

# TAKING ROMANCE FOR A HIKE

A guide to love and looking good on the trail

WORDS BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN | PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

The sun was setting over the rim of the gorge and we were snuggled close together in the warmth of the campfire, sipping the wine he'd thoughtfully packed along in a shatterproof bottle. As he slipped his arms around me, I felt that bright, burning spark start to flare up ...

That's when I started jumping up and down slapping at the spot on my back where the ember from the fire had landed on my brand-new fleece jacket and slowly had begun to melt its way through my clothes.

If you're in Manhattan, then it may be *Sex in the City* for you, but if you live in Eugene, it's more like "Hooking Up On Hike." Here in the Pacific Northwest you're just as likely to have a guy or gal ask you out for a walk in the woods as you are to get asked for a dinner and a drink. With a little forethought, you can combine an outdoor adventure with a little romance and look good while you do it.

Dan Kruse had already gone on a number of hiking dates with his lady-love Ivy Knox when the backcountry Casanova made reservations for several nights at the fire lookout atop Hager Mountain during a snowy weekend in March. The mountain lies near the town of Silver Lake, about three hours from Eugene.

What Knox didn't know was that Kruse had snuck a bottle of champagne into his already loaded pack (hint: champagne and wine are very romantic, but very heavy so plan ahead). After hiking for three miles up the mountain, then snowshoeing another steep mile, the couple reached the lookout as the sun was setting, cold and exhausted.

The cabin at the top of the peak, says Kruse, comes with fireplace and wood, a bed and an amazing view of the Cascades and Eastern Oregon out the windows. "It was the middle of winter and we were looking out across the desert," says Kruse. "We were literally sitting on top of the world."

Kruse popped the question (and the champagne), Knox said yes, and the couple spent the next three days holed up alone in their wilderness love nest.

You don't have to go far to wander in the woods with the man or woman of your dreams (or at least the hottest potential mate you found in the personal ads last night). Popular Eugene destinations for an easy-but-outdoorsy first date include Spencer's Butte, Skinner's Butte and even Hendricks Park. Mount Pisgah is great, too, and if you get along well, you can get married or domestic partnered there later. Just stay on the trail and keep an eye out for poison oak in the summer; it can really make you regret that romp on Pisgah's grassy slopes.

Note: For those of you with first date safety concerns, you get cell phone service at all those places. And with any hike, always tell someone where you are going and when you plan to be back.

If you want to wander farther afield, Daphne Gabrielli of Eugene recommends anything to do with waterfalls for romance, and I agree. There's something about all that rushing water ...

Gabrielli's personal favorite is Kentucky Falls, about 45 minutes west of Eugene. Spirit and Moon Falls outside of Cottage Grove



are short hikes with lovely falls, too; in fact, the forests around Eugene are full of waterfalls — there's a reason those mountains are called the Cascades.

For the beauty-conscious, it's difficult to compete with all that natural loveliness, and it's hard to look hot when you are hot and sweaty on the trail, but it can be done. I know we're supposed to be all-natural nature girls here in Eugene (your beauty comes from within), but sometimes a girl feels like getting gussied up. Even for a hike.

Starting from the inside out, you're going to get sweaty, but don't be tempted to cover that up with perfume. Perfume might make you smell a little better, but it will also make you smell really tasty to the bears and the bees. If you're worried about your scent, especially on longer hikes, pack along some biodegradable baby wipes for a quick wash up. Be sure to pack them out and leave no trace.

Wear sunscreen. If you wear makeup, mineral-based makeup combines all natural ingredients with sun protection, giving you a concealing tint into the bargain. Add some waterproof mascara and some tinted lip balm, and you're good to go. Some powders have sunscreen, too, but compacts just don't always hold up to the rigors of the trail.

While you're getting dressed, know that layering is key to not getting too hot or too cold while you're holding hands by one of those waterfalls. Silk is highly recommended both as a base layer and as something soft and sheer for those of us who take "hot" literally and figuratively. A little negligee under your hiking gear will keep things heated up on any hike. Just remember to avoid itchy lace. If it itches now, it'll be 10 times worse a mile down the trail.

For summertime hikes, jeans and a T-shirt are fine: sexy and practical. Keep in mind you may get them snagged or torn, but sometimes you have to sacrifice a little; they are jeans after all. Shorts aren't usually a good idea, unless you don't mind getting scratched up and bitten, which is generally not a good way to show off your legs.

Avoid cotton clothes on hikes with the potential for wet or cold, and go with polypropylene or wool. Sexy wool sweaters are not hard to find, and brands from REI to Patagonia carry jackets cut for the feminine figure.

For easy hikes, you can get away with sneakers, but I recommend a good pair of hiking boots. They'll keep you secure on the trail, and off trail you can pair them up with a miniskirt for that tough but sultry look. Having hiked with high heels and a short dress, I can tell you right now, it's a bad idea.

It may sound romantic to let your long hair billow in the wind, but there's a reason so many hippies in Eugene have dreads. Unless you want to sport the too-tangled look, be prepared for braids or pony tail. For long trips, bring along some leave-in detangler and a comb.

Most backpack companies make packs shaped for a woman's physique. For a day hike, along with your safety essentials, toss in some plastic wineglasses and chocolate, and switch your wine into a lightweight shatterproof bottle. Bring a lightweight blanket to lie back on and let the water, wind and birds be your mood music. **ew**

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