



How to Prepare for an Outdoor Adventure



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You are reading this because you and I have one thing in common: We Love Adventure!



I have been very fortunate to go on countless adventures across the globe from glacier trekking in Patagonia, to horseback riding in the Chilean Andes, to diving with Great Whites Sharks at Seal Island off the coast of South Africa. There is something about adventure that keeps us coming back again and again. When I first started partaking in outdoor adventures, I have to say I was a bit unprepared. For some trips, I wasn't fit enough while in others I just did not know what to expect. I quickly realized that what could make or break the experience was preparation. I threw myself into developing a "preparation system" to ensure that I would never again be unprepared for an outdoor adventure.

A few summers ago, I was preparing to hike the infamous Chilkoot Trail. I had learned about this trail from a book about the Klondike Gold Rush. If you are not familiar with the Gold Rush, in 1897 and 1898, over 100,000 people from across the world came to Alaska and the Yukon Territory searching for riches. For many, the journey to the Klondike began with a trek along the Chilkoot Trail located in Dyea, Alaska.

I had two months to prepare for this thirty-three mile hike that is carved into the Coast Mountains on the border of Alaska and British Columbia. For many, the journey to the Klondike began with a trek along the Chilkoot Trail which starts in Dyea, Alaska.

I began to think about the preparation for all of my adventures in three main categories:

1. The Trail
2. Physical Fitness
3. Gear



1. The Trail

Research Your Trail

Understanding all aspects of the route that you will be taking is vital. You should know both the starting and end points of the trail, and have spent time studying a map to fully comprehend the path you will be taking. If you are in either a remote location or a national park, you will need to know if there are designated campsites and their locations. This will also help you determine where the water sources are. In addition, some trails will require you to have a permit to enter them so be sure to research this ahead of time.

Know Your Mileage

Knowing the total mileage of your route will help you plan the duration of your trip, and help you estimate the number of nights that you will need to spend camping, as well as, the amount of food that you will need to bring. In addition, it is important to compare your fitness level with the trip route so that you don't overdo it. For an example, most hikers do the Chilkoot Trail in four and a half days. However, our plan was to hike it in two and a half days. (Interesting enough we heard that a few weeks earlier, a pair of trail runners had completed it in just 10 hours!)

Know Your Terrain

While the length of your trip is important to know, understanding the terrain can be even more critical. There is a big difference between hiking on flat ground versus hilly ground especially when you are carrying a gear pack. Depending on the level of steepness this can really fatigue your legs. However, if the trail is an often-climbed one, it should have switchbacks in steep sections to make your ascents easier.



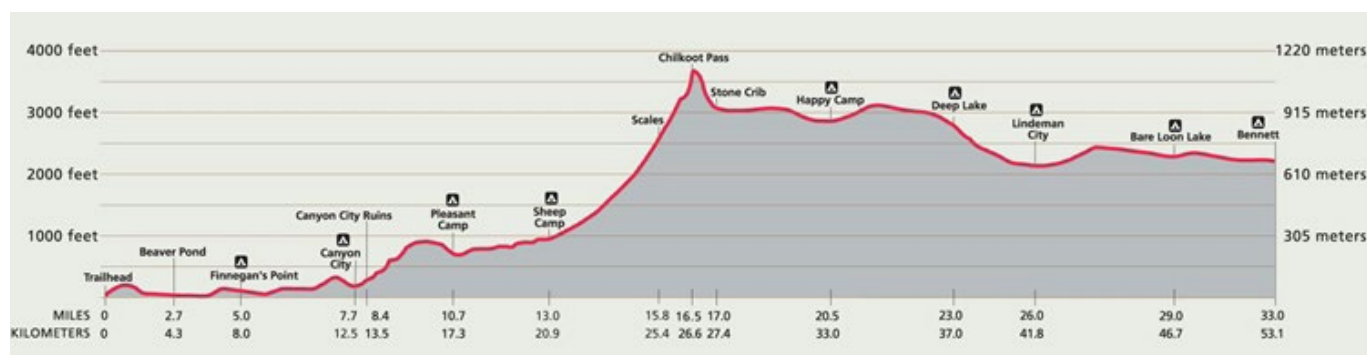
In addition, consider the type of ground you will be hiking:

- Is the trail packed dirt, loose sand, or rocky?
- Will there be snow on the trail?
- Does the trail get technical in places?
- Will scrambling be required or are there sections that might be outside your expertise such as mountaineering or rock climbing, where a rope or harness is required?

Know Your Elevation

Elevation can have a big impact on your trip. At around 7,000 feet, the body can start to feel the effects of elevation. Looking at an elevation chart of your trip can give you a sense of what to expect and will help you plan your routes more safely.

As an example, below is an elevation chart for the Chilkoot Trail:



Source: U.S. National Park Service

Weather

It is important to understand the expected weather conditions for a trail.

- What is the temperature range?
- Are there chances for rain and/or snow?
- Will weather be consistent throughout or are there various climates along the route?

In many mountainous areas, it is common to have dramatic changes in temperature at different elevations. Also, temperatures in mountainous areas can drop greatly at night. You could be hiking at seventy degrees F during the day and at night the temperature can drop below forty degrees F. It is important to be prepared for these changes.

History

Knowing about the historical significance and points of interest of a trail can really bring the adventure to life. Hopefully, you'll have the luxury of a guide during your trip who can help with the details. For the Chilkoot Trail, I read multiple books on the Klondike Gold Rush. One that I found to be very informative and entertaining was 'Klondike' by Pierre Berton. The author goes into great detail on what the trail was like for the miners to hike back in 1897. When we hiked the Trail, we actually saw remnants of the miners' supplies along the route, as well as, the foundations of the various towns that had existed over 100 years ago. These experiences made our trip that much more memorable.



2. Physical Fitness

Once you have a solid understanding of the trail it is time to plan your fitness regimen. For me, two months of training has always been a good time frame to prepare for multi-day adventures. However, depending on the difficulty and length of your trip, this could require more time. For example, three years ago I spent five months preparing for my climb up Mount Rainier in Washington State. Below are some helpful tips to assist you in planning out an appropriate fitness regimen for your adventure. However, I strongly advise you to consult a fitness professional and medical doctor to assist you with this process.



Train in a Similar Activity

One of the best ways to train for an upcoming trip is to do the same activity that you will be doing on your adventure. Whether it is hiking, mountain biking, or kayaking, doing the same activities will condition the same muscles and help prepare you. However, with work, responsibilities, and just life in general, it is often difficult to find time to do these activities during the weekdays. Many people do them on the weekend, and supplement their training with aerobic activity and strength / core training during the week. Some examples of great aerobic activities are running, cycling, swimming, and using the StairMaster®.

Aerobic Activity

- Running
 - For hiking and backpacking trips, running is a great way to supplement your weekend hikes in the mountains. If you are fortunate enough to live close to trails, trail running is always preferred to road running since it is closer to what you will experience in the mountains.
- Cycling
 - Cycling is a great aerobic workout that works the leg's muscles with a very low impact to your body and knees.
- Swimming
 - Swimming works the entire body, is low impact, and builds endurance and cardiovascular fitness.
- StairMaster®
 - For hiking and mountaineering trips, a StairMaster® closely resembles this activity. A good forty-five to sixty minute session simulates the uphill portion of your hikes that would typically wear you down the most in a multi-day outdoor adventure.

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Strength / Core Training

- While most outdoor hiking adventures place an emphasis on the legs, you should not underestimate how a strong core and upper body will better prepare you for your journey.
 - A person's core and upper body is critical in hiking, trail running, and mountaineering. You will often encounter situations where you will be forced to assume unorthodox body positions when either scrambling or doing light rock climbing. In addition, you will be carrying a weighted pack for extended periods of time. It is important to work the arm, back, shoulder, stomach, and chest muscles. I advise consulting a professional fitness trainer who can work with you in structuring an appropriate strength-training plan.

Replication

- As we discussed earlier, it is important to replicate the activities that you will be performing in your adventure as much as possible while training. This does not just mean in the actual physical activity but also in wearing and growing accustomed to the gear that you will be using.
 - Pack
 - You will most likely be carrying a pack for a portion or the entire duration of your trip. Your pack adds a considerable amount of weight onto your body frame and if you are not accustomed to this, it could make for a very unpleasant trip. For the Chilkoot Trail, I carried a 35 lb. pack. To prepare my body for this, each weekend

during my training hikes, I would ensure that my pack had the same amount of weight in it. This is a great way to prepare your body and muscles for your adventure.

- o Footwear

- The proper footwear can make or break a hiking trip. (We will talk more about this later on in The Gear Section.) It is important to train in the gear that you will be using on your adventure. Hiking boots, mountaineering boots, crampons, and micro-spikes can all affect your feet in different ways, especially if you are not used to them. They not only add extra weight and pressure to your foot, but also add a different dimension in the way you move your body forcing you to work different muscles. Wearing them beforehand can help alleviate foot pain, blisters, and other injuries.

- o Terrain

- We talked about terrain in the above section, as well as , the importance of knowing the ground type that you will be hiking on. When you have a good sense of the terrain then you can better understand how to train for it. Many trails have packed dirt, while others can be rocky. In cold weather areas, you could encounter ice and snow.

For those who have hiked up Mount Rainier, you know it is inevitable that you will encounter glacier snow on part of your journey. To prepare for this environment, a good way to replicate glacier snow is to hike on the soft sand of a beach that is located farthest away from the ocean. The consistency is very similar to what you will find on mountains covered with glaciers. Proper training and expertise in these varying environments can better prepare you for your trip and help to prevent injury.

Start Slow

- o Once your have booked your trip and have a sense of your training timeline, it is important to pace yourself and start out slowly. Map out the amount you will train each week, and note how the schedule will change as you get closer to your trip. My advice is to work with a professional fitness trainer and medical professional. In addition, peaking at the right time is very important as well. I see so many people who push themselves too hard early on in their training, then when they are ready to leave for their trip they are already burnt out. Start out slow and pace yourself! Gradually easing into your training also prevents injury, and allows your muscles and body to adapt to the physical activity at a more natural pace.

Stretching

- o Many of us often skip one of the most important aspects of proper training... stretching. Stretching has many benefits for our bodies.
 - Stretching increases:
 - o Flexibility
 - o Range of Motion
 - o Blood Circulation
 - o Muscular Coordination

- During outdoor adventures, we often put our bodies through unordinary and extreme positions that we don't normally do. Being flexible and having range of motion provides us with a greater ability to cope with these situations.
- Before stretching, it is important to do a light aerobic workout. A 5 minute slow jog will do the trick. Remember to never stretch while cold because it could cause injury. Also, stretching at the end of a workout is extremely important because muscles tighten up when worked. Stretching at the end helps to keep them lengthened and flexible while minimizing soreness and inflammation.



Footwear

This might be the most important gear item when it comes to hiking. You will be on your feet most likely for 8 to 10+ hours per day on uneven terrain. If you don't have the proper footwear, blisters and foot issues can completely ruin a trip. First, ensure that your shoes are made for hiking. Often times, I see people on a trail with running shoes. Running shoes do not provide the same support and traction as hiking shoes do. Next, when purchasing a hiking shoe, you should ensure that the shoes are waterproof. Also, weight is an important consideration, as well. Lightweight shoes can really save your legs on a long backpacking trip. Lastly, once you have selected your shoe, spend some time wearing them in order to break them in. You do not want to head out on the trail with a brand new pair of shoes that have never been worn resulting in blisters and other foot issues.

Socks

Selecting the right socks is just as important as buying the perfect footwear. Some hikers prefer wool socks while others prefer synthetic. I have used both extensively and in my opinion it is really up to the person. What really matters though is your "sock-system". Your goal is to avoid blisters caused by excessive friction during movement. To eliminate this, I recommend wearing two pairs of socks. The one pair acts as a barrier against the shoe while the other pair rubs against the other socks resulting in a softer and more forgiving surface. Also, the extra padding from the additional sock provides cushioning in areas of your feet that are prone to blister such as your heels. It is always important to bring an extra pair of socks since your other pairs can get wet during your adventure.

Outerwear

Remember to always prepare for the worst when packing your clothing. While the temperature may be expected to be seventy degrees F, you must consider the region and location of your trip. Wilderness and mountainous areas will always have dramatic changes in temperature. Daytime temperatures can drop over thirty degrees F or more at night. In addition, as you ascend into higher elevations, it typically will get colder. On a recent hiking trip to Mount Washington in New Hampshire, it was sixty-five degrees F at the base of the mountain and below forty degrees F at the top. Keep in mind, this was in the middle of the day! You need to be properly prepared for these changes while wearing the appropriate clothing.

Layering

Wearing appropriate clothes on the trail is all about layering. With the changes in both your body temperature and outdoor temperatures, you will be adding and taking away layers throughout the day to ensure your comfort. I like to break down layers into four categories:

- Base Layer
- Middle Layer
- Outer Layer
- Waterproof Layer



- Base Layer
 - o As temperatures most likely will drop on your adventure, it is important to bring along a warm base layer. A good base layer keeps moisture away from your skin and helps maintain body temperature. Note that it is best to stay away from cotton as it retains moisture. Instead, focus on a synthetic fabric that directs moisture away from the skin. Also, you should bring both a bottom (full pant) and top (long sleeve) base layer with you.
- Middle Bottom Layer
 - o Some people prefer to hike in shorts while others hike in pants. For an outdoor adventure, it is best to have both so that you are properly prepared for changes in both temperature and the elements. In order to keep your pack light, you can purchase hiking pants where the bottoms unzip and turn into shorts.
- Middle Top Layer
 - o It is smart to bring along a few synthetic short sleeve t-shirts. You will most likely become warm and sweaty during your adventure. Having a lightweight t-shirt to wear will prevent you from overheating. One long sleeve synthetic is also a good move to protect from cold weather and wind.

- Outer Layer
 - Depending on the location of your outdoor adventure you could be required to bring either a warm fleece or even a down jacket to ensure you stay warm if the temperature drops dramatically.
- Waterproof Layer
 - In addition to the middle-layer pants, have a separate waterproof bottom shell to protect from rain and snow. Also, an upper waterproof shell is necessary. Since packing light is an important consideration, you should also bring along an outer layer that is waterproof.

Hands

Keeping your hands warm and protected is extremely important. With just minimal exposure to the cold and wind, frostbite can set in very quickly. I always like to bring both a thin liner glove and a thicker waterproof glove. It's a good idea to have a waterproof glove that is durable so you can use it for scrambling and light rock climbing.

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Head

- Neck/Face
 - I often use a buff for my neck and face to protect against the wind, cold, and sun. I highly recommend them. Some products are specifically designed for UV protection. If you require more substantial face protective wear, you should purchase a neoprene facemask.
- Head Gear
 - I recommend both a baseball cap or a brimmed hat and a knitted cap. At times, the sun in the mountainous areas can be very strong. To avoid heatstroke and to protect your face from sunburn, a brimmed hat is advisable. Also, since nearly 50% of the heat in your body exits from your head, when the temperature drops, wearing a knitted cap will help keep you warm in cold weather.

The following list contains additional gear and supplies that you may find helpful for your trip. For a more complete list, you will need to check with the adventure travel company or your guides to determine what is necessary.

- Passport
- Food

- Electrolyte Tablets
- Energy Gels
- Head Lamp
- Sunscreen
- Lip Balm (UV)
- Two Nalgene Water Bottles
- Bug Spray
- Carabiners
- Sleeping Bag
- Sleep Mat
- Tent
- Hiking Poles
- Sunglasses
- Gators
- Batteries

Guide Equipment

If you are using a guide, he/she should have all of the equipment listed below but it is important to check with them since you may want to supplement in case it isn't in their protocol to bring these items. However, if you are not going on your trip with a guide, I recommend that you bring this essential gear with you.

- Maps
- Compass
- Satellite Phone or Communicator
- Bear Spray
- Knife
- Water Purification Tablets and/or Ultraviolet Water Purification Light
- First Aid Kit
- Nu Skin® and/or Duck Tape
- Waterproof Matches
- Portable Stove & Fuel
- Cooking & Eating Utensils

In Conclusion

For my Chilkoot Trail trip, knowing the route, being in the proper shape, and having the right gear, proved to be the perfect formula for my trip. We started our hike on the Chilkoot Trailhead on a beautiful day, with seventy degree F temperatures and not a cloud in the sky. We hiked along suspension bridges, waterfalls, and amid lush green wilderness. After thirty-three miles, we finally reached our endpoint, Bennett Lake. While I was hiking, I could only imagine what it would have been like in 1898 when hundreds of boats left these shores in what would be a five hundred mile run down the Yukon River to Dawson City in search of treasure and adventure.

I look forward to seeing you on the trail!

Jeff Bonaldi



Disclaimer

You should consult your physician or other health care professional before going on an adventure tour or participating in a fitness program to determine if it is right for your needs. This is particularly true if you (or your family) have a history of high blood pressure or heart disease, or if you have ever experienced chest pain when exercising or have experienced chest pain in the past month when not engaged in physical activity, smoke, have high cholesterol, are obese, or have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in physical activity. Do not start this fitness program if your physician or health care provider advises against it. If you experience faintness, dizziness, pain or shortness of breath at any time while exercising you should stop immediately.

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