



HIKING SAFETY

Don't travel alone

Like any rule, there are exceptions. If you're just going for a stroll in a nearby, well-traveled area you're as safe there as anywhere. But if you travel through isolated areas, with steep canyons and winding trails, you can easily get lost. And, of course, there are lots of gradations in between. Use your judgment. Traveling with a hiking partner will help you in many ways, especially if he or she is an experienced hiker. People in pairs are much less likely to panic. They can assist one another up steep grades and apply first aid when needed. He or she can travel back to the trail head if you're injured. And, if needed, body heat can be much better conserved when there are two traveling together. Hypothermia has killed more than one lost hiker before they could be rescued.

Know where you're going

Stay on clearly marked or well-traveled trails until or unless you are experienced enough to take the uncommon route. Yes, they're sometimes not as interesting. But getting lost is interesting in a very unpleasant kind of way. A map, a compass and/or a GPS unit is a must for any kind of serious hike. Naturally it has to be usable in the area you hike. Not all units will continue to function in every area. Get the details of where you plan to go and ask someone who knows.

Take some basic gear

You can go overboard on gear. But for anything more than a simple, two-hour hike over easy terrain, a large chunk of peace of mind can be bought very cheaply. Take a lighter or matches. Matches can get wet, but a lighter can run out of fuel. No plan is perfect. A knife, especially one with lots of genuinely useful (as opposed to merely impressive) gadgets can be a literal lifesaver. A simple first aid kit can also be a lifesaver. Gauze and bandages, anti-bacterial cream and other standard items are essential. Anti-itch and sunburn pain reliever can be greatly appreciated sometimes. Aspirin is one of pharmacology's most under-appreciated drugs. All these things are small and lightweight. No need to take a miniature doctor's office, just the basics. Of course, you have to have some first aid knowledge. There are times when aspirin can be harmful. Gauze and bandages don't do you any good if you don't know the difference between venous and arterial bleeding. A flashlight is a must. Toilet paper can be really handy too.

Take basic provisions

Water or other fluids like sports drinks are an obvious essential. You can lose a lot of fluid even over a two-hour period on a hot day. Heat stroke can kill, but is easily preventable. Even dehydration can radically reduce physical performance. Just remember water weighs about 8 pounds per gallon. Take what you need, not much more. Except in emergencies, avoid drinking out of streams. Forget TV commercials. Natural water sources, not always but often, are loaded with bacteria. Just remember, animals bathe and eliminate in them. Take enough food to last you the anticipated hike time. About 1 pound per day (depending on what you bring) is average for a medium-sized male. You can last longer without food than water, so trade off when you have to.

Exercise common sense

Among other things that means don't get carried away with your enthusiasm – and a belief in your invincibility – and tempt fate. Despite what you may have read in and about some places, Mother Nature is quite indifferent to hurting you when you do dumb things.

Notification

It is always good practice to let a loved one or a friend know where you are going. Let them know exactly what time you hit the trail and how long you plan on being gone. If something happens and you get lost, this will expedite and search and rescue operations.