

It happens like this; you plan a winter hike and the roads seem fine and the snow isn't too deep, so far so good.



Then the trail is in the shade and it becomes glare ice. This happened to me on a hike on the Toronto section of the Bruce Trail a few years ago. People started slipping, falling and it was just luck that no one was hurt. What have I learned since then? Hopefully I have learned some things that will keep hikers on the “up and up.”

Better Boots

Boots are better now and the ones that I am currently using, Dunham Waffle Stompers, have a softer sole and a design that gives a better grip. The boots help but just like the tires on your car they do slip. Check my “Right Stuff” article entitled “Boots and Socks” for more information on the topic of hiking boots and socks in the pursuit of happy feet.



Icers – Canadian, Eh!

Along came a Canadian invention called “Icers” [www.icers.nb.ca]. This ingenious device is a Vibram sole with stainless steel screw heads around the periphery, similar to the studded tires that were around a few years ago. The “Icer” is held to your boot with a set of Velcro straps. Walking with my Icers on any type of ice is like magic! No more slipping and sliding, you just walk normally with little fear of falling. Starting in December they live in the trunk of my car and by January they are in my pack for the winter. You won't have to use them very often but when you need them you need them! When it is icy walking on the streets of the city I use them as well. They are usually available at the Shoppers Drug Mart – Medical Supply stores and ISECO, Industrial Safety Equipment Company, which specializes in footwear. They cost about \$40.00. Check the Icer's website address (above) for a Store Locator link. Another product one may consider is the Yaktrax. See www.yaktrax.ca for details. There are similar products; however, they are not as robust and perhaps not able to withstand a boot on a long hike.



Trekking Poles

When I started hiking in the mid '70s I did not use them, then I went to one, now two. Now I have switched to a titanium pair and they provide good support and I even get a little upper body workout with them. As the mountain goat says, “Two legs good – four legs better.” Also, I replace the bails with wider ones when snow shoeing. I have written a “Right Stuff” article on Trekking Poles, so check it for more information.

Balance Training

Vic, my tai chi teacher, tells me that as soon as you walk you are relying on balance, as you do not have both feet on the ground at the same time. Enter balance exercises. Vic wants us to be able to stand on one foot; **eyes closed** and build up our balance until we can do this for a minute. It is not easy! Anna, my young cross country ski champion friend, tells me I have to visualize my foot and lower leg as I try to stand on one foot and that will improve my balance. I have given up the chair at my desk and use a balance ball to sit on and I try to do a few minutes a day on my wobble board. Hazel, a psychiatrist friend says, “Greg, it is the first thing to go!” Let's see if I can keep my balance for a while yet.

Core Strengthening

As we have more “labour saving” devices around we have little to keep our strength up. Balance depends on many things and one is having a strong core. A program of crunches and similar exercises should help. Pilates exercise work on strengthening the core; an evening class per week is a great workout

I know that icy conditions will come up again on a hike but I also know that now I am better prepared. And, remember, “Upright is OK!”

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Happy upright walking,
Greg



About Greg

Greg is an experienced and certified hike leader and instructor. He has been a long time member of the Bruce Trail Association (www.bruce-trail.org), the Grand Valley Trails Association (www.gvta.on.ca) and other hiking organizations. Greg has an extensive background in aviation and air traffic control. Greg has taught introduction to hiking courses and map and compass courses for several years. Currently his website, Greg Vincent's Hiking Site, resides at <http://home.golden.net/%7Egvincent/>

Other The Right Stuff articles are:

- Footwear - Boots & Socks (how to care for your feet & how to choose boots & socks)
- Clothing (how to keep warm & dry)
- Packs (what kind to carry & what to put in them)
- Bugs (how to avoid them & prevent their bothering you)
- Trail Safety (how to ensure you hike without incident)
- Trekking Poles (modern ones - what are they & why use them)
- Winter Walking (all the peculiarities of hiking in cold climes)
- Medical Emergencies (how to prepare for & respond to a medical emergency while hiking)
- Warm Weather Walking (the scoop on hiking in warm weather)
- Snowshoeing (If you can walk, you can snowshoe – no ifs, ands or buts.)
- Global Positioning System or GPS (What is it and how it works.)