

Before Leaving Home...

Hiking begins before you reach the trailhead.

While it's natural to want to jump into the car on a whim and drive to a favorite hiking trail, doing so is not necessarily the wisest of choices. Hiking is a lot like painting a house in that the preparation is just as important as the actual activity itself. So before you head out, follow these tips:

Let people know where you'll be hiking and when you expect to be back.

This is important whether you are going on a day hike at a nearby park or on a multi-day hike. On a backpacking trip, plan where you'll be camping each night as well as the section of trail you'll be hiking each day, in case you need to be pinpointed for an evacuation. The best insurance is a written reminder with all your information left behind with someone who is not going and who is expecting you back or to check in by a certain time.

Study your maps before you begin the trip. Have a good idea of which route you will hike. Look for possible emergency exit points as well as places where water refills are likely. Identify more than one water spot since dry spells can be unpredictable.

Time control plan. Predetermine where you ought to be at certain points of the day using your map. Factor in your walking speed based on the number of people on the hike as well as their fitness level. Also, for every 1000 feet of elevation you gain, add about an additional hour of hiking time. Remember that when traveling as a group, you are only as fast as the slowest person in the group.

Graph your route. Highlight the route you will be taking. Mark potential campsites, water stops, and major road intersections.

Check the weather and pack accordingly, keeping in mind that the weather at the base of a mountain and halfway up a mountain can be vastly different. Rain gear (one of the 10 Essentials) should be brought even if no rain is predicted, as wet clothes can cause a person to become hypothermic even with temperatures in the 50's.

