

# Hiking – Level 3

## Day Hikes to Extreme Hikes

### **The Day Hike:**

Day Hiking is the ultimate recreational activity. Trails are everywhere. From easy walks around a lake to challenging hikes up a mountain, almost everyone can participate.

Anyone who can walk can do this. The goal is to walk (hike, trek) and come back the same day to indoor plumbing and a bed with an expensive mattress. The attractiveness of this "sport" is each person sets a goal and strives to achieve to it. Rather than a casual walk in the evening after dinner (also, a good thing to do), this endeavor requires some planning and a commitment. Whether it is a challenging, "extreme" or an easy hike, the answer is in the eye of the beholder (or in the feet of the hiker?); specific hikes will be too hard for some and too easy for others. The main goal is to achieve a sense of accomplishment similar to more rigorous sports like ultra-trail or marathon running but with a lot less stress on the body.

Day hiking is becoming popular with all ages. Most everyone shares the desire to do something sporting and rigorous, yet returning to the creature comforts of civilization and a good night's sleep. The quintessential day hike can satisfy the need for this rigorous physical activity.

Health Benefits: Unless you have been living on or under a couch, you must have noticed the preponderance of evidence claiming rigorous physical exercise is great for your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Studies have shown brisk, low-sweating walking can help the heart just as well as more vigorous activities. Furthermore, brisk walking for 10 hours or more at high altitude is marathon-like achievement and a lot more interesting.

### **The Day Hike:**

**Go Early:** One key to a successful long and satisfying day hike is to start in the night. I thought you said it was a "day" hike? Lose some sleep. Deal with it. It's OK. Think about it. Would you rather start out in the dark or end in the dark. You can always sleep after the hike is over. Getting on the trail at 3 or 4 in the morning sounds extreme, but it really makes sense. High altitude hikes can be prone to afternoon thunderstorms. It's much better to reach the summit by 10-11am and be well on the way back down during vulnerable afternoon hours. Another benefit of heading out at or before dawn is cooler weather. Less heat means less sweating, therefore less water needed and a lighter load.

**Go Light:** It's simple: carry less, go further. A minimalist approach is suggested to food, clothing, and other items. Each hike should be planned considering the risks involved. One advantage to extreme day hiking on well-established trails is the reduced need for survival items since it's harder to get lost or hurt yourself.

No one is suggesting you should not bring your single lens reflex camera with tripod, arctic parka for that summer blizzard, first aid kit capable of heart bypass surgery, enough food to feed everyone on the trail, and enough rain gear for the 100 year flood. However, every pound you carry will decrease the probability of your success. Of course, the tricky part is, the extra one pound you do carry could save your life.

**Go Fast:** Actually don't go fast. The goal is to minimize time on the trail by developing a consistent pace with a minimum of rest stops. One can usually spot a novice hiker by bursts of speed, followed by many rest stops. The net effect is usually a slower trip.

**Go Far and Go High:** Early+Light+Fast enables one to go Far+High in one day and return to the creature comforts of a roof and indoor plumbing. A marathon-like distance with large elevation changes are made possible by this thinking. The personal challenge is to go as far and high as you can ... what someone else does is not the point.

**Food:** Trail Mix may not be the best food on the trail for a hike that has high levels of aerobic and anaerobic exercise. Nuts and other oily, fatty foods are harder to digest when your body is using your oxygen elsewhere. Also, fruit in excess can cause digestive distress. DayHiker has found the best foods on the trail are sport bars like Clif Bar, Promax, Balance Bar, etc ... and, for a sandwich that travels well and always seems to taste good: PB&J.

**Water:** By studying the weather, the water sources, the trail, one can carry the minimum amount of water, which is probably the heaviest thing one carries on a day hike. An interesting idea is to stash water bottles on the way up, to be retrieved on the way down. A water filter may be an efficient way to go to minimize weight of carried water. The disadvantage is the time it takes to find water, stop and pump.

**Clothing:** If you have cotton or wool clothes don't even think about hiking with them. Burn them, or give them to homeless street people who are cold and don't move fast. This may be tax deductible. Consult your tax attorney.

There are many high tech fibers that wick (transport your sweat into the air) and are warm (since not wet it feels warmer) and are incredibly light. Some of these trademarked fibers are coolmax, ultralight microfeece, microfiber, capilene, polartec, ultrawick, tactel, spandex, supplex, gortex, and lycra.

By layering these materials it is possible to hike with incredibly light clothing, even in freezing weather. Try it. It works.

**Hats:** This is easy. Wear the largest, lightest brim hat you can stomach. Yes, it's dorky looking but do it anyway. It keeps you cooler and lessens the chance for wrinkles and skin cancer.

**Sunscreen:** See the part of the last sentence on hats. High altitude and summer time are brutal to the skin. Low altitude and any sun are brutal to the skin. Put on sunscreen on all days, cloudy

or not, preferably a moisturizing sunscreen to provide extra relief against the damaging UV Rays. Consult your local dermatologist.

**Shoes:** The success or failure of an extreme day hike is tied to shoe selection. Heavy, stiff hiking boots are at a decided disadvantage to a light, flexible, comfortable shoe. Every pound of shoe is equivalent to carrying 7-9 pounds on your back. Minimize shoe weight by selecting a cross-trainer with ankle support, a trail-running shoe, or one of the lighter hiking shoes that are readily available.

When you go to buy a "hiking" shoe you will almost always be encouraged to buy one with "great ankle support" and a steel shank so you won't "feel the rocks." This makes sense if you are carrying a 60 pounds pack and are going through small rocks and other rugged cross-country terrain. This also makes sense if you are the shoe salesman trying to make a \$225 sale as opposed to a \$85 lighter shoe. If you are hiking on a trail these are not a priority, and a cheaper shoe will do. I actually have gone on long day hikes in running shoes.

**Socks:** It's amazing how important sock selection is when engaged in an long day hike of many hours. The coarse threads of hiking socks will eventually begin to dig into your skin causing much discomfort and blisters. Avoid this by wearing a thin nylon sock, a liner, as a first layer, or just on pair of light ones. Bring an extra pair for replacement half way. There is something really refreshing about putting on a pair of socks half-way through a killer hike.

Before undertaking that marathon hike consider this - new socks, old shoes. It's not a good time to see if those new shoes work.

**Hiking Poles:** This is the best-kept secret for success on the extreme day hike. Common in Europe, and mandatory equipment for mountain climbers, trekking poles give an advantage, which most people don't understand until they try them. The uninformed usually comment or think, "Where's the snow?" "Aren't they heavy?" "Do they help?" "Are you really a wimp?"

It is estimated the use of trekking poles can add up to 20% efficiency to the body by transferring some of the load to your arms. Even more significant is the stability the poles provide, greatly reducing the need for leg muscles to continually provide balance. The chances of a sprained or broken ankle, the bane of a hiker a long way from help, is greatly reduced by the use of poles. Stream crossings, wet rocks or logs, ice, loose rocks, and steep areas are made safer. Using a very light shoe that does not have much ankle support is made possible with poles.

A single walking stick is better than nothing, but is more awkward than two lightweight trekking poles. Additionally, telescoping poles can be stowed in your daypack at times when they are not needed. Some models have shock absorbers built in which allows less stress on the wrists when stroking hard with the poles. Another feature is a slight taper on the hand grips which make for a more ergonomic grasp.

## **Training**

The best way to train for any sporting event is to train specifically for that event. In other words, if you want to hike a long distance trail, it's best to get out on a trail to simulate the conditions of the big day. However, for many people, finding a trail to train on may not be convenient.

Walking in your local neighborhood or in a park is an excellent alternative.

Roughly six weeks prior to the hike create a schedule and begin training in which your walking miles slowly increase.

During the first two weeks of training you could probably get away with walking just three days a week. During the first week, two of those walks should be at least 2-3 miles long, and the third walk should be in the 4 to 5 mile range. During the second week, you should ratchet up your long walk day to around 6 or 7 miles. The other two days should consist of walks of at least 3 miles per day. If you're going to be climbing any significant elevation on your hike, you should try to include as many hills into your routine as possible.

During week 3, you'll probably want to add a fourth day of walking into your schedule. Your long walk day, which preferably should be 7 days from your big hike, should now be in the 8 to 9 mile range.

During the final week before your hike, you should still be walking on at least 2 or 3 days. Each of those walks should be in the 4 to 6 mile range. Use the days leading up to your big hike to train on some shorter trails. Make sure you're well rested though. At a minimum, the day before your hike should be a rest day, meaning, no training on that day. You might even consider taking two days off prior to your hike. This way, your leg muscles will be well rested and you'll be ready to conquer your goal.

On the day of your hike, make sure you take enough food and water with you to keep your fuel and hydration levels up.

## **What is an "Extreme Day Hike?"**

"Extreme Day Hike" ... sounds like the words don't go together (oxymoron), like "jumbo shrimp," "boxing championship," "airplane food," or "middle-east peace." "Extreme," which indicates a difficult variation of a physical activity, would appear to be an exaggeration of the simple feat of walking during the day. While overused today as an adjective, "extreme" does seem to fit.

For a person not in shape, an extreme day hike may be a walk around the shopping center. On the other hand, for a trail or marathon runner, they would have a different opinion. "The Extreme Day Hike" is one that consumes most of the day in a challenging adventure in a spectacular natural setting. To be an "extreme" hike it will have an elevation gain of 4000 feet +, 14 miles round trip, and on a trail.

Additionally, any hike to over 14,000 feet in altitude is considered to be an extreme day hike due to two challenging factors: Lack of oxygen and quick changing weather. Even after acclimatization, some people do not cope well with the high altitude and become ill. Secondly,

the danger of an unexpected storm bringing heavy rain, snow, or thunderstorms is greater at higher altitudes.

### **Extreme Hikes:**

Usually Extreme Hikers pick a tough and rugged terrain or wilderness. They then hike deep into their targeted area and use their survival skills until they finish their journey. Extreme Hiking is not your typical stroll through the National Park. It is way above that.

Extreme Hikers must be in excellent condition and have a knowledge of survival skills that are unsurpassed than the average hiker. The Extreme Hiker will condition his body physically in the areas of strength and endurance. They design a personal workout plan that prepares them for the challenges that they will have to deal with in their hiking environment. Once they have prepared, they will usually try their skills out on a smaller scale. For example they might just do a three day two night 15 mile a day trip. They will do this several times before they try a major extreme hike.

Although there are some individuals who like to go it alone, it is very wise to go with a group of five or more. By using a group, you can share the work load that is necessary. It is also much safer to travel in a group.

A good rule of thumb when preparing your pack for your Extreme Hiking trip, is to prepare for two individuals. This will ensure enough supplies for yourself. Learn how to load your pack properly and minimize your necessities.

Once your group picks out a trail, terrain, or area, be sure to let others know your position in case of an emergency. Have some form of communication like a cell phone. Carry extra batteries. When you make out your menu to eat on, make sure that you have the proper amounts for the energy that you will burn. Have plenty of water. Don't count on finding water. Many of the streams and lakes aren't fit for your digestive system.

Be sure you know how to handle health situations like blisters, hypothermia, dehydration, stings and bites, altitude sickness, and broken bones. Have a first aid kit that is well equipped. If you use medication, keep it separate in your backpack and easy to get to.

Survival skills are a necessity. You can learn these skills by going to survival classes. Don't just think that reading a book will solve your problem. Until you actually put your survival skills to use, you know nothing. survival skills are serious business and should be taken that way. Yours or your partners life might depend on them.

Once you are ready to go, respect nature. Don't litter or destroy things. Always clean up your mess. Take pictures for memories of a lifetime.

Last and most important of all, Extreme Hiking is a serious sport. If you are traveling with a team, get along together. Look to help each other out. Never take chances or risks.

### **Hiking Level 3 Requirements**

- 1 – What is a day hike?
- 2 – What is an extreme day hike?
- 3 – What is an extreme hike?
- 4 – List 8 things you need to pay specific attention to and why.
- 5 – Day hike, Why go early, go light?
- 6 – Plan and do a day hike in a State or National Park near you of 10 miles or more.