

Trekking poles are an idea whose time has come. Look at a photograph of a group of hikers from 20 years ago and you may see the odd walking staff but no modern trekking poles. Check the difference there is in a group of regular hikers now. Many hikers are using one and increasingly two poles and for some very good reasons.

Why Poles?

The prime reason that I use a pair of trekking poles is that they make trail walking a whole lot easier. As someone far smarter than me said, “Two legs good; four legs better.” When using poles the whole motion is smoother, similar to cross-country skiing and none of us would try that without ski poles.

Let’s look at some more advantages.

1. An increase in stability with fewer trips and falls.
2. An upper body workout that regular walking neglects.
3. An aid to the knees, both on uneven trails and especially on downhill situations
4. Those wet rocks and logs are not as much of a challenge during stream crossings.

Pole Characteristics

There are many companies now making poles. All work, some better than others. We want poles that are *light*; the pair I use are titanium and their “swing weight” is quite light. We also want *comfortable grips*, even though we do not really “grip” the pole, rather we have our hand in the comfortable strap in such a way that our weight is on the heel of our hand, similar to the way we hold our cross country ski poles. Some poles have an “*anti shock*” *feature* that cushions each pole plant but not an absolute requirement and this feature tends to drive up the purchase cost.

Baskets fit on the end of the pole and should always be used. Many poles just come with them attached but not fitted to the end of the pole. The idea is to stop the pole sinking into mud, etc. For the winter I change my small baskets for larger ones that do not sink as far into snow and make my poles ideal for snowshoeing. I tried cross country ski poles for snowshoeing but found them not as useful as my regular trekking poles once equipped with bigger baskets.



Pole length is important. The modern pole comes in three sections and most are easily lengthened and shortened (if this is not easy on the poles you are considering, consider another pair – the procedure should be quick and easy). When walking on a trail that is mostly level the pole is most comfortable if your forearm is parallel to the ground. If you have a hill to climb, shorten the pole and chunk it in behind you, making the hill a little easier. If you have a descent, lengthen the pole and set it ahead of you – much easier on your knees and it adds more stability.

Etiquette and *Safety* are important too. In your hands are poles with carbide tips that could give someone behind you a pretty good poke. Please be aware of those behind you. Extra care should be taken at stiles. Rather than trying to carry your poles with you over the stile, try placing the poles through the fence and picking them up after you are over the stile.

Trail walking is something that many of us plan to do for a long time and trekking poles will help us keep at it.

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Happy hiking,
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.brucetrail.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/>

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- Clothing (how to keep warm & dry)
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- 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)
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