

# Appalachian Backpacking Courses

## -Tutorials-



By Tha Wookie

*“The backpacker... discovers that the positive quality of the voyage is directly related to his or her own knowledge and resources.”*

*–Joseph E. Sax, Mountains without Handrails.*

Welcome to the Tutorial Sample for the ABC's. The following is a short excerpt from Tutorial 1 in the Beginning Level Course. Pay for a course today for complete access to all Tutorials and a personal guided Class Trip!

## Physical Preparation

One of the greatest facts about hiking is how easy, yet challenging, it can be. Hiking is really nothing more than walking. But walking up and down mountains on rough, uneven ground is something to which most people in America aren't accustomed. In fact, many Americans rarely walk on anything but flat surfaces. When on the trail however, feet move in unfamiliar ways, and the resulting friction inside the shoe mixed with sweaty feet (sweat produces salt, which increases friction) commonly creates blisters. Also, various muscular or ligament problems ranging from soreness to potential permanent damages may occur for the untrained foot, ankle, or knee. Luckily, with minimal training and proper footwear these problems can be limited or avoided altogether.

We include footwear as the first discussion because **it is important for you to “break in” your shoes as much as possible before the trip.** This means wear them to work if possible, wear them when you practice walking on uneven surfaces, and wear them anywhere else you can imagine.

The first step to avoid blisters is choosing the right foot wear. There are three basic choices: 1) Boots, 2) Running or Cross-training shoes, 3) Performance sandals.




### The Great Shoe Debate

1) **Boots** have become an icon in hiking, but lightweight running shoes are quickly replacing them as the popular choice. This is partly because boots are notorious blister

producers. They are often rough, tightly fitted, and tend to trap moisture. In addition, they are heavy, and lugging them around all day takes up a lot of energy. **We highly recommend trying a lighter, more breathable alternative to boots.**

2) **Running shoes** are becoming the most popular choice of footwear for experienced hikers. They need not be fancy or expensive, but instead breathable and reasonably supportive. Of course, keeping a low pack weight is important for the shoe wearer. Heavy packs tend to cause a loss of balance and make for a greater risk of injury. Light footwear offers less ankle support, but at the same time increases maneuverability. Refer to *Beyond Backpacking* for details in this modern debate. Shoes range greatly in support, but look for one which less material so it will dry quickly.

3) **Sandals** are becoming more and more accepted in their use for serious hiking. Except for snowy areas, ABC’s guides prefer them, and have logged over 5,000 miles wearing sandals. Obviously, sandals offer less insulation from nature and ankle support. For long hikes, dry feet can crack unless treated with a balm. But especially on weekend hikes, sandals can provide a comfortable advantage over the alternatives. However, it is always wise to carry some thick **non-cotton** (like a wool blend) socks for cross country (off-trail) travel when wearing sandals. Additionally, we recommend carrying a back-up pair of light running shoes for those not used to hiking in sandals.

What to Wear on Your Feet				
	Boots	Running Shoes	Sandals	
<b>Socks</b>	No cotton EVER; thicker wool blended socks	No cotton EVER; thinner wool “running” socks – I prefer ankle high’s	No cotton EVER; Any wool blend.	
<b>Examples</b>	Vasque boots <a href="http://www.vasque.com">www.vasque.com</a>	Montrail shoes <a href="http://www.montrial.com">www.montrial.com</a> ; New Balance 800 series are VERY popular on the trails. Any decent pair of running shoes should be fine.	Chaco’s sandals <a href="http://www.chacousa.com">www.chacousa.com</a> are our all-time favorite; Wraaptor’s; Teva’s; Women’s Keen sandals are very popular.	
<b>Photos</b>				
<b>Blister potential</b>	<b>VERY HIGH</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>LOW</b>	
See <a href="http://www.REI.com">www.REI.com</a> or <a href="http://www.campmor.com">www.campmor.com</a> to get an overall idea of what’s out there, even if you shop elsewhere.				

## Pre-Trip Training

Once again, there's good news in that hiking is easy-paced. One needs not hit the track for wind-sprints or commit themselves to any grueling masochistic routine. The most important and effective training exercise for hiking is ...<drumroll>... walking! The idea is to mimic trail conditions. This means strap on that footwear and gear you will take on the trip, find a hilly area near your home, and go for a nice walk. Remember to avoid sidewalks and other flat surfaces, and seek out the most rugged walkable terrain you can find. For extra ankle strengthening, walk alongside graveled train tracks (looking for trains) or go barefoot in a sandy area. It's always good to stretch out (touch your toes, stretch your calves, and so on) before and after exercise. Try "spelling out" the alphabet with your toes, bending at the ankle while sitting in the office or in class –this is a great way to train your ankles and calves for long days on the trail. Remember, the longer and more frequent you train, the more likely you are to avoid blisters or injury!

## Physical Preparation Activity: "Meet the Mile"

I've heard a lot of hikers complain, including me, that the mileage on a map or in a guidebook was wrong. Sometimes it is. But most often it's the hiker underestimating the mighty mile. Most people judge mileage from driving cars. This is why the experienced hiker on long hikes almost always adds mileage when a person in a re-supply town gives directions. "The restaurant is just a half-mile away", can sometimes mean that the restaurant is actually a mile-AND-a-half away. The helpful townspeople aren't trying to be deceptive, it's just that many have never actually walked to the restaurant themselves, so to speak, and they tend to calculate driving time instead. The point is that walking a mile –especially a mountain trail mile- is usually a lot longer than most people presume. Learning the distance of a mile the "natural way" (walking or hiking) demonstrates the importance of the *approach* vs. the *result*.

When I told a friend of mine that I was going to walk to Maine, he gave me a concerned look and said with pure sincerity, "Nate, I have a friend who owes me a favor. He works for Greyhound. I could get you a ticket *real* cheap." What he didn't understand is that my goal wasn't to get to Maine –it was to enjoy the experience of getting there!

This exercise is meant to kick-off your physical preparation for the class trip and beyond. Perhaps you already walk regularly –great! If so, simply incorporate this activity into your normal routine. After this activity, you should start to get a sense of what to expect on a real wilderness trail. Your body and mind will respond to this, growing more and more adapted for life on the trail!

### Materials:

1. The same shoes you plan to use on the class trip
2. Your backpack if you have it already
3. Your class journal and writing utensil
4. A full water bottle
5. A watch

**Step 1:** ...for the rest of Tutorial 1, and much, much more, take the first step and begin your course today!

See you on the trail~

Tha Wookie & Island Mama