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How Pawful -- Lionesses

Newsletter
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Lessons from Our Travels, Part 1: Take Care of Your Feet

We have been fortunate enough to be able to journey to some truly amazing places. We have felt the chill in the air north of the Arctic Circle, and dodged the determined tse-tse flies on the African savanna. We have swum with the sting rays in the South Pacific and shared the trail with grizzly bears in Glacier National Park. As we have become more seasoned travelers, we have learned that there are certain bits of wisdom which, regardless of our destination, help ensure a more comfortable and successful outing. In sharing them with you, we hope that you can benefit from our sometimes hard-won insights.

The first installment of this series deals with a somewhat underappreciated but extremely important part of our anatomy: feet. We will avoid the overly obvious tidbits such as “wear sturdy shoes that fit properly.” (Well, yeah. Of course.) While these pieces of advice may or may not be applicable to a tour through Rome, they are definitely advantageous to any hike involving trails or use of the word “backcountry.”

Wear waterproof hiking boots

Note the term “waterproof” – it is an important feature. We learned this the hard way while in Africa. One of us had waterproof boots, the other did not. Both pairs were very comfortable. It shouldn’t have mattered that one pair was not waterproof; after all, we were visiting in the dry season. Surely we wouldn’t need *waterproof* boots, would we? An unusual, day-long downpour jarred that notion right out of us. Rivers flooded; tents collapsed from the fierce wind. Small divots in the ground morphed into expansive lakes. There was no avoiding it: our boots were going to get very wet. Big deal, you say? Indeed it is.

Wet feet are more likely to develop blisters, which can have effects far beyond the day your feet were wet. Severe blisters can keep you from being able to don shoes at all. Wet feet also lose heat faster than dry feet (25 times faster, according to the United States Search and Rescue Task Force), which chills your body and makes your feet more susceptible to cold injuries. Wet boots can take days to dry, leaving you dealing with damp feet long after the rest of you is dry. And honestly, who likes walking around in wet footwear?

Though our non-waterproof pair of boots had been coated with a waterproofing spray, water still got into the boots, and the wearer had to deal with this uncomfortable situation for several days. The waterproof boots, on the other hand, had several built-in features that kept their wearer quite comfy. The waterproofing was vastly superior to the spray-on version. Seams were sealed. The tongue was attached to the uppers, forming a solid barrier through which the water could not seep. The uppers were constructed from a material that allowed moisture to escape out of the boot (despite not allowing it in), reducing the amount of sweat dampness within the boot. The feet within those boots stayed quite dry and comfortable, and the wearer had to bite their tongue to keep from floating.

Even if you don't get caught in an unexpected deluge, hiking often involves crossing small creeks, jumping puddles, or tromping through mud. In addition to keeping their contents dry, waterproof boots have the added advantage of being easy to clean: just spray them off or dip them into the lake. As long as you are careful to protect the collar (the highest part of the uppers), you immediately have a clean, *dry* pair of boots to wear.

Take an extra pair of socks

No, we don't mean to pack an extra pair for your trip; we mean take an extra pair on each hike. At your halfway point, change your socks. This is especially easy when the halfway point is somewhere that you want to dawdle for a time, such as a lake or peak with a view. If the weather and temperature allow, let your feet air dry thoroughly before donning the new socks. If it is too wet or cold, dry your feet the best you can. This not only helps to protect your feet from the deleterious effects of staying wet, fresh socks in the middle of a hike simply feel heavenly.

Take your boots on a downhill "test drive"

This is best done well before you go on that long hike. Find an area where you can simulate going downhill in your footwear of choice: a steep driveway, a nearby hill. Some outdoor gear companies such as REI even have faux rocks you can clamber up and down to test your boots. As you head downhill, pay attention to how your foot moves in the boot. What you do not want is for your longest

toe(s) to touch the front or top of the toe box of your boot. Although the short amount of time spent testing the boots will leave you wondering why this is a concern, prolonged contact between the toes and the toe box can lead to very painful toe injuries, ranging from bruising and swelling to losing the toe nail. To combat this issue: 1) ensure that your boots are long enough. Many people are surprised to discover that they actually need to go up at least a half size to be properly fitted. For those of you with narrow feet, resist the urge to buy the smaller pair to get a tighter fit across the forefoot. You can lace the forefoot tighter, but you can't extend the shoe length. 2) Keep your feet from sliding forward in your boots. This may require tightening the laces or using arch supports. 3) Remember that as we age, our feet flatten out a bit, which may require adjustments to our shoe size. Don't cling to the past; your feet will love you for the extra room! 4) And finally, know that these toe injuries are not limited to hiking boots. They can happen in any kind of footwear in which the toes touch the front of the shoe -- including the much beloved tennis shoe.

Happy hiking, and be good to your feet!

February's Fun Facts

In honor of the 2012 leap year, this month we look at the calendrical weirdness that is February.

February receives an extra day every four years to align the calendar with the solar cycle. The solar year averages 365.24 days, putting the calendar almost a full day behind every four years. Why, one might ask, is the extra day added to the seemingly arbitrary February, and not the end of the year? And why does poor February have only 28 days, while the rest have 30 or 31? The answers lie in the evolution of our calendar, known as the Gregorian calendar. (Don't worry; I'll give you the short version.)

The ancient Romans designed the first ancestor of our modern calendar. It had ten named months of widely varying durations, and was centered on agricultural cycles. Thus, the year began at the spring equinox (March) and ended in December. The time between December and March was not agriculturally important, so it was left off the calendar. The calendar was eventually changed to include two new months at the end of the year: January and February. Thus, the addition of the leap day *did* occur at the end of the year.

The number of days in February bounced around quite a bit over the centuries. At one point it had 24 days, at another it had 30... There was even a point at which there was a 22-day long thirteenth month between February and March –

but only every other year. (The history of our calendar is nothing if not convoluted.) Eventually February settled at 28 days, and January was designated as the beginning of the year. By that time, there was a long history of making calendar adjustments in February, and the tradition stuck. Thus, every four years, the elusive “February 29” makes an appearance. (Actually, it’s not always every four years, but that is another discussion entirely!)

Happy Leap Year!

If you have any questions, or suggestions for future newsletters, please email us at: relationships@cityescapesphotography.com

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