

One of the most difficult things for a hike leader to do is watch hikers learn lessons the hard way. It truly is painful. Let's look at some areas that crop up time and again and look at solutions that will be less trying for everyone.

### **Water**

Water is an essential of life and nowhere is that more clear than on a hot day on a long hike. It is difficult to get new hikers to realize how much water they will need and the consequences of dehydration which starts with a headache, then fatigue and exhaustion and can lead to kidney stones and bladder infections. You should pee frequently and your urine should be light coloured. Drink water when you get up in the morning, before the hike (from water kept in your car) and drink *frequently* on the trail. Most hikes will need two litres (2 L) of water and *if it is hot, three*. Check your water bottles for their maximum volume; that is, are they 1 L bottles? Some popular bottles only hold 500 or 600 mL. Drink when you get back to your car. Avoid "sport drinks", coffee and juices. What you need is water.

1 L Water Bottle



### **Footwear**

Many new hikers avoid buying good boots. I have heard all the "reasons" and none have convinced me. You need proper, sturdy hiking boots and this does not include running shoes or "trail shoes". They should be well fitted and well broken in. If you have paid much less than \$200.00 (regular price) for them they probably won't do the job they are intended to do and that is to protect your feet. Please read my The Right Stuff article Boot and Socks.

### **Trail Guides/Map(s)**

Trail Guides are just that and they should be *current*; again I have heard all the excuses for not carrying a current book and they just don't cut it. Trails change and if you are going to venture into unknown places have the best information that you can get.

### **Safety Equipment**

Safety equipment includes a whistle, blister kit (moleskin and a small pair of scissors), space blanket (to cover yourself if you are on the ground for a while) and a first aid kit to deal with cuts, scrapes and sprains/strains. More information on first aid kits appears in other The Right Stuff articles such as Medical Emergencies.

### **Hat**

Most of the time a hat is intended to shield you head from the sun. I know why you don't like to wear a hat. Hats look funny and they mess your hair. Get over it! Wear one when the sun is hot, they protect your skin and could save you from heat exhaustion. In winter a different hat will do the same thing in addition to conserving body heat and keeping your ears toasty.

Wide Brimmed Hat for Sun



### **Other Clothing**

When the weather is warm cotton clothing is not much of a problem, uncomfortable maybe, but not a real problem. However as the weather cools, and the cotton become wet with perspiration, such clothing tends to stay wet and will wick the heat away from you and can lead to *hypothermia*. Look for the newer high tech fabrics and you will stay warmer, drier and safer. Please read my other The Right Stuff article entitled Clothing and Keeping Dry for further information about wick-away fabrics/layers.

### **Poison Ivy**

There is lots of it along our trails. The irritant is oil (urushiol) from the plant – pretty well any part of the plant. You can keep it away from you with long pants and a new product that is like a pancake makeup that is a clay-like substance which absorbs the oil. The oil could get onto your skin from touching clothing (e.g. pant leg) or the tip of your trekking poles. There is nothing worse than transferring some of this oil to such places as inside the

mouth, eyes and genitals – some unfortunate hikers will tell you about their unpleasant experiences. After a day on the trail have a hot shower and *scrub with soap*. Wash your socks and pants to get rid of the oil. Learn to recognize it and avoid it. Google it if you do not know what poison ivy looks like. There is a common low-lying form and a climbing woodier form. Check “Poison Ivy, Western Poison Oak, Poison Sumac”, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada - Publication No 1699 by Gerald A. Mulligan [[http://sci.agr.ca/ecorc/poison/index\\_e.htm](http://sci.agr.ca/ecorc/poison/index_e.htm)]

### **Wood**

Wood on the trail can be very slippery when wet, especially those "water bars" or “box culverts” that our good friends the trail captains use to divert water from gouging our trails. The rule here is to walk over or walk around wood on the trail, don't step on it or you could be in for a nasty fall. The pressure treated wood of footbridges can be very slippery when wet. Step cautiously.

### **Know Your Limitations**

If you are new to this great activity start slowly, try some of the easier hikes at a slower pace. Once you are comfortable with this type of hike you can start to challenge yourself a little more. A hike once every week or two is not going to get you in good physical shape and may even be counter productive. If you want to get yourself ready for the longer faster hikes, you will need two or three periods of aerobic activity a week; that is, walking, running, aerobic classes, stair master, biking, and so on.

Enjoy the trails safely!

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](http://www.bruce-trail.org)), the Grand Valley Trails Association ([www.gvta.on.ca](http://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:

- “On the Up and Up” or Icy Walking
- 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)
- 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.)