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# TRAIL TIPS

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## Helpful Hints for Hiking

### A Thorny Subject

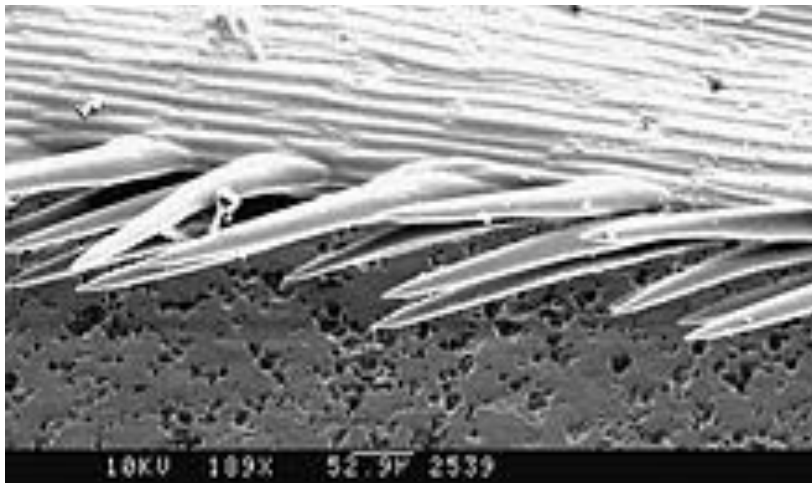


You've all seen 'em. Those cute, fuzzy teddy-bear cholla cactus. Yes, they're very pretty to look at.

But don't touch 'em! Most of us have made this mistake before with these thorny flora. One thinks one can get away with just a little poke on a thorn to see just how sharp it really is, and the next thing you know, the dad gummed thing is stuck in your finger!

There's a very good reason for this. And I have to give a tip of the hat to Van Judd, Sun City Hiker and purveyor of all things historical for enlightening me as to the reason. Yes, I know they're sharp and pointy. But did you know they have barbs on them, like little fish hooks, designed to inflict maximum pain on the unsuspecting victim when trying to remove one?

See for yourself:



The pointy end is to the right. As the thorn penetrates the skin, the barbs lay down against the spine. As soon as you try to pull the sucker out though, guess what happens? Yup, those little barbs spring out and resist your puny attempts with your fingernails or teeth to remove them from your epidermis.

Tweezers, hemostats, or needle-nose pliers are the best tools to perform a thornectomy on yourself. It takes a bit of effort to dislodge them. And a certain amount of pain.

Some of the barbs on certain types of cactus are teeny-tiny. There's a variety of Prickly Pear cacti that has what looks like little nubbins on their paddles, but they're actually little patches of spines. These can be a real challenge to remove.

One method I've seen to fully remove small spines involves spreading good old Elmer's glue on cotton gauze and applying it to the affected area. Let dry, and peel the gauze off. It will hopefully pull the spines out as it is peeled from your abused skin. You might lose a little hair too, especially the gentlemen out there, but cowboy up guys! You'll know what your spouses go through when they wax their unwanted follicles.

Here's another thing I learned from Van - cactus spines can work their way through the sole of a sturdy hiking boot! Yep, that barb action keeps the thorns from working their way out of the bottom of your boot, and as you walk, it can keep working its way in. The next thing you know, you have this sharp pain in your foot. At that point (Get it? Sharp pain? Point? I kill myself...) the only thing you can do is to take apart your boot and pull the offending spine out from the inside.

It's best to get the spines out of the sole of your boot as soon as you notice you've stepped on that cholla pod on the trail, before the spines have a chance to really imbed themselves deeply into the rubber. Even if you break them off, the tip may find its way to your tender feet. And really, don't we have enough problems with blisters, arthritis, planters fasciitis, etc?

And if you want to go an extra step (please, somebody stop me!), when you see a cholla pod laying in wait on the trail for the next unsuspecting boot, take a moment and scoot it off to the side with your hiking stick. The next person in line will thank you. Well, perhaps not, but they should.

So let's follow our golden rule, and Take Nothing But Pictures, Leave Nothing But Bootprints, and not collect any thorny reminders of our hike.

Have a **SAFE** hike out there!

Burt