

FITNESS FOR HIKING, SCRAMBLING AND BACKPACKING: I'm going to stick my neck out and make a bold statement: that for every physical endeavor that you take on you will be safer and have more fun if you're physically fit, that is fit in a general overall sense and fit with respect to the specific movements required of that activity. OK that's not a very bold statement; it's pretty darn obvious.

The reasons for optimizing your fitness with respect to hiking, scrambling & backpacking: First, you're going to have more fun. The more fit you are the greater the probability that the scenery will take your breath away not the plod up the hill. Second, you're going to be safer, because of the reduced the risk of slips and falls and internal medical moments such as heart attacks. And third, you're going to be more useful to your hiking mates in an emergency situation where your ability to help get them to medical attention may even save someone's limb or life.

There are three aspects to fitness: muscle strength, cardiovascular capability and flexibility.

Muscle strength: we're asking our bodies to get up from the office chair & to hike over variable and sometimes rough terrain, for hours at a time, at least half of it uphill, often with an unnatural amount of weight strapped on our backs. Core strength in the abs and back and in the legs is required to carry that load efficiently, safely and comfortably. The person with the strongest legs won't necessarily be the strongest hiker, but it makes sense that the stronger you are, the more hiking capacity you will have.

Cardiovascular fitness is required to enjoy anything tougher than the easiest of gentle-slope and short-length hikes. Heart rate and breathing rates increase considerably when climbing and this is where a higher level of CV fitness is called for.

Flexibility or range of motion isn't maybe such an obvious aspect but consider the scrambles that many of us will do: for example, if you've got more range of motion in your hips such that you can lift your knee well past 90, you've got an obvious advantage scrambling up that rock.

I think it's apparent that your physical fitness can and will be a limiting factor in the relative difficulty of the hikes and scrambles you want to take on. And it makes sense that your fitness should be a criterion that the trip coordinator will take into account before accepting you on a trip.

Where do you get fit: the easy answer is the also the right one. You get more fit for hiking by...wait for it...hiking. Get out on the trail with a pack and start moving. You can start easy and work your way up to longer distances & more elevation gain as you gain fitness. You don't need to be a gym rat, but it makes sense that if you've invested the time and effort doing resistance and aerobic exercise (ie. In the seven months of winter we have each year), you'll be more fit and get your hiking legs under you quicker than if you hadn't spent that effort exercising. This goes then for resistance training for muscle & strength gain, aerobic exercise for cardiovascular fitness (walking, running, swimming, biking) and stretching and yes, even yoga for flexibility and range of motion.

I know a 50-something-year-old whose hiking, skiing and golf game has been considerably enhanced by regular yoga sessions. This guy (or gal) also knows that attaining and maintaining an appropriate body weight can only enhance overall fitness and capability to every one of life's activities.

Everyone's different but stretching at the beginning and end of your hiking day will reduce muscle fatigue and soreness and promote recovery. Some dynamic stretching before you hit the trail and some static stretching at the end of the day before you hit the campfire or pub will make the drive home or next day on the trail more comfortable.

I've attached some articles I found on various websites that approach the subject of fitness for hiking from slightly different perspectives. Maybe one of these articles will connect with you. There's even one article that shows some basic yoga moves that are very good for the post-hike body and can be done on your sleeping mat or even in your sleeping bag.

Thanks for your attention. Are there any questions?

<http://www.thehikinglife.com/health-safety/fitness/>

[http://www.berg.co.za/hiking\\_fitness.htm](http://www.berg.co.za/hiking_fitness.htm)

<http://getgoingcanada.hubpages.com/hub/fitness-for-hiking>

and the yoga positions <http://www.backpacker.com/october-2011-yoga-for-backpackers/skills/15949>