones stay home in the closet.

Which segues nicely into fabrics and materials. For the most part, materials don't matter that much for the type of hiking we as day hikers participate in. I would advise wearing light colors to reflect the sun for the most part. But if you're an avid hiker, check into the old and new materials available. Wool has always been a great standard, but now there's Merino or Smart Wool, GoreTex, DryFit cloth, nylon blends, etc. Many of these are great at wicking moisture away from your skin, dry quickly in the sun after a brief rain shower, and are durable. Cotton is really not so great in the outdoors, but I really like the way it feels next to my skin, and is usually my base layer of clothing. Your mileage may vary. Most importantly, wear the clothing that you are comfortable in over the changing conditions of the day. Comfort beats fashion on every level, in my humble opinion.

Clothing is not the only thing needed to be comfortable and safe in the outdoors. The sun can be very harmful at these elevations and latitudes. Just look around you when you're out in public. How many bandages and dressings do you notice on people's faces, hands, and arms? I've seen an alarming number in the crowds I hang out in. And most are due to removals of skin cancers.

It's a common topic I hear at gatherings. "Yes, I just had this squamous cell removed from my honker, and I have to go back next week for a basal cell I just noticed on my forehead." We live in a harsher atmosphere now than when I was growing up here back in the Seventies. I remember actually going out on my lunch hour at ASU to sit in the sun and tan! Sunscreen?! Naw, just pass the baby oil, thank you.

Nowadays, doctors advise that we apply a sunblock of SPF30 or greater just to go to the grocery store! Seriously!! My better half has nagged gently reminded me of this on numerous occasions. I now take sunscreen pretty much every where I go. There's a tube of it in all of our vehicles, backpacks, and usually on the kitchen counter. It's delivered by the case from Amazon every six months, on a recurring shipment.

Apply your sunblock 20 minutes before exposure, and don't forget to reapply every 2 hours or so whilst outdoors. Partly cloudy days can actually magnify the UV rays, so slather up even if it's cloudy with peeks of sun outside. I'm channeling Rene, here...

I still hate having to wear the greasy sticky stuff. Good sunblock is not cheap, dust sticks to it like glue when on the trail, it stains my clothing, and it can be a pain to wash off in the

shower. But I'd rather put up with all of those nuisances than have to undergo surgery, or worse, to be able to enjoy the great outdoors and keep my skin from killing me.

I have found another article of clothing to reduce the amount of sunscreen I slather on my exposed skin, however.

Arm sleeves.

I love 'em. Rene' got me a set to try, after enduring my whining about how hot my lightweight over-shirt gets. The sleeves actually perform quite well, and aid in evaporative cooling with just a little breeze. I prefer the plain white ones, but they're available in colors and prints as well. You could be out on the trail in fashionable lavender sleeves, or sport some gnarly cool tats running down your forearms. I get mine at Amazon, \$9.95 a pair, but I also hear they're available at most of the golf pro shops here in Sun City.

Light cloth or thin leather gloves can be very comfortable, especially using trekking poles, and double as an extra layer of protection from the sun. I see them often on the trail, but don't use them personally. They make my hands sweat. And I still have those cases of sunblock coming in every six months...

Another item I'd like to share is cooling cloths. I had to do a test trip in Mexico one summer, and Rene' got me a gel-filled cooling wrap for my neck. I scoffed at it a little of course, but dutifully stuck it in my backpack and promised to try it. That little sucker worked great! I was working in a huge parking lot, climbing in and out of parked semi-trucks all day. I soaked that wrap in cool water every night, the little gel beads greedily sucking up the water, kept it in a zip lock bag till it got hot outside, and wound it around the base of my neck. It cooled the blood as it circulated through my carotid arteries and jugular veins, and kept my head from boiling. The wrap would last about 4 hours at 105 degrees until it needed another dousing.

In a pinch, a kerchief will work very well. Soak it in water from a stream or water bottle, don't wring it out much, and knot it loosely around your neck. Douse it in water every 20 minutes or so. Instant evaporative cooling for your noggin!

And lastly, speaking of your noggin, ya really ought to have a hat. Preferable one with either a wide brim or one of the desert hats with the fabric "skirt" around the sides and back. A vented one is the best. A lot of heat exits the top of your head, and if the heat can't escape easily, you cook your computer. Then you stumble and hurt something else. Keeping a cool head can be a life saver in more ways than one!

That's gonna wrap up this edition of Trail Tips. I hope everyone enjoys the upcoming Holidays, and I'll have more fashion tips (or not) next year!

**SAFE** and Happy Trails to you and your families!

Burt