

HIKE THE HILLS

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Introduction: Hiking can be used as a fitness tool for everyone: young to old. It can combine the cardiovascular benefits of running with the non-impact benefits of walking. It costs little, can be incorporated easily, and can be as easy or difficult as desired.

My goal for this class is to encourage you to come up with ways in which you can add hiking into your student's lives. Ideas include:

- Combine with an Orienteering unit. Teach using a compass and reading a map.
- Have students hike as an outside of school activity for credit; as a supplement to the regular curriculum.
- Encourage them take their active heart rates – are they in their target zone?
- Wear heart rate monitors – how long were they in their target zone?
- Start a hiking club.

Benefits: Hiking is a practical, easy to incorporate activity. It requires a minimal investment, can be done in a variety of locations, and can provide hours of quality exercise. Hiking can be done at an easy pace, taking time to really enjoy the natural surroundings, or it can be done at a fast pace, really pushing a person's heart rate above their target zone.

Hiking involves large muscle groups of the body, working not only on the health related components of fitness like cardiovascular development and muscular endurance, but also on skill related components of fitness such as balance.

Families can hike together providing quality time for parents and children together. It can be done in locations with breathtaking scenery. Opportunities arise to learn about local plants, wildlife, and history.

Athletes with overuse type injuries could benefit from low-impact, yet aerobically challenging hikes, adding needed variety to their training.

Safety/Hazards: Some precautions and suggestions follow to increase enjoyment of hiking.

Hiking alone. Hiking alone is not recommended – injuries can and do happen. If you insist on going alone tell someone where you are going and when you will return. Leave a note in your car at the trailhead with this information too.

Fluids. Proper hydration is essential when exercising outdoors and hiking is exercising. Plan on a minimum of about 8 oz of liquid every 30 minutes, depending on the temperature and elevation change. Don't drink from streams or lakes as they may contain parasites that can cause severe stomach problems.

Exposure: Wear a hat sunglasses, and sunscreen. Carry appropriate clothing for cold, wind, and rain.

Poison Oak: Poison oak flourishes throughout California. Its form varies from squat shrubs to climbing vines. Poison oak exposure can be a minor irritation for some people, yet a medical emergency for others. Learn how to identify the plant and avoid touching it.

Depending on the time of year the colors will change. In spring the leaves are green and there may be small yellow-green flowers. In late summer and early fall the leaves are deep crimson red.



Remember "Leaves of three? Let it be!"

Ticks: Ticks are present all year long, but more so during the rainy season. The best way to avoid them is to stay on the trails. Ticks hang on shrubs and tall grasses, detecting the carbon dioxide from passing animals or people. If desired wear long sleeves and pants. Brush yourself off frequently, especially after passing through tall grass. After a hike check yourself completely.

Rattlesnakes and Mountain Lions: Both can be present and dangerous in many locations of California, so knowledge is vital. Snakes will often sun themselves in open areas on cool spring days, and are found in shaded areas during hot days.



Rattlesnakes try to avoid contact with people but will bite if surprised or cornered. The best way to avoid them is to stay on the trail and avoid climbing over loose rocky areas. If you see one, it is best to walk slowly away – nothing sudden.

Mountain lion encounters are rare, but have happened. If you see a mountain lion don't run. Stand your ground maintaining eye contact. Try to make yourself look bigger using your jacket or pack. Then, slowly back away.

Animal Tracks: Look at the number of toes. Deer have two. Dogs, foxes, cats, mountain lions have four toes. Raccoons, weasels and skunks have five.



Raccoon 2-3"



Bobcat 1.5-2"



Skunk 1-1.5"



Grey Fox 1.5-2"



Walking Deer 2-3"



Mountain Lion 3-4"



Running Deer 2-3"

Trail Rules / Etiquette:

1. Carry out everything you brought in – leave only footprints.
2. Yield to horses.
3. Yield to hikers coming uphill.
4. Keep dogs on leash.
5. Don't trespass.
6. When hiking in groups go at the slowest person's pace or have rotating leaders.

Equipment: Some suggestions are below. Remember the Boy Scout Motto: Be Prepared!

Proper shoes
Backpack
Fluids
Light jacket
Sunscreen

Book or map of area / GPS
Binoculars
First Aid Kit
Food

Hat
Knife
Flashlight
Personal I.D.
Cell Phone

Resources:

There are hiking books for just about every place you could go. A couple of examples are:

San Luis Obispo County: Trail Guide. San Luis Obispo, CA: Sierra Club, 2001.

Martin, Don and Kay. Hiking Marin, 121 Great hikes in Marin County. San Anselmo, CA: Martin Press, 1995.

Of course the internet has everything. Here are a couple of great websites or just google "hiking" to find more.

American Hiking Society: www.americanhiking.org

How to find hikes near you: www.localhikes.com

Great overall resource with lots of articles and links to other outdoor activities: <http://gorp.away.com/gorp/activity/hiking.htm>