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WEEKEND BREAK

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SALMON-
HUCKLEBERRY
WILDERNESS

MT. HOOD
National
Forest

NOTES FROM THE TRAIL

Things to consider while taking a hike

I consider myself fortunate to spend a good amount of time on trails — whether I'm out hiking, searching for lost people or out for days backpacking and fishing high alpine lakes.

Out there I contemplate much. In the context of the broken back I suffered falling 75 feet down a riverbank in 2013, and how devastating that could have turned out, I'm grateful for my life and limbs, on the trail and off.

Being on the trail is incredible. But it's often eye-opening and frequently frustrating.

Small safety precautions go a long way. We can all take small actions, but choosing whether the impacts will be helpful or harmful — to ourselves, our recreational areas and public lands — makes all the difference.

A few reoccurring thoughts from the trail that I feel are worthy of consideration:

1. If you're going somewhere, tell someone.

"It hinders the spontaneity," some say. But over and over again, as a Pacific Northwest Search and Rescue member, I see folks end up in dire situations. And the failure to tell anyone where they're going results in a delayed response from loved ones and emergency responders.

Simply letting a responsible person know when you'll return, and placing a note specifying the planned day-in / day-out on the backside of your trip plan on your dash at the trailhead, can make a huge difference.

In addition, personal locator beacons (PLBs), such as a Spot or Garmin InReach, can be invaluable during a wilderness emergency.

2. Bring proper clothing and footwear.

Often I see people hiking in inadequate clothing and footwear. That's fine if all is good. But after seeing feet torn open and shredded by roots, I've realized the risk isn't worth it. Inadequate footwear is an accident waiting to happen.

And should something unexpected happen out there, failure to bring additional clothing, rain gear and an emergency shelter could be the difference between an inconvenient night in the woods and not making it home.

3. Appreciate the little things.

Pay attention to plants, wildlife and the weather. Soaking up these things in addition to views, summits, photos or destinations will add depth to your hike and contribute to being fully present — which can help your situational awareness and increase your safety.

4. Take advantage of technology.

The days of having to buy a \$500-plus standalone GPS unit are over. With that smartphone in your pocket, a plethora of navigation and trail map apps are available to you for free or small annual fees. (My personal recommendations are Gaia GPS and AllTrails.) Of course, carrying and knowing how to use a compass and having a good topographical map are paramount.

5. Remember to pick up your dog waste bag.

Trailheads everywhere are littered with them. People will bag the poop, then say to themselves, "Why should I carry this all the way up the trail and back?" fully intending to grab the bag on their way back down.

I mean, I get it — why would you want to take it with you when you're going to be returning to the trailhead anyway? Unsurprisingly, though, the moment of remembrance often comes too late, after well-intentioned dog owners have already left the trail. You can also help by picking up bags left by other hikers.

It's an issue of epidemic proportions. Woof.

6. Bring an extra trash bag.

There's no shortage of trash to pick up out there. Do it for yourself and inspire others with this small act. I try to treat trails as I do campsites: Leave them better than I found them. A little effort goes a long way. Carry Nitrile gloves in your pack if you're concerned about germs.

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Stay safe. Respect nature. Inspire other to get outside and share your passions freely. There are always little things we can do and discuss with others to be safer and make sure we all make it home safely.

Aaron Breniman is a fly fisherman, kayaker, backpacker, trail runner and freelance writer who teaches wilderness skills at Clackamas Community College. Find him at aaronbreniman.com, or follow him at @aaronbreniman on Twitter or @akbnpdx on Instagram.



TOP: The Salmon-Huckleberry Wilderness trailhead sign in the Mt. Hood National Forest. LEFT: Trash, picked up from around and inside Devil's Peak Lookout, strapped to the outside of a pack for the hike out. RIGHT: Smoke wafts through the forest canopy during an Oregon spring backpacking trip. BOTTOM: Sunset lights the sky on fire as it sets through the trees near Devil's Churn, just north of Yachats.



Photos by Aaron Breniman