

Hiking

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Two hikers in the Mount Hood National Forest



[Eagle Creek](#) hiking

Hiking is a form of [walking](#), undertaken with the specific purpose of exploring and enjoying the scenery. It usually takes place on [trails](#) in [rural](#) or [wilderness](#) areas.

The word '**hiking**' is understood in all English-speaking countries, but there are differences in usage. In some places, off-trail **hiking** is often called *cross-country hiking*, *bushwhacking*, or *bush-bashing*. In the [United Kingdom](#), **hiking** is a slightly old-fashioned word, with a flavour rather of 'heartiness' and 'exercise' than of 'enjoying the outdoors' (people in the UK would be more likely to use more modest

terms such as *hillwalking*, or simply *walking*). [Australians](#) use the term *bushwalking* for both on- and off-trail **hiking**. [New Zealanders](#) commonly employ the word *tramping*, particularly for overnight trips. **Hiking** in the mountainous regions of [Nepal](#) and [India](#) is sometimes called *trekking*. Overnight **hiking** is called *backpacking* in some parts of the world. **Hiking** a [long-distance trail](#) from end to end is often referred to as *thru-hiking*.

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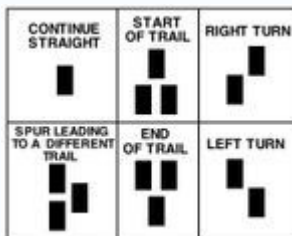
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Comparison with other forms of touring

Hiking is one of the fundamental [outdoor activities](#) on which many others are based. **Hiking** is the only way to reach many beautiful places overland. Enthusiasts regard **hiking** as the best way to see nature. It is seen as better than a tour in a [vehicle](#) of any kind (or on an animal; see [horseback riding](#)) because the hiker's senses are not intruded upon by distractions such as [windows](#), [engine](#) noise, airborne [dust](#) in large quantities, and fellow passengers. It has an advantage over standing in one place because the hiker may cover a wide area.

On the other hand, **hiking** over long distances or over difficult terrain does require some degree of physical ability and knowledge, as well as a [backpack](#) to carry [food](#), water and [essential equipment](#). Hikers may be caught in inclement [weather](#) or suffer mishaps. Some jurisdictions (for example, [New Hampshire](#)) now require inadequately prepared hikers to pay for their own rescues.



The most common symbols used in [trail blazing](#)

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Ecological impact of **hiking**

Hikers often seek beautiful environments in which to hike. Ironically, these environments are often fragile: hikers may accidentally destroy the environment that they enjoy. The action of an individual may

not strongly affect the environment. However, the mass effect of a large number of hikers can degrade the environment. For example, gathering wood in an [alpine](#) area to start a fire may be harmless once (except for [wildfire](#) risk). Years of gathering wood, however, can strip an alpine area of valuable nutrients.

Generally, protected areas such as parks have regulations in place to protect the environment. If hikers follow such regulations, their impact can be minimized. Such regulations include forbidding wood fires, restricting [camping](#) to established camp sites, disposing or packing out [fecal matter](#), imposing a quota on the number of hikers per day.

Many hikers espouse the philosophy of [Leave No Trace](#): [hiking](#) in a way such that future hikers cannot detect the presence of previous hikers. Practitioners of this philosophy obey its strictures, even in the absence of area regulations.



A cathole may be dug with a trowel.

Human waste is often a major source of environmental impact from [hiking](#). These wastes can contaminate the watershed and make other hikers ill. [Bacterial](#) contamination can be avoided by digging [catholes](#) 10 to 25 cm deep (4 to 10 inches, depending on local soil composition) and covering after use. If these catholes are dug at least 60 m (200 feet) away from water sources and trails, the risk of contamination is minimized.

Sometimes, hikers enjoy viewing rare or endangered species. However, some species (such as [martens](#) or [bighorn sheep](#)) are very sensitive to the presence of humans, especially around mating season. Hikers should learn the habits and habitats of the endangered species, in order to avoid adverse impact.

There is one situation where an individual hiker can make a large impact on an ecosystem: inadvertently starting a [wildfire](#). For example, in [2005](#), a [Czech](#) backpacker burned 7% of [Torres del Paine National Park](#) in [Chile](#) by knocking over an illegal gas [portable stove](#). Obeying area regulations and setting up cooking devices on bare ground will reduce the risk of wildfire.


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Etiquette of [hiking](#)

[Hiking](#) is a recreational experience. As such, hikers expect it to be pleasant. Sometimes hikers can interfere with each others' enjoyment, or the enjoyment of other users of the land. Such interference can be minimized by hikers who follow good etiquette. Examples of such interference and etiquette include:

- When two groups of hikers meet on a steep trail, there may be contention for use of the trail. To avoid conflict, a custom has developed: the group moving uphill has the [right-of-way](#). In other situations the larger of the two groups will yield to the smaller.



 **Hiking** in a group increases safety, but hikers may wish to hike at different rates.

- Being forced to hike much faster or slower than one's natural pace can be annoying, and difficult to maintain consistently. More seriously, walking unnaturally fast causes dramatically increased [fatigue](#) and exhaustion, and may result in injury. If a group splits between fast and slow hikers, the slow hikers may be left behind or become lost. A common custom is to encourage the slowest hiker to hike in the lead and have everyone match that speed. Another custom is to have an experienced hiker sweep up the rear, to ensure that everyone in the group is safe and nobody straggles.
- Hikers often enjoy the silence and solitude of their surroundings. This enjoyment is disrupted by loud sounds, such as shouting or loud conversation. Some hikers purposely avoid loud sounds, out of deference to other hikers. Staying quiet will also increase the likelihood of encountering wildlife. (This is a hazard if dangerous animals are present; see "Personal safety hazards".)
- Hikers sometimes trespass onto private property. Such trespass can alienate the property owners and close down [hiking](#) rights-of-way. To maximize [hiking](#) opportunities for everyone, most hikers will understand where private property lies and avoid it — or get permission from the owner. Staying on trails will also minimize the probability of trespass.
- Often tree branches or other vegetation may hang low across the trail. A passing hiker may cause the tree branch to snap back in the face of the hiker behind. While it is courteous to warn the hiker behind you if a branch is likely to snap back, it is every hiker's responsibility to allow enough space between himself and the hiker ahead to avoid the hazard.

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Personal safety hazards

Main article: [Hazards of outdoor activities](#)

Hiking is meant to be enjoyable, and with the correct planning, preparation and precautions, it is one of the safer outdoor recreations. Without these, participants are recklessly placing themselves (and companions and mountain rescue teams) in danger. Two groups of people in particular should take care to avoid endangering others: novices should research what they intend to do and listen to advice, and people who regard [hiking](#) as a "challenge" or an opportunity to "push themselves to the limit" should take a responsible view of what their limits actually are. New hikers looking for pleasure rather than an endurance test can enjoy themselves enormously, without blisters or over-exertion, by a little research and

a gentle build-up regime (a quarter-way through the hike is not the time to find that boots are not broken in!) However, any outdoor activity entails risk, even if participants do NOT recklessly place themselves in harm's way: bodily injury through sprains and falls, metabolic disturbances such as hypothermia and heatstroke, having to sleep outdoors through losing the way, and other unsavory possibilities.