

BACKCOUNTRY TRAVEL HINTS

Tip #1: Be prepared--for weather. This preparation can be both physical and mental. Bring rainproof clothing and be sure to carry it in your day pack always. Things packed on the llamas are inaccessible during the hike to camp. Even if the day looks clear in the morning, afternoon thunder showers have a way of materializing out of--you guessed it--thin air. Mentally, you should be prepared to experience life amid the elements. Rain, and even snow, are not uncommon in any mountain environment. That doesn't have to mean the trip is ruined. Some of the best hiking is on cool, bug-free, dustless days when the mist moves up and down the mountains, and the waterfalls tumbling off the canyon walls come alive. Throw in a couple extra plastic garbage bags and you'll find a use for them on damper days.

Tip #2: Don't forget a good book just in case we're tent-bound during inclement days or in case you turn in early on a frosty evening. My friend Toni Landis says "take a book of no redeeming value"--the juicier the better. If you forget one, don't despair. We have a small "traveling library" of field guides and books on the natural history of the area.

Tip #3: Dressing for success in the backcountry means having layers of clothing that will keep you warm and dry should the weather turn cool. I highly recommend capelene, polypropylene or silk long underwear. These fabrics have the ability to "wick" moisture away from your skin. In this way they prevent you getting chilled as the moisture evaporates, and allow you to stay warm while hiking in cooler weather. These fabrics are lightweight, fold into nothing in your pack and make wonderful sleepwear.

Tip #4: Don't forsake comfort for style. Hiking in jeans can be hot in warm weather and a disaster in rain if they get wet (and cold and heavy). Supplex nylon is a good alternative, and a pair of lightweight fleece pants are comfortable loungewear in camp. On cool days hiking in shorts over wicking long john bottoms is a great way to go. If it turns drizzly, just add a pair of rain pants.

Tip #5: Want to know a secret? Mosquitoes cannot bite through tight weave nylon. Ripstop or supplex pants are ultra light and very versatile. When it's hot, they're light enough to wear alone and when it's cool, just throw on a pair of long underwear bottoms underneath. A lightweight nylon windbreaker or wind pants can also serve in a similar fashion. Keep them in your daypack to help out up on breezy ridges and in camp on buggy nights.

Tip #6: Keeping warm at night is an important part of enjoying your backcountry journey. I love big, overstuffed Mallard duck print flannel sleeping bags, but only in a cozy mountain cabin with a wood stove. They really can't compare to today's synthetic equivalents of the optimum goose down sleeping bag when a frosty wilderness night rolls around. If you're a cold sleeper, bring a bag rated down to at least 10-15°. Also, leave a bit of your tent door open at night to allow your tent to "breathe", otherwise you'll wake up to think it's rained inside your tent from the condensation. And, it's hard to believe, but if you wear too many clothes to bed you'll actually be colder than if you simply wear a wool cap and socks with a lightweight long john top.

Tip #7: Blisters! To avoid them, make sure your boots are well broken in. Light-weight hiking boots have a definite advantage -- they quickly become comfortable mile in and mile out. If you know you have some perennial problem areas with your boots, be sure to carry a Spenco® Blister kit or other blister remedies in your day pack. The minute you feel a "hot spot" on your foot, STOP and take care of the problem. Some hikers find that wearing a thin pair of liner socks inside their heavier wool pair to reduces friction on their feet. Go with what you're used to and, again, well-broken in boots are essential.

Other ideas shared by experienced trekkers:

- Keep a bandana in your daypack for drying your feet after creek crossings.
- Keep a couple of plastic bags (sandwich size or 1 qt.) in your day pack for trash or wet items.
- If you fly in, be sure to take your complimentary "air sickness bag" off the plane. It's the perfect tent trash bag.
- Bring along an old sock or rag to help tidy up your tent.
- Be sure to bring extra batteries for your camera, flashlight and any other battery-dependent gear.
Murphy's law applies.
- LADIES ONLY: Panty liners are the way to go in the woods, obviating the need for excess toilet paper during quick trail side pit stops.