

Out of Bounds

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

hiking

For several summers when I was a kid, my then-hippie parents packed my brother and me into a VW Microbus, and we toured the American and Canadian Rockies for weeks at a time.

Dad had a handful of walking sticks (we used the short ones), and he would decorate them with various carvings. With our pint-sized backpacks stuffed with trail mix and an orange Nerf ball for entertainment, my brother and I, despite our obliviousness, were able to witness the sublimity of nature that you simply can't see from the road.

Dad was thinner then, too, which is perhaps the second best reason to take a hike. Hiking burns about 240 calories an hour, as well as lowering high blood pressure, cholesterol levels and helping stem the onset of osteoporosis. It takes far less toll on the body — especially the lower back — than running or other high-impact sports.

Whether just a hike of a couple of hours or a long-term trek, knowing your physical limits and being prepared is imperative. Storms can come, ankles can sprain and, if you have a hankering to go off the path, it's surprisingly easy to get lost. Here's what you need:

Boots: They need to be comfortable and broken-in to avoid blisters. Your local outfitter shop should be able to

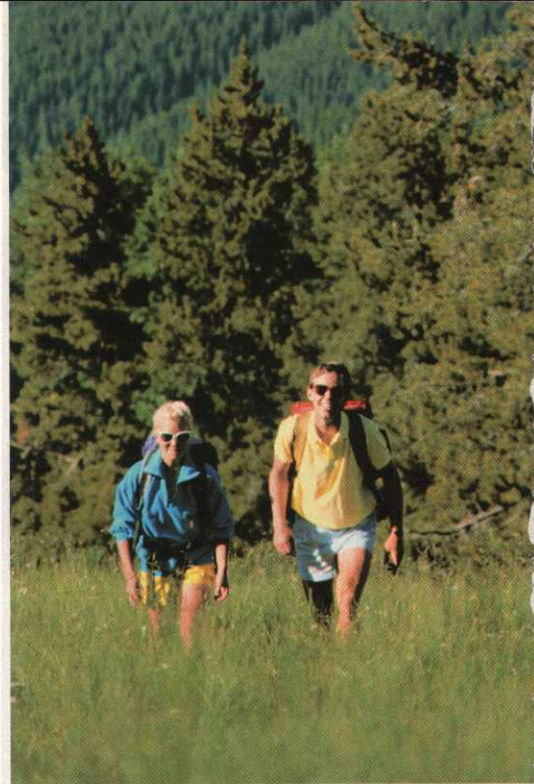
LACE 'EM UP, PACK A PACK AND GET WALKING TO REDISCOVER NATURE'S BEAUTY

BY MARK LUCE

get you in a good pair in no time. Remember to wear two pairs of socks — thin inner, thick outer.

In the pack: The American Hiking Society (AHS), a wonderful group that has a fact-filled Web site at www.americanhiking.org, recommends you pack the following for a day hike: one extra pair of socks; underwear; long-sleeved shirts or sweatshirts; parka or windbreaker; pants or shorts; hat; canteen(s); food (extra energy-boosting trail snacks like candy bars, energy bars, crackers and dried fruit); sunglasses and sunscreen; pocket knife with one cutting blade; can opener; scissors, matches or fire starter; first-aid kit; flashlight; map and compass; insect repellent; and a plastic bag to carry out the trash.

Finding a trail: The AHS also features a fantastic, easily searchable database with more than 30,000 trails, comments on those trails and contacts for more than 160 hiking clubs throughout the country. It's only \$2.50 a



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month for access. State parks, national parks and local outfitter stores are also good places to find trail maps.

In a society that gets more and more paved by the hour, it seems we forget about things like the high of physical exertion, the beauty of unspoiled nature and the meaning of exploring and adventure. Of course we don't want to encourage hikers to overrun the golf courses and plow across bunkers and greens. But spending some time performing the planet's oldest form of exercise carries with it physical returns and mental bliss, the perfect recharge for stress-laden lifestyles.

So lace 'em up, pack the pack, find a stick and get to ambulating, ya' greenhorns. Remember, the only thing you should leave on the trail is footprints.

Mark Luce, a free-lance writer, recently busted out his hiking boots for some foraging around his home in Lawrence, Kan.

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