

Finding Inspiration on the Trail

Hiking & Photography in San Diego & Beyond.

By Brad Spiess

How I started in Hiking and Photography

I love to hike, and I love photography. I started hiking at an early age when I lived in Guam with my mother and we would go hiking with the U.S.O. as we explored the island. Later in life when I left the military I moved down to San Diego to pursue my Athletic Training Degree at San Diego State University, I rediscovered my love for hiking. My cousin, his wife, and I would look through a local hiking guide and mark all the hikes we wanted to explore and then go out and start completing them. As I got more and more into hiking I decided to start documenting these hikes and I put together a web site on Hiking in San Diego and beyond. Hiking the many trails in San Diego will make you fall more in love with this area and appreciate the many opportunity's it has to offer.

My love for photography started with my love for exploring the great outdoors and documenting my adventures. I can be obsessive when I get interested in a subject, after starting a web site about hiking I started to learn how to make better photographs of the places I was exploring, in the process I was quickly consumed with everything to do with photography and how to make myself a better photographer.

What I hope you get out of this workshop

My goal is to inspire you to go out and explore the surrounding area you live in. I want to help you get the most out of your exploration by discussing the proper equipment you will need for hiking and optimal equipment to use for photography while on the trail. While at the workshop we will discuss some of the following:

- the best planning practices that can help you maximize your enjoyment of the adventure and increase your keepers for your photography,
- some of the better locations around San Diego for hiking and photography
- best fitness practices to help you get in shape for your hiking adventures
- Safety tips to help minimize your risk while out on the trail.

Come join me and let your next adventure begin.

Before you head out for your next adventure in the great outdoors let's discuss how to best equip yourself so that you can make the most of your enjoyment. There are a few essentials that can help make hiking much more enjoyable and rewarding. First and foremost let's talk about what goes on your feet.

Hiking footwear: There is a wide variety of footwear available for hiking. I myself have several different kinds of boots for different environments. A pair of comfortable hiking boots from [Merrell](#) that feel more like tennis shoes but provide much more ankle support and grip in the tread of the boots. I have a much sturdier pair of boots for the long distance backpacking trips where I personally want a much more supportive and water resistant boot. Finally I have another pair for heavy winter conditions that have great grip and can keep my feet warm down to negative 30 degrees. For San Diego conditions you don't really need that much protection. I would suggest choosing between a pair of boots that provides better ankle protection by being a mid-height boot or a trail running shoe or boot that tend to be a regular cut shoe but a little sturdier and with much better grip. Which kind of boot you choose is really up to your comfort but I would always suggest using one of these options over a normal pair of shoes such as running shoes, sneakers, or tennis shoes. [Check out this REI guide to choosing](#)

Socks: You wouldn't think this makes that much of a difference but I can tell you from personal experience that I will never go hiking with a pair of cotton socks again. A good pair of wool socks helps wick the moisture away from your feet whereas cotton tends to hold onto the moisture keeping it near to your skin and helping create the conditions that promote blisters. There are just as many choices in socks as there are in boots, just make sure they have some sort of wool blend so that they help keep your feet dry, the last thing you want is a constant reminder of the hike you just took with painful blisters on the bottom of your feet. [Here is a guide to hiking socks](#)

Cloths: Shorts and short sleeve or long pants and long sleeves? The answer to that question really depends on where you are going to go hiking, the weather, and your comfort level. For the most part hiking in San Diego just requires a comfortable pair of shorts and a comfortable shirt, but if you are going to go hiking on a trail that does not get used often or if you know you're going to be doing a lot of rock scrambling you may want to choose the longer pants and sleeves to help shield your skin from those scragging branches on tight trails or scrapes as you leverage your body up and over rocks, I can't tell you how many times I've come back from a hike looking like I got into a fight with a cat because of all the scrapes on my arms and legs. While our weather is pretty spectacular here in San Diego there will still be days when you may be more comfortable with longer sleeves and pants because of the colder weather or even the sunny weather if you want to keep your skin covered and protected. I will always pack a light wind breaker in my bag, even if I don't feel like I'll need it, many times I'm producing a lot of heat while hiking, especially with a backpack on, but once I get to the top of a mountain and I'm not moving anymore and it's windier I am grateful for having another layer available to me. [Here is a guide to clothing for hiking](#)

Headwear: again another area with a lot of choice, suffice it to say a good hat will help keep the direct sun off of your head and help shade your eyes while out in bright sunlight. Even having a baseball cap is better than nothing.

Sunglass's: There not just to make you look cool. A good pair of sunglasses really help protect you from the intense UV rays that are ever present while you enjoy the great outdoors. Those intense UV rays get worse as you move up in altitude and have less atmosphere to block them, not really to much of a problem here in San Diego but still something to keep in mind. Something that I never used to think about when I first started hiking but I can look back and see the importance of is just making sure your eyes are protected from being hit. If you are hiking through thick brush sunglass's can help protect your eyes from being hit by branches as you pass by or when your partner lets them snap back into your face from in front of you. In one instance I stumbled on some rocks while hiking and went down face first into an aloe vera plant that stuck me in the cheek with a long spike just below my sunglass's, had I not been wearing the sunglass's and had fallen just slightly different I could have had a very bad day. [Here is great advice for choosing sunglasses](#)

Alpine Poles: I normally do not use these on my easier hikes around San Diego, but I do love using them on longer, steeper hikes, especially when I'm carrying heavy loads over long distances such as when backpacking. If you are an older adult and or have issues in your lower body joints you may find that using these poles can really help redistribute the forces on your body as you are going downhill so that your upper body helps share the burden and helps keep your knees from fatiguing too quickly. [How to choose hiking poles or "Alpine Poles"](#).

Water: I've used hydro bladders and metal water bottles and they both have their upsides and downsides. As a hiker I have always loved the hydro bladders that you slip into your backpack in order to hold your water for you. [Here is a guide to how much water you need while hiking](#)

The [hydro bladders](#) keep your hands free so that you can concentrate on other issues as you hike. The bladders make it easier to drink water periodically helping to keep you hydrated because the hydration nozzle is usually just sitting on your chest and is easy to reach. Most backpacks these days will have a slot for one and a routing hole to bring the hose out and attach it near your chest. The only time I've had one leak on me was when I did not close the lid properly, but it could happen and that is always a worry. I have never noticed the taste of plastic (4 years of Army training cured that), but people have complained about that issue many times. If you use any hydration tablets (tablets that release electrolytes into the water) you better make sure to clean it as soon as you can when you get home, the longer the water sits in there the worse it can get.

[Insulated Metal Bottles](#) are wonderful. I remember making it back to my car on a really hot day after a long hike and running out of water, opening the bottle that had been sitting in my hot car for several hours expecting warm water and being extremely pleased to quench my parched throat with cold water. These bottles do an excellent job at keeping hot things hot and cold things cold, but they are not cheap. The full bottles tend to feel heavy and unwieldy on your backpack compared to the hydro bladders which are usually centered in your back. Most importantly you will usually need to take your back pack off to access a bottle which will usually mean you're not going drink as much water as you hike making proper hydration harder. On colder days I will sometimes just use a bottle instead of a bladder because I will not need as much water on a hike and can therefore conserve weight.

Flashlight or Headlamp: It's a no brainer just to stick one in your bag and leave it there. I have several and try to do just that. Even if you don't think you will need one, you never know what may happen, and it's better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it. For instance on a recent hike I took I had taken my headlamps out of my bag and forgotten to put them back in. I didn't think it would be too much of a problem because I could just use my phone's flashlight if I really needed it. My mistake was having a phone that was low on juice, playing an audiobook on the way out to my hike and forgetting to recharge my phone on the way. It was a sunset hike and luckily I made it back to my car as it was just starting to get dark to see where I was going. It's just best to have one in your bag at all times. [Advice for headlamps](#)

Food: I usually just stick a couple of Cliff Bars and an apple in my bag. Unless I'm going on a serious hike that requires some serious calorie burning I don't worry too much about what food to bring. It is always a good idea to have just a little more than you need for that hike, an extra bar or two at least. Again you just never know what is going to happen and if you're stuck somewhere you will thank yourself for having an extra morsel or two. [A guide to foods to eat while hiking](#)

Sunscreen: Even on cloudy days I will put a layer of sunscreen on. There is nothing more miserable than walking around feeling half cooked with heat radiating off of your burnt skin for a couple of days after a bad sun burn. Make sure you cover all the areas of your head as you are putting it on, your ears, neck, all your exposed skin etc...I personally use a spray on 100+ spf, I read or heard it does not do much after an spf of 50+ but I can personally see the difference, so there you go. [A guide to sunscreen for hikes](#)

Great Locations for Hiking and Photography in San Diego

San Diego is a very diverse area with many regions, the 4 distinctive regions for photography in the area begin with the coastal region which most people are familiar with and makes for the picture perfect San Diego moments that most visitors are looking for. As you start moving east inland you start to hit the natural preserves such as [Los Penasquitos Canyon](#) more towards the coast, [Mission Trails](#), The [Mount Woodson](#) and [Iron Mountain area](#) more inland, all the way to the [Ramona Grasslands Preserve](#). As you move further east you start to hit the foothill regions starting with the foothill regions such as Warner Springs in the north down towards the [Santa Ysabel region](#), through towards [Cedar Creek Falls](#) and [Three Sisters Waterfalls](#) down towards [Corte Madera](#), and [Lake Moreno](#). As you get up into the true mountain areas you get different flora and fauna in areas such as up in [Palomar Mountain](#), [Hot Springs Mountain](#), [Volcan Mountain](#), down towards Julian, [Cuyamaca Peak](#), and [Mt Laguna](#). As you move further east you have a dramatic change into the desert region starting with the Montezuma Road making its way down into Borrego Springs in the North as you move south you make your way into the [Anza Borrego Desert State Park](#), the largest State Park in California making up 1/5th the San Diego Region.

Coastal Region:

While there many opportunities to shoot along the coast in the San Diego area I'm going to focus on 4, starting with the ***San Elijo Lagoon State Marine Conservation Area*** around the Cardiff area. This is a relatively easy area to hike with only 8 miles of trails but giving you an opportunity to photograph the wetlands and a family friendly hike through [Annie's Canyon Trail](#), a unique easy hike through a sandy little coastal slot canyon.

The next area on my coastal region is the ***San Dieguito Lagoon State Marine Conservation Area***. While the immediate area is not much different than San Elijo just 5 miles north, this area is the terminus of the [Coast to Crest Trail](#), a trail (not quite finished) that makes its way from Volcan Mountain in the east through 71 miles of trails to its terminus at the coast. As of this time this area again is a great area to shoot local wetlands with great opportunities to photograph some local wildlife like the nesting pair of Osprey by the Fairgrounds and right off of the trail. Perhaps it's one of my favorite areas because it's so close to where I work that I spend a lot of time between clients shooting around this area.

Torrey Pines State Reserve is the quintessential San Diego Hiking and Photography experience. I always think of it as the one area to not miss if you have out of town visitors and you want them to experience what is special about San Diego. It's a good reminder of why we pay the "sunshine tax" here. With that said realize that a lot of people know this and [Torrey Pines State Reserve](#) can get crowded when it comes to parking, I've never felt crowded on the trails but you may need to park quite a ways away from the park, adding to your hiking experience. An awesome place to go for sunset photography of the unique cliffs and seaside, great views both north towards Del Mar and south Towards La Jolla. This park also attracts wildlife photographers with Peregrine Falcons nesting alongside the cliffs giving ample opportunity to photograph from the beach or from one of the trails up top.

[Cabrillo National Monument](#) is a very unique park; I am convinced that if not for this park we would see multimillion dollar mansions dotting the hillside, it has one of the most unique viewpoints in all of San Diego. While most people will spend time hiking along the coast side trail enjoying the tide pools at low tide, one of my favorite views is at the bottom of the [Bayside trail](#) looking towards the City of San Diego with Coronado Island in the foreground and the Cuyamaca Mountains far in the background behind the city.

Inland Region

As you move inland from the coast you have a couple of preserves and open space parks that make up great hiking areas. Moving inland from the coast the first I can think off is the [Los Penasquitos Canyon Preserve](#). It stretches approximately 7 miles from the 5 and 805 interstate merge to just east of the interstate 15 freeway. It encompasses some 4000 acres of both Penasquitos and Lopez Canyons. This is a great area for Hiking, Trail Running, and Mountain Biking. Penasquitos is well known for its small waterfall area, its forested area of Giant California Oaks that follows the stream through the preserve, and a lot of opportunity to come across wild life such as bobcats, coyotes, and deer. Bordered by Carmel

Valley and Del Mar to the north and Mira Mesa to the south it has become a favorite area for a lot of locals that can just pop into the preserve so close to their homes.

[Mission Trails Regional Park](#) is a 7200 acre open space preserve within the city of San Diego. It is the 6th largest municipally owned park in the United States, and the largest in California. There is an extensive trail system within Mission Trails, it is a great place to get some quick hiking in so close to the city. There are fantastic views looking towards the city and Point Loma towards the west from the top of **[Cowles Mountain](#)**. I can't speak to all the views within the park, but suffice it to say there are plenty of opportunities to hike and take in the surrounding countryside.

[The Mount Woodson Wilderness area](#), [Blue Sky Ecological Reserve](#), and [Iron Mountain Wilderness areas](#) operated mainly by the city of Poway are fantastic areas for hiking that are easily accessible, which is one reason they make up some of the most popular hiking areas within the San Diego area. With that said realize that these areas are so well used that it's a little hard to get away from people on these trail systems, but with a little patience and going early or late in the day these areas can make great experiences. I have photographed everything from Sunrise, Sunset, Milky Way, and Macro photography on these trail systems. Since you are farther inland and there less areas for shade I would recommend going as early as possible or as late as possible for both comfort and better shooting conditions.

As you move further east you start to move up in elevation generally between 3 -4,000 feet, but it's still not quite the mountain area, I would think of these areas as the foothills around San Diego. Starting with **[Warner Springs](#)** in the north, Warner Springs feels so removed from the San Diego area that you can be forgiven for not realizing you are still in San Diego County. The Pacific Crest Trail runs through Warner Springs which is dotted with large oak trees and grasslands, a small hike

15 miles south of Warner Springs is the **[Santa Ysabel](#)** area with two trail systems, **[Santa Ysabel West](#)** a 5 mile out and back trail through golden rolling hills dotted with oak trees and **[Santa Ysabel East](#)** is a 7.5 mile point to point trail that is best done with car shuttles. Just like its neighbor to the west Santa Ysabel East is a meandering trail through rolling golden grasslands dotted with oak trees. Both are good places to catch some wildlife and excellent places to golden hour photography.

A little further south of Santa Ysabel are two waterfall areas that are only separated by a few miles but take completely different routes to get to **[Cedar Creek Falls](#)** and **[Three Sisters Waterfalls](#)**. These waterfalls are practically within a stone throw of each other but to get to Cedar Creek Falls you will have to go through Ramona out to the San Diego Country Estates to start the hike, while to get to the Three Sisters Waterfalls hike the best way is usually heading east along the 8 freeway to Descanso and then driving along a dirt road out to nowhere for 20 -30 minutes. There is only a short window were I would recommend these hikes and that would be from winter through spring (approximately December through March) when there is water running the falls (the whole reason you're going there) and color temperatures.

Keep going a little further south from the falls as the crow flies and you will hit **[Corte Madera](#)** and **[Moreno Butte](#)**. Both these hiking areas are rocky outcrops along hillsides with great views. Corte

Maderas south face plays host to a number of birds of prey, including falcons, hawks, and golden eagles. I remember coming across nesting turkey vultures in the area myself. This area is also popular with rock climbers but there can be seasonal cloggers to the face of the rocks to help protect nesting raptors. Moreno Lake is not too far away from Corte Madera. [Moreno Lake](#) is set up for more activity with camping, boating, and fishing. There is a great trail to the Moreno Buttes, 3 small peaks with commanding views of the surrounding area. Along the dirt road around the lake you can also find a nesting pair of Bald Eagles seasonally.

Mountain Region

While San Diego does not have dramatic mountain regions you can get a little higher with some cooler air and dramatic changes in flora and fauna.

Starting in the north with ***Palomar Mountain***. There are a couple of ways of hiking around Palomar Mountain with a number of smaller hikes that you can combine into a [9 mile hike around the Palomar Mountain](#) area or the 14 mile out and back hike up to the [High Point Fire Tower from Oak Grove](#). The area has some beautiful forested areas that make a great place to come for fall colors and spring with wild flowers.

[Hot Springs Mountain](#) is the tallest peak in San Diego County at 6,535 feet, about 20 feet higher than Cuyamaca Peak to the south. Hot Springs Mountain sits on the Los Coyotes Indian Reservation just to the east of Warner Springs. There is a \$10 per person permit that you can buy online. It's one of my favorite hikes in San Diego for just how remote it is, many times I'll hike out here and run into no one on the trail. The top of the mountain is beautiful during the fall and I have come across many bird species here. It's worth checking out.

[Volcan Mountain](#) sits just outside of the town of Julian. I love this hike. I find the further away I am from San Diego proper the less I run into people, while this is a popular hike I have never felt crowded on this trail, again sometimes I can be the only one on the mountain. There is a lot of bird life on this peak. A wonderful view at the top towards the Salton Sea in the east and a gorgeous view towards the west. On clear days you can see both San Clemente Island and Catalina Island to the west. I love shooting sunset from this area which is usually when I am the only one left on the mountain.

South of Volcan Mountain and the town of Julian are [Cuyamaca Peak](#) and directly across from it [Stonewall Peak](#). There are many hiking trails around the Cuyamaca Peak area, it's all beautiful but most of the forested area is the area left around the Paso Picacho Campgrounds, it's evident that this area was well protected during the last large fire in the area. There is a lot of wildlife to photograph around this area. I also like coming up in the snow to hike, with Stonewall Peak giving a commanding 360 degree view of the area.

Lastly we come to the Mount Laguna area. ***Mount Laguna*** has many hiking trails and is a popular area for camping, hiking, mountain biking, and trail running. One of my favorite trails is the [Big Laguna Lake Hike Loop](#). This is probably the largest forested area besides Palomar Mountain in the San Diego area. A great area to come photograph wild life, oak and pine forest and vast mountain meadows and the Big

Laguna Lake which is really a shallow mountain lake used to hold water for bovines. The best views at Mount Laguna are the dramatic views east down towards the Anza Borrego Desert region. The Pacific Crest Trail runs along the rim of the mountain and makes up part of the hiking trails in the area.

Desert Region

The ***Anza Borrego State Park*** has a lot to offer, but considering how hot it gets out here I would suggest seeing most of these things seasonally in winter and spring months when it's much cooler. The Indian Pictograph area near the Whale Peak makes an awesome hike with lots of bouldering and some fantastic views. The wind caves and slot canyon of the [*Domelands hike*](#) makes for a fantastic adventure that can be fun for the whole family. You can even see the tallest, longest wooden train trestle bridge in North America at the [*Goat Canyon Train Trestle Bridge hike from Mortero Palms*](#), part of what was once called the "impossible railroad".

Camera Gear for Hiking

Having suffered from G.A.S (Gear Acquisition Syndrome) it should come as no surprise that I have also tried many ways of carrying my gear while hiking. I've tried carrying my camera gear in a normal backpack, I've tried using systems to attach your camera to your shoulder harness for easier access, and I have several camera backpacks, each that have their own usefulness with me.

When I first started out I didn't have any special gear for carrying my camera gear, but you quickly learn that if you want to make the most out of your adventures you need some way to organize your gear for quick access. So I first started with a camera carrier that I could attach to the front of my chest harness. This allowed for easy access to my camera gear when I needed it and since I was not carrying much but the camera, lens, and an extra battery or two it worked fine for me, until it didn't.

As I started to carry better and heavier lens with me, the camera carrier sitting on my chest got more uncomfortable, the last straw was carrying it up a 14k elevation mountain in the Sierra Nevada feeling like someone was pushing down on my chest the whole way, no fun, but super easy to access at all times.

I have bought several camera backpacks since then, and all work well for carrying my gear when heading out to photograph, however if I'm doing any backpacking on a trail for several days I need to maximize how much space is being utilized by my camping and hiking gear and therefore my photography gear needs to be downsized. So I bought a smaller sensor camera and lens set up (every other camera is full frame sensor) that I could pack into a small carrying case with another lens or two, and battery's and store in my backpack. The advantage here is smaller set up with a lot less weight, but slightly limiting in what I will be using it for.

Camera Backpacks

The 3 camera backpacks that I have so far are the F Stop Ajna 40L backpack. The Shimoda 70 L Action X70 backpack, and finally the Shimoda Explore V2 30L backpack.

[The F Stop Ajna](#) was my first professional camera backpack and worked great, but there were little nagging things about it and when I saw the Shimoda system come on the market I decided to give it a try, thinking that I would sell me F Stop, but now I have found a use for it again.

I bought the [Shimoda 70L](#) thinking it would hold more of my gear, especially my long lens (200-600mm) and still allow me to maybe using it for backpacking, I have not tried that yet, if I did I would need to get a smaller internal unit to hold a small number of gear so that I could utilize the rest of the bag for backpacking related items. Right now it holds an extra-large ICU which makes it sketchy for airline check ins.

I found the Shimoda 70L backpack very comfortable to use but a little big for everyday use, so when the Version 2 came out of the [Explore V2 30L bag](#) I decided to grab one for everyday around the town use, Plus it sounded like it would be great for travel. It is a wonderful backpack and extremely comfortable to use, however I probably should have gone for the 35L version as I have a hard time packing everything I would need when traveling, which is why I'm so glad I held onto my F-Stop 40L bag, as it fits everything I need and it fits onto all the domestic flights I've been on in the United States.

This is all a very long explanation to say that I don't think there is a "Perfect Camera Backpack", you will find that different size bags will work best for different purposes and I'm still searching for the one bag that can do it all. The elusive unicorn.

Tripods

I have several "professional" tripods and I still have the smaller lighter tripod that I started with, I still bring it with me as a light stand when shooting Astrophotography.

[Promedia Gear TR344L](#) – I got this mainly for being able to shoot wildlife and having a much sturdier tripod, with my large RRS BH-55 or a gimbal attached it makes for a heavy set up, So try not to take it with me hiking, although I have before and wished I had brought a lighter setup.

[Gitzo 3532](#) – my first "professional" tripod I bought off Craigslist and it has served me well. A very sturdy set up with my RRS BH-40 head and much easier to take hiking, although still larger than what I probably need.

Benro Travel Tripod – small and light weight. I bought this for a 4-5 day backpacking trip through the sierras, it worked really well and it also works well for another light stand.

MeFoto Aluminum Travel Tripod – My first tripod, it served me well until I decided to move up to the big boys, not as light as the Benro, but still lighter than the big ones.

[Leofoto LS-223CEX](#) – This is an awesome little table top tripod that only gets 1-1.5 feet high, but it is an awesome little set up and you can throw into your bag as an afterthought.

All of this is to say that there is no “perfect” gear when you are out hiking, it really depends on what you are planning on shooting, and how comfortable or uncomfortable you want to be while hiking.

If you are willing to carry the load, then take what you think you need, just realize that your not going to move as fast, and you should probably take more breaks, which are perfect opportunity's to photograph.

For example, hiking up Volcan Mountain usually takes me 2-2.5 hours, but on a recent hike carrying my gear up and seeing so many opportunities to photograph made my trip last 4-4.5 hours.

However you can still have fun with less set up, recently I decided to see what macrophotography I could take on the trail and hiked Ellie Lane near Iron Mountain, I had a wonderful time with just the camera and the lens, without any extra gear.

There is always the much lighter and easier to use camera on your phone as well, I have taken a few great photos just using my phone, which means a much easier hike with less weight. It's a great way to preplan for another trip with your professional gear, see what kinds of photos you can take with your phone as you get accustomed to the trail. I still take my phone with me and use to preview as scene sometimes before I unpack my gear and set up for a shot.

Planning for your photography and hiking to maximize your success.

There is a plethora of information on the internet on just about anywhere you want to hike these days. This makes it easy to see what kinds of photos are possible and to get a better idea of what kind of gear you may need to bring with you.

Make extensive use of this information, plan your route, print a map, print out figures ie, ...how many miles, elevation gain so you have a better idea of what you are getting into, even in these days of smart phones and apps a good map can be a lifesaver.

Check your weather app and the national weather service. I use several sources of weather information, especially the more remote and severe the hike the more I want to make sure I know what I am getting into.

Let someone know where you are going, I use the find my feature on my iphone so my wife can see where I am when I am hiking, or out photographing by myself. I try to let her know before hand where I am going and if my plans change pass on the changes. Even more important, if I know there is no phone signal access where I am going I will let her know that so that she doesn't worry when I may be out of communication for a day or a week.

There are devices such as the [Garmin Inreach](#) and [Inreach mini](#) that will allow you to communicate over satellite in areas that have no other coverage.

Safety Practices while hiking

Around here in San Diego, absolutely positively, make sure you bring enough water. It seems like most of the rescues I see and hear about are because of heat related injuries.

We don't have any bears here in San Diego, but we certainly have mountain lions and rattle snakes. Make sure you know what to do if you come in contact with one.

Most rattle snakes will leave you alone if you leave them alone, but if you are so "in the zone" that you step on one with realizing it you may be in for a world of hurt.

Mountain Lions are the only natural predator I worry about when I'm out in the early or late hours of the day. I have yet to see one on the trail, but I am super aware of what is going on around me when I am in an area that I need to worry about, especially if I am by myself.

Be aware of what plants to avoid, such as poison ivy, poison oak, poodle dog bush, cholla cactus, tangling with these plants can turn your wonderful hike into a miserable experience.

Simple fitness tips

I have been in the fitness industry for a long time, I help a wide range of people, from teenagers getting started for the first time to 100 year old clients just trying to keep going for another year. There is an principle called **sports specificity** that says "*adaptations elicited from training are directly dependent on the specific type of activity, volume, and intensity of the exercise performed*" which is a long way of saying if you want to get better at hiking, go hiking more often. Start off slow with small, less intense hikes and as you become accustomed to these hikes try longer more intense hikes, making a progressive change to your fitness level and what your accustomed to.

With that said there are some exercises that you can do to help strengthen your body so that hiking is less of a challenge.

Climbing Stairs – both up and down if your joints will allow it, after all this is what you will be doing on the trail. I like to have clients go up 2 steps at a time to really challenge them, while also taking your time going down the stairs as this is when more forces are applied onto your joints. If you go really slowly down the stairs this will help develop your muscles for the long downhills during your hiking. If your joints are not strong enough try **chair squats**, just get yourself a kitchen chair and have a seat, stand up and slowly sit down, as you get used to it sit slower and try not touching the chair with your butt, basically making a squat.

Calf raises – stand on a staircase while holding onto a rail and placing the balls of your feet on the edge of the stair, raise up on your tip toes and then let your heels go back down past the level of your toes, repeat the movement until your calves are burning.

One legged balanced deadlift – this one is so simple but yet so hard for so many people when they start. Balance on one foot and slowly lean forward reaching for the ground while balanced, bring your other

leg up behind you for counter balance. This is an easy way to help build some strength in your hamstrings while also working on your flexibility and balance.

Static Prone Plank – this is a great way to help build some strength and stamina in your core. I usually have people start with 10 second holds for 10 reps, as they get accustomed to the exercise they can always hold the exercise for longer periods of time.

Pelvic Bridge - A pelvic bridge is a great exercise that works on glutes, hamstrings, and core muscles. Lay on your back with your feet shoulder width apart and pulled back towards your butt so that your knees are close to 90 degrees. Then just tighten your core muscles and your glutes and raise your butt up off of the ground as far as you can slowly. Hold this position for 5-10 seconds and then lower your butt back down and repeat.

These are some simple exercises that require no equipment that you can do anywhere! If you have any joint issues though it may behoove you to consult your doctor and or a fitness professional before getting started on a fitness program.

Thanks for coming out to hear me at the San Diego County Fair

Have fun with your adventures

Brad Spiess