

# Crossing a Stream

Getting to other side (mostly) dry.

When hiking, sooner or later you're going to come across a stream that doesn't have a footbridge to allow a dry crossing. In spring in particular, many creeks and streams run faster and deeper due to snow melt at higher elevations and seasonal rains. Your choice will be to either cross the stream or turn back. Don't forget that last option – it's far better to be safe than rescued. It's also OK to go a little up or down stream to find a better crossing, but remember you're going to have to find the trail again, so pay attention if you do this!

Keep in mind prior to crossing, that the water may be moving much faster than it appears. It may also be deeper than you think. For safety's sake, assume it is both, when considering a crossing. Even shallow water is surprisingly strong and can exert significant forces.

Prior to crossing the stream, place all your electronics and anything that needs to stay dry (matches, map, etc.) in a waterproof case or dry sack. Then remove your boots and socks and put on sturdy sandals or water shoes if you have them, or if you don't have any, put on your boots (but not socks) again. It is not recommended to cross barefoot.

Do not cross wearing long pants as they will catch the current and make it more likely that your balance will get thrown off and will also increase resistance as you walk through the water. Especially in cool weather be sure you have dry clothes to put on when you get to the other side. If you don't have extra clothing in your pack, it is better to cross in just your base layer or less and keep your outer layers in the dry sack.

In cooler weather dry clothing is a must; wet clothes easily lead to hypothermia. Upon reaching the other side, remove any wet clothing and put on dry clothing. Do not put dry clothes on top of wet clothes – the wet clothes will draw heat from your body whether they are covered or not.

When you're ready to cross, put your pack back on but do not buckle the sternum strap or waist belt. This allows you to get out of the pack more quickly if you end up in the water and the pack pulls you down. If you have trekking poles, use them to help steady you while crossing. Be alert for submerged rocks, sticks, and logs as they are likely slippery.

While fording the stream, look up and focus on your destination. Don't look down at the moving water as that can be disorienting.

