

# Selecting Your Preferred Style and Philosophy of Hiking and Walking

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. . . it is very easy to improve [the act of walking] by a little conscious thought what I regard as the most important single element in the physical act of walking: rhythm. An easy, unbroken rhythm can carry you along hour after hour almost without your being aware that you're putting one foot in front of the other . . . . With experience you automatically fall into your own rhythmic pace. But when you first take up real walking you may have to think deliberately about establishing a stride and a speed that feels comfortable . . . . You'll almost certainly have to concentrate at first on the important matter of not disrupting the rhythm unless absolutely necessary. I can't emphasize this unbroken-rhythm business too strongly.

—Colin Fletcher and Chip Rawlins, *The Complete Walker IV*, page 115

## **Central Issues Addressed in This Article**

What are the different styles and philosophies of walking and hiking and which do you prefer? What specific values underlie your preferred styles? If efficiency is an important value, how efficient is your current style? What would make your style even more efficient? Are you willing to practice (and maybe integrate) several different styles? Are you willing to develop your walking into an art form? Do you enjoy the act of walking and hiking for itself?

## **Sixteen Styles/Philosophies of Walking: Thumbnail Sketches**

Below are thumbnail sketches of 16 selected walking styles and philosophies, starting with the more common and moving to the less common and more esoteric. The explanations for the more common styles are relatively brief, becoming more detailed for the less common. For many walking is just walking,

putting one foot in front of the other.

*[Note: “walking” will be used in this context as an umbrella term for the following (unless indicated otherwise): hiking, trekking, tramping, tromping, bushwalking, hillwalking, ambulating, ambling, sauntering, meandering, wandering, strolling, trudging, sloggng, marching, rambling and roving.]*

### Minimalist or Barefoot Walking

Walking in sandals, moccasins or barefoot has probably been and may still be the most common style of walking, worldwide, through the history of human movement. This style of walking often involves a mid-foot or fore-foot strike as contrasted with the more traditional heel strike. Without padding, this mode of walking utilizes what can be described as a “walking softly” technique. With minimal foot covering and without distinct heels or padding, this style definitely puts one in touch with the terrain under foot, strengthens the lower leg muscles and tendons and allows one to walk more upright than with footwear with distinct heels and cushioning. Some have conditioned their feet and legs to use this style in adverse conditions (snow, off-trail, rocky trails).

### Power Walking

Power walking is roughly synonymous with fitness walking, aerobic walking, speed walking, power striding and fast packing. Power walkers move at a brisk pace with a longer-than-normal stride. It is often competitive in nature (with self or with others). This style involves pushing off aggressively with toes, ankles, knees and hips fully involved. The arms often pump aggressively back and forth to increase both energy expenditure and forward momentum. This type of walking can be practiced anywhere—on trails, paved or asphalt surface, indoor or outdoor tracks, treadmills, shopping malls, etc. Power walking is good for training and increased speed, but is energy draining and not efficient for longer walks.

### Race Walking

Race Walking is best defined as covering a distance as fast as possible without running. It is a form of power walking that has been turned into a competitive

sport. Practiced competitively, it involves exaggerated swinging of the arms and hips (“hip wiggle”) with strict restrictions on form. World class race walkers can achieve jogging like speeds (up to nine miles per hour), while still walking. Race walkers do not usually apply their style to travel in the backcountry but stick to frontcountry tracks, trails and roads.

### Slow Walking, Sauntering and Meandering

This style is a totally non-competitive and non-goal oriented walking style in direct contrast to power and race walking. It could be a primary style of hiking or something done in the evening to explore around camp after a hard day on the trail. If adopted as a primary routine, this kind of hiking is sometimes called “slackpacking.” [Slackpacking and Slow Walking](#) involve undisciplined and leisurely walking with no specific destination or goal; one walks totally as the spirit moves. It usually involves carrying only a fanny size pack with minimal supplies or no pack at all.

### Controlled, Moderate Pace Walking

Even though it has no catchy name, this is probably the walking style practiced by a majority of hikers and walkers. In contrast to both power and race walking on one extreme and slow walking on the other, a moderate pace is no more than three miles per hour, less with a heavy pack, much less on the uphills. With this style it is important to walk relaxed, at your own pace, with a natural rhythm. A neutral, mid-foot plant or strike is often used rather than a heel or toe strike. Many long distance “thru-hikers” use this walking style, moderating it as if they were walking for 16 hours straight, stopping only for a few minutes every hour or so to rest, massage feet, hydrate, add body fuel, etc. A typical “moderate” pace is 1.5-2.0 miles per hour average over a whole day. See Ray Jardine’s *Beyond Backpacking* (pages 251-259 or pages 199-203 in the newer edition titled, *Trail Life*) for a more detailed discussion of this approach.

### Rest Step (Lock-Step) Walking

Its essential characteristic is a pause of motion with the rear leg vertical and fully extended, while the front leg is relaxed except as needed to adjust the balancing of the climber's body and burden on the rear leg. The goal includes "locking" the knee, in order to rest the weight on the skeleton (and

relieve the leg muscles of exertion as much as possible).

—excerpted from *Wikipedia* ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

Use of poles with rest step walking can assist with balance and thereby increase relaxation. “Rest Step Walking” is used for steep grades with heavy loads, walking uphill at altitude or to get to a destination towards the end of a very long hiking day.

### Cruising (Gliding)

Ray Jardine has a brief discussion of what he calls “Cruising” (*Beyond Backpacking* page 257 or *Trail Life* page 201). “Cruising” (a term supposedly borrowed from Laurence E. Morehouse’s *Maximum Performance*, Simon & Schuster, 1977) is a rapid walk/slow run technique involving two main components. The first technique recommended by Jardine is pretending to have a jug of water on your head and walking slightly bent back with your head steady (so as to not spill the water). The second component is to walk crouched a few inches lower than you normally walk so your leg muscles relax and the forward movement comes more from your core muscles. Cruising is useful to provide variety and to get you to a specific destination more quickly. Strong core muscles and minimum pack weight are necessary to make this walk/run style work efficiently.

### Downhill Cruising or Jogging

Even if “cruising” on most kinds of terrain doesn’t appeal, it can be quite useful for moderate downhill sections. The basic addition to *downhill* cruising is to restrict your movement only enough to maintain control, letting gravity take over without any attempt to stop downward progress. The end result will be a fluid and easy jogging motion. Even momentarily halting ones stride, as hikers often do on downhill sections, is inefficient and hard on the joints. Another important element of downhill cruising is a flat-footed, neutral foot plant with neither heels nor toes hitting first. In addition, a shortened stride will lessen stress on joints and ligaments and provide more stability. Another way to increase stability downhill is to alternate between looking ahead 5-15 feet and looking down close to the actual foot placement. Short-term memory will capture both the terrain ahead and the terrain underfoot as you switch back and forth. Trail runners make the techniques described in this section an

essential part of their running repertoire.

### Pole Walking

Walking or hiking with poles, staffs, stocks, sticks, etc., has become another popular style of walking in recent years. Trekking with poles can utilize one or two poles, with or without wrist straps, with or without adjustability for length. Even though some see it as just adding a piece of equipment while walking or hiking (like a pack), consider pole walking as a fundamentally different style or philosophy, especially if the [poling techniques](#) recommended by Nordic Walkers are adopted.

### [Nordic Walking](#)

The Nordic Walking community has recently taken the art and science of pole walking to high levels. The basic Nordic Walking technique (always with two poles) is an enhancement of normal arm swing. When the leading foot strikes the ground, the opposite pole arm swings forward to waist height. The opposite pole strikes the ground across from the heel of the opposite foot. Essentially mirror your stride—right leg/left pole, left leg/right pole. In the Nordic Walking technique, the planted pole and the opposite leg are pushed off simultaneously while keeping the poles pointing diagonally backwards. The rear leg on the pole side is extended backward until it is nearly straight. The purpose of this technique is to fully engage the upper body for a full body workout. Many refinements and variations of this basic technique can be learned from certified Nordic Walking instructors. Nordic Walking uses techniques similar to Nordic Skiing. Nordic Walking and Skiing poles usually have specially designed wrist straps to enhance the respective techniques described above.

### Centerlining

The basic centerlining technique is to imagine a line stretching out in front of you and have your feet land relatively close to that line. The closer your feet land to the line, the more hip rotation you will get which in turn will maximize the involvement of large core muscles in the trunk. The more you engage your core, the more power and stamina you will have in your walking and hiking (a good thing). To augment this technique, practice tilting your pelvis slightly upward as you walk, which will further engage your core. Centerlining works

best with strongly developed core muscles.

The most exaggerated example of centerlining is the classic strut of fashion models down a runway. The problem with the runway strut is that the short steps cause a sideways movement in the hips (not a good thing unless you are trying to be a sexy model). Normal or longer strides cause hip rotation (a good thing) rather than wiggling from side to side. Most people do not centerline naturally so it takes some practice and concentration. Centerlining is especially effective when walking narrow and slippery surfaces (e.g., slippery logs). This technique can be integrated into most other walking styles.

### ChiWalking

ChiWalking combines the principles of T'ai Chi with the physical aspects of movement like body alignment, core strength and taking advantage of gravity. Following are some basic techniques prescribed by author Danny Dreyer as he describes ChiWalking in his book by the same name:

- using a somewhat exaggerated hip and arm swing (like in Race Walking);
- getting a gravity assist for the legs by maintaining a slight forward lean;
- extending the rear leg out to the back with each stride (like in Nordic Walking);
- using a shortened stride and a mid-foot plant (like in Moderate Pace Walking);
- getting the abdominal muscles to do much of the work by tilting the pelvis slightly upward with your core muscles developing a “flat pelvic floor” as you walk.

The hip and arm swing combined with the forward lean causes each leg to mostly straighten out on the backswing. This combination relaxes the leg muscles and engages more of the core. Instead of pushing off with the foot and

leg muscles to move you forward (i.e., Power Walking), ChiWalking relies more on the tilt of your body and rotation of core muscles. The mid-foot strike means neither a heavy heel strike (jarring the body) nor pushing off with the toes.

This walking style sounds complicated, but with practice, it can produce a satisfying, natural rhythm. Dreyer claims this walking technique will improve balance, stability, endurance and enjoyment of walking longer distances. To get the full benefits from this style, he recommends engaging a certified ChiWalking instructor.

### Zen Walking and Deep Breathing Walking

Zen Walking focuses on the here and now, especially by paying close attention to the breathing process. One well-known backpacking author expresses it thusly:

Everything begins and ends with breathing, and everything is born and dies with breathing. When I walk, I think about my breath, about taking deep, full inhalations and exhalations. I let the in-breath take in all of the beauty and harmony of nature that surrounds me, and I let out all of my distractions, insecurities, and frustrations in the out-breath.

—Chris Townsend, *The Ultralight Backpacker*, page 118

An effective focus for the deep breathing aspect of Zen Walking can be that of pulling in positive energy and thoughts while taking deep inhales and expelling negative thoughts, bodily tiredness, tensions, etc., on the deep exhales. All the while, feeling more relaxed with each inhale-exhale cycle. Deep and efficient breathing takes discipline, but will eventually come naturally on the trail without thinking about it.

### Walking Meditation/Selective Awareness Walking

Closely related to Zen Walking, a “walking” meditation is walking with short, slow strides without focusing on any specific destination. The inhale-exhale rhythmic breathing process is often focused on total body relaxation. Like many forms of meditation, it often involves focused awareness on a specific object, symbol or phrase. As is usual with meditation practice, one attempts to empty one’s mind by becoming an *objective observer*, acknowledging any

thoughts and feelings and sensations that come up—then letting them go by returning focus to whatever focus point has been chosen. While obviously not a style that would fit most hiking situations, walking meditations can be practiced at intervals while out on the trail to meditate and relax.

### Group Walking in Silence

Though silence is common to solo hikers, hiking clubs sometimes schedule silent walks where, by agreement, a larger group periodically walks for 20 minutes or so without anyone saying a word. Those who have participated say that once you grow accustomed to it, your eyes open wider to the world around you, you tune in to the wind and water, and a sense of oneness both within the group and within the natural world is felt. [Note: this is a paraphrased excerpt from the essay "Silence and Sounds" by Guy and Laura Waterman, *The Winding Trail*, page 372.]

### Freestyle Walking

The art of freestyle walking (loosely related to Free Running) is a means of self-expression and creative interaction with one's environment. Many of the practitioners of this art form (or sport, as some consider) excelled at the sport by freestyle walking to find more full involvement with their otherwise routine surroundings. Freestyle walkers use leaps and air moves, clever footwork, dance or any non-traditional walking movement. Some basic examples of freestyle walking moves include: Stalls, Slides, Swings, Hangings, Flips, Spins, and Vaults.

—excerpted from *Wikipedia* ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

The 'secret' to walking comfortably is to walk naturally — pretty much as you've been walking up to now. Don't be too concerned with proper walking ... Remember your body is unique. It has its own particular form and style, so you can't force it to behave like someone else's body. Just walk naturally and enjoy yourself.

—Tommy Boone on *Freestyle Walking*

For an example of a unique and more philosophical walking and hiking style

that combines several of the styles profiled above, click on [Mindful Wandering](#).

### **Additional Walking Styles Identified**

The above styles and their accompanying thumbnails represent those I find most interesting and those that best fit into the overall purpose of this article. It must be acknowledged, however, that there are many additional walking styles and situations that have been given meaningful labels. Here are many of them:

- walking softly (as in the “Leave No Trace” philosophy)
- Volksmarching (organized non-competitive walks)
- night walking
- bushwhacking and off-trail walking
- orienteering (using a map and a compass to find established way points)
- Volksmarching (organized non-competitive walks)
- Rogaining (non-competitive team sport involving long distance, cross country navigation)
- treadmill walking
- walking with strap-on weights
- sleep walking
- walking in space (e.g., at the International Space Station)

### **Criteria for Making Judgments About Various Styles**

What criteria should I use to judge the best walking style for me? For example, should I view walking primarily as:

- a practical exercise (i.e., how most efficiently to get from point A to point B)?
- a matter of peer pressure (conforming with or resisting the style most everyone else I hike with using)?
- an experiential matter (where I experiment with a number of styles to decide which are most comfortable and efficient and enjoyable)?
- a scientific matter (where I do appropriate research and consult with experts)?

- an aesthetic matter (where form, rhythm and style are central)?
- a philosophical matter (where consistency with my chosen lifestyle and personal values is the central focus)?

If viewed as a philosophical matter (my bias), it would be quite appropriate to then identify my overriding values and priorities about traveling in the wilderness and then develop a hiking style or styles that best match up with them. The next section will assist in this task.

### **Values Implied by Styles Thumbnailled Above**

Consider that specific values are built into all of the different styles of walking and become part of the philosophy underlying each. Here are examples of specific values I see underlying some of the styles sketched in the earlier section (they are not exhaustive):

- *Thin-Sole or Barefoot Walking* values walking softly, simplicity and being in touch with the earth.
- *Power Walking* and *Race Walking* value achieving goals, speed, fitness and competition.
- *Slow Walking* values comfort, spontaneity and a free, undisciplined spirit.
- *Controlled, Moderate Pace Walking* values comfort, stamina, rhythm and efficiency.
- *Cruising* values variety and speed.
- *Rest Step Walking* values efficiency and stamina.
- *Pole and Nordic Walking* values upper body fitness, efficiency, balance and rhythm.
- *ChiWalking* values efficiency, stamina, balance, bodily alignment, and a natural rhythm.

- *Zen Walking and Deep Breathing Walking* values stamina, rhythm, positive energy and focusing on the here and now.
- *Freestyle Walking* values creativity and a free, undisciplined spirit.

### **Acknowledging Personal Walking Styles and Values: Reader Participation**

What are your priorities and values related to styles of walking and hiking? What values most resonate with your chosen lifestyle? *First*, from the previous sections, identify the style(s) you currently practice with some regularity plus those that you would like to experiment with in the future (add more if I have missed some). *Second*, write down the specific core values underlying the style(s) you have identified. *Third*, prioritize the values identified. *Fourth*, identify the walking and hiking styles most compatible with your prioritized values.

### **Author's Values Relative to Chosen Walking Styles**

Since researching material for this article, I have been experimenting with several different styles of walking and their underlying values. Currently, my overriding values and priorities are EFFICIENCY and STAMINA (probably a function of my advancing age). When I started hiking and climbing many years ago, speed and competition and fitness seemed to be my top priorities. When I am feeling stressed out and obsessed, I value the OPEN MINDEDNESS and RELAXATION and BEING HERE AND NOW of walking meditations. I also value FLEXIBILITY and VARIETY while choosing to practice several different styles, sometimes during the same outing. To maximize flexibility, I desire to better understand the various styles and philosophies and to learn to adapt them more effectively to my walking moods. This means that ADAPTABILITY is also a top priority value in this context.

### **Engaging the Core Muscles**

Several of the walking styles place a strong emphasis on engaging the core muscles (e.g., Cruising, Nordic Walking, ChiWalking). Core muscles are more than just the “abs” (abdominals). They include the muscles surrounding the abdomen, back and pelvis. There are many approaches to and specific exercises for strengthening one’s core. Here is one Internet reference to a Mayo Clinic set of slides with visuals showing 13 different core strengthening exercises:

[Slide Show: Exercises to Improve Your Core Strength](#)

### **Current Style Maximize Efficiency, Stamina and Enjoyment?**

Is it possible your current walking and hiking style is not very efficient? The answer is probably that it is not as efficient as it could be. In addition to the quote from Colin Fletcher at the very top of this article, three additional writers support this perspective.

The elimination of wasted energy is what we are aiming for in our walking. To learn how to do this takes time and concentration, however . . . With practice and discipline, we can walk with greater ease and simplicity by tapping into our body's natural instincts and abilities.

—Chris Townsend, *The Ultralight Backpacker*, “The Art of Walking,” page 108

The Alexander Technique is an educational process that uses verbal and tactile feedback to teach improved use of the student's body by identifying and changing inefficient habits that cause stress, fatigue and pain . . . Most people have a side to side sway when walking which stresses their lower backs, their neck and their shoulders.

—Charles Stein, “Walking Well With the Alexander Technique”

Most people walk at about 50 percent efficiency or less. Poor structural alignment and the lack of core muscle strength create a body that is out of balance, inefficient, and often in pain and discomfort.

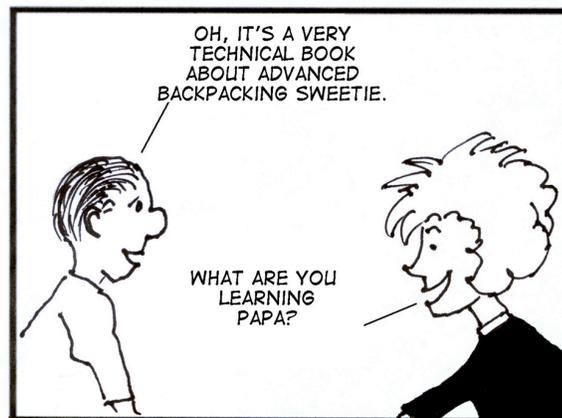
—Danny Dreyer and Katherine Dreyer, *ChiWalking: The Five Mindful Steps For Lifelong Health and Energy*, page 16

From my personal experience and research, I concur with the attitude expressed in these quotes. Efficient walking is an art form that does not come naturally to most of us; it is something that has to be learned and practiced. Even though there are many ways to increase efficiency and stamina in walking (e.g., conditioning, proper lightweight footwear, proper insoles or orthotics, use of poles), style and technique should be the principal focus. Specific resting techniques should also be part of the efficiency equation.

Assuming that efficiency and stamina are quite important, the next issue is to

select the styles and other related elements (e.g., footwear) you believe have the greatest potential to increase stamina and efficiency. The final step will, obviously, be to experiment to see what works for you.

For most of us, evaluating the efficiency of different approaches to hiking and walking is largely a subjective matter. Some will chose to attempt to make it more objective by exploring the subject scientifically. The subjective criteria I use for determining efficient approaches is simply the amount of enjoyment I am experiencing from the act of walking.



JIM MORRISON

## My “Aha” Experience

While researching and writing about hiking and backpacking for my website, I experienced an "aha" moment where several things came together, where I connected some dots that allowed a much larger and different picture of my

hiking style. The unpredictable result was a whole new way of looking at walking, hiking and backpacking. I now spend a lot more time in the wilderness, *enjoying-it-now for its own sake*, with or without a destination or goal.

A bit of personal history is necessary to best relate my "aha" experience. My hiking and climbing over the years generally involved the following style: generally taking long, powerful steps enhanced with trekking poles, powering up and down trails wearing heavy boots and a heavy pack. I was convinced this was the most efficient style for me. This style was great for conditioning and burning lots of calories. When in good physical condition, I loved to feel the power in my body and its ability to cover ground up hill and down. This technique, relying heavily on powering my legs and hips, was probably the cause of the lower back pain, tight hamstrings and sore quads I often experienced at the end of longer hikes and scrambles.

My "aha" experience occurred while experimenting with five separate elements: lightweight trail shoes, lighter pack weights, custom orthotics and integrating the *ChiWalking* and *Nordic Pole Walking* techniques into my walking form.

When I had my "aha," I saw how these five elements could work together in harmony. This synthesis resulted in a much more relaxed and efficient walking style, one that I am still tweaking. The heart of this synthesis seems to be that of letting gravity, my upper body core muscles and my arms to do more of the work. I now hike further with an easier rhythm, more energy, less strain and pain, and with real joy. Since my "aha" experience, I have lost 10-15 pounds in body weight further enhancing my walking experience.

How has integrating these five elements (trail running shoes, orthotics, lightweight pack, *ChiWalking*, *Nordic Walking*) resulted in a more relaxed and natural rhythm? *First*, my lightweight trail running shoes provide adequate stability, but not enough to interfere with a relaxed and efficient walking style. Most hiking boots interfere to some degree with a fluid and natural style. *Second*, lighter pack weights have allowed me to walk more upright with shoulders back and much less strain on the body. *Third*, my custom orthotics with aggressive arch support provide more stability and balance over the pivot point of my arch. *Fourth*, using lightweight, carbon fiber poles with effective poling techniques has contributed to a more fluid and natural body rhythm (somewhat akin to ice skating). *Fifth*, *ChiWalking* techniques (with their mid-foot strike) provide a more upright posture with the flattened pelvis necessary to getting gravity and

my core muscles to do more work (getting away from the more stressful and bone-jarring “power walking” style).

This summary of my “aha” does not capture the full flavor of my experiences, but it should provide a glimpse of the process and the end result. I have related my “aha” experiences not to say that my chosen walking tools and techniques are best, but to encourage hikers and backpackers interested in taking their craft to a higher level to experiment with new tools and techniques. With my nearly six decades of experience in the wilderness, I was skeptical at first. But I now look forward to enjoyable hiking and walking into my 70s, 80s and beyond.

### **Integrating Techniques from Different Walking Styles**

The many different walking and hiking styles are not exclusive. In fact, it is desirable to synthesize and integrate a variety of techniques into one’s primary style. Some examples from my personal experience that I am currently attempting to integrate:

- (1) a mid-foot strike as emphasized in *Thin Sole, Barefoot Walking* and *ChiWalking*;
- (2) walking softly as emphasized in *Thin Sole, Barefoot Walking*;
- (3) exaggerated arm swing as emphasized in *Race Walking, Nordic Walking* and *ChiWalking*;
- (4) more hip and upper body movement as emphasized in *Centerlining, Pole Walking, ChiWalking* and *Nordic Walking*;
- (5) more engagement of my core muscles (as in pelvic tilt) as emphasized in several walking styles.

These are the techniques I am attempting to integrate. What about you?

### **[Alternative Ways to Examine the Act of Hiking and Walking](#)**

Clicking on this link will take you to a short article delineating four distinct ways to view walking and hiking: as an art, a science, a style or as a philosophy.

## **Generalized Conclusions About Walking/Hiking**

- Avoid fixating on any one style of walking; it is desirable to integrate several styles together; it is desirable to vary the style of walking, especially on longer hikes.
- It is good to develop an in-depth understanding of the different techniques and philosophies of walking and to develop walking and hiking into an art form.
- Walking is both an art and a science; some have developed it into an art form, but most have not; it is imperative to undertake this endeavor if we are to take walking to a higher level.
- Even if currently satisfied with all aspects of your walking, this article should at least raise some interesting questions about your current practice of same.
- Walking and hiking styles are a function of personal values and philosophy; there are no right or wrong philosophies, styles or values in this context.
- It is possible not only to analyze walking philosophically and mechanically (the primary focus of this article), but also examine it from aesthetic, emotional, social, cultural, historical, therapeutic, physiological and kinesthetic perspectives.
- Walking styles and personality styles interact. For example, a confident, happy and energetic person will walk differently than a sad, depressed and low energy person; an older person differently than from a child; a single person hoping to attract a mate differently than a happily married person.
- Using different footwear (e.g., slippers, sandals, running shoes, dress shoes, boots) or the lack thereof (barefoot) will usually result in both a change in mood as well as a change in movement.
- It is important to understand the interactive role played by the various tools of walking and hiking (e.g., shoes, insoles, packs, clothing, poles, gloves,

hydration, nutrition). The more refined the walking system, the more enjoyable the walking becomes.

- Specially designed trail shoes, walking shoes or running shoes are superior to boots for most walking and trail hiking. For those partial to boots, a mid-height, lightweight, soft-ply boot is a reasonable compromise.
- The more one refines walking and hiking techniques and the better the equipment, the more walking and hiking one will do, both in the frontcountry and the wilderness. It is desirable to walk and hike and scramble as much as possible.
- Vigorous and frequent frontcountry walking (with and without a pack) is good conditioning for wilderness hiking and backpacking.
- Using a combination of an efficient stride along with a variety of styles, it is possible for most of us to walk for long distances over days and weeks, if so motivated. With the proper training and knowledge, it is possible for most of us to walk, run (or run-walk) for 50-plus consecutive miles over wild terrain with minimal sleep or rest (as in “ultrarunning” or “adventure racing”).

### **Some Issues for Reflection**

Here are several issues for your consideration. These issues are only stated, but not explored in this article.

1. Philosophizing About Walking and Hiking Styles: How much should I think about and analyze this subject? How important is it to first understand the subtleties and philosophies underlying many of the different styles related in this article and then do some hard nosed philosophizing and critical thinking about them and how they fit in with my personal style of wilderness travel?
2. Walking Science: Can walking and hiking be usefully viewed from a scientific perspective? Is there any consensus in the scientifically oriented walking and hiking community about proper techniques, styles, equipment, etc.? What about consulting a certified physical therapist or others with expertise in gait analysis? Can the scientific study of the physiology of movement

(kinesthesiology) contribute significantly to the layman hiker and backpacker?

3. Consultations With Experts on Footwear: Should I buy my footwear at retail stores staffed with trained footwear specialists? Get expert assistance in selecting boots, shoes and insoles? When should I consult with medical specialists (e.g., pedorthist, podiatrist, physical therapist) about my footwear?
4. Walking Efficiency: Are some styles significantly more efficient than others? If efficiency and stamina are overriding priorities, how best go about making significant increases in walking efficiency?
5. Making Substantial Changes in Style: Is my naturally developed style probably best for me? Is it a good idea to make substantial modifications to one's habitual style of walking, especially later in life?
6. Walking and Hiking Equipment: How important are the primary tools of walking: boots, shoes, socks, insoles, packs, gaiters, poles and gloves? How important are the tools of walking compared to, say, technique, conditioning, motivation, hydration and nutrition? Acknowledging that comfort is usually a high priority, how important is it to select the proper tools and techniques beyond just what is comfortable, beyond what feels good?
7. Interactive System: Should I assume that all of the various walking tools and techniques interact with one another and function as a complete system? What are the ramifications of adopting a "systems" approach to this matter?