

## Walking Gear

New members receive this advice in their “membership pack” but it has been suggested that some existing members may not have seen it and might find it useful – so here it is.

### 1. Footwear

Some people, even in difficult terrain, prefer walking shoes. However, for the vast majority of people walking boots are strongly recommended, if not essential. Whilst some have a preference for leather boots, most walkers these days will choose a lightweight Nubuck / suede and fabric boot. These will usually have a Vibram sole of cleated rubber on a stiff plastic inflexible base. Preferably the boot should have a Gortex liner that should allow you to stand in a stream without getting your feet wet (providing the water does not come over the top of the boot!). This combination will give you a breathable boot with strong foot and ankle support. A long walk over rough ground should not leave you with sore feet in good boots. When choosing a boot make sure that you try it on with appropriate socks and inner soles or footbeds. (A good pair of inner soles (not the ones that come with the boot) should give substantial cushioning and will cost about \$40.) Most people will require a boot that is larger than their normal shoesize. A good rule of thumb is, while wearing a pair of socks that you intend wearing with your boots, put your intended purchase on your foot without lacing it up. Now push your foot forward so that your toes touch the toe of the boot. If you can comfortably fit a finger or thumb into the gap between your heel and the heel of the boot then the boot is probably the right size. The toe gap allows you to descend a slope while taking your body weight on the instep of your foot rather than your toes. Move your heel well into the heel cup of the boot and lace it up, making sure that you're not lacing too tight. Walk around the shop to see if the heel of your foot 'rises' within the boot despite being laced up. A significantly rising heel will probably blister on even the smallest walk and the boots are unlikely ever to be comfortable. If you have already bought a boot that permits too much movement consider fitting it with a padded footbed to reduce the amount of space in the boot. Extra socks may also help but the footbeds will reduce the amount of vertical space in the boot without affecting the other dimensions. If a footbed uncomfortably restricts the space available in the toe of the boot then consider using heel pads. Some insoles double as a shock absorbing medium.

Nubuck / suede and fabric boots should be washed after each walk using a bucket of warm water and a dish cleaning brush. This prevents the Gortex membrane getting clogged and losing its breathability and prevents the spread of pathogens such as Cinnamon Fungus from one walking locality to another.

A thick outer pair of socks worn over a thin pair of wicking socks prevents the feet getting too sweaty and also prevents blisters forming.

### 2. Clothing.

#### Inner layers:

The most suitable clothing is a shirt of “high tec” nylon and trousers (with zip off bottoms) of similar material. These fabrics are windproof (surprisingly warm) and dry rapidly after getting wet. The author has walked in a “Wilderness” shirt in light rain in a high wind and had the shirt stay dry because the wind dried it as quickly as the rain wetted it! Needless to say they dry rapidly after getting wet with sweat also. In cold weather the shirt may be worn over a T-shirt of Merino wool (an Icebreaker or similar). The principle of dressing in

“layers” should be followed with a light wool sweater or cotton windcheater worn over the shirt. In still colder weather a Windstopper can be worn over these or you may choose to wear only a Windstopper over the shirt. A Windstopper cannot be too highly recommended. They are warm, windproof, rain resistant, quick drying and fold into a small space.

#### Outer weatherproof clothing:

A wind and waterproof thigh length jacket with a waterproof membrane such as Gortex or Hydronaut is recommended. A hood is desirable. A pair of waterproof overtrousers is also very useful. The more expensive “breathable” Gortex type are much more comfortable than cheaper plastic or nylon trousers. In the latter you may end up as wet as if you did not have them on!

#### Hat:

A broad brimmed soft hat is recommended to shade the face on hot days. You may find a soft “fleece” cap is good for cold days or a “fleece” ear band. Walking is a heat producing process so one is rarely very cold! But remember that in emergencies such a hat or ear band could make a great deal of difference.

### **3. Pack**

Numerous daypacks are available. My recommendation would be to get a 25 – 35 litre pack on a lightweight frame that holds the pack away from the back. This is much cooler on hot days. The pack should ideally have an inbuilt waterproof pack cover (most pack fabrics are not waterproof) and large pocket on the pack flap and a couple of side pockets capable of housing a water bottle. When worn the waist support should rest on the hips and the waist belt should be cinched in tightly so that the pack weight is entirely on the hips not the shoulders. Adjust the shoulder straps to set the pack snugly against your back but little or no weight should be on your shoulders. You may find that you need to use the sternum strap to prevent the pack wobbling on your back.

### **4. Pack contents**

Casual walkers often wonder what club bush walkers have in their “huge” packs. Whilst much of the contents may be used on a day walk, a good deal is there for emergencies and the unforeseen event. Remember that on harder walks even in localities as close to Melbourne as Kinglake National Park it is relatively easy to get into areas that are very difficult for State Emergency Services to access. All it takes is a severe sprain or a broken leg and some or all of the party may be delayed for some time in isolated bush. Even an unforeseen deviation from the planned route may leave you in dense bush after nightfall. This is when some of the “emergency” contents of your pack are required!

If you are on a walk on well defined tracks close to civilisation then it would be sensible to adjust the contents to take this into consideration – there is little point in carrying all the “emergency items” for a walk in Westerfolds Park for example! Some common sense needs to prevail.

Clothing – the type of clothing has been discussed above. What you put in your pack will depend upon the season, the weather forecast and the location. If you are going into

alpine regions then be prepared for any type of weather (it can snow in summer), if going into the depths of somewhere like Lerderderg Gorge be equipped to comfortably survive a night out in case you are stranded after dark by some unforeseen event. In summer, unless venturing into the alps, I would settle for a light short waterproof jacket and a cotton windcheater but in winter I would probably have a full Gortex coat and a windstopper.

Water - on cool days in winter 600ml may be sufficient but on warmer days 1 – 3 litres may be required. On a warm day walk in Lerderderg Gorge for example you will drink 1.5 litres with no trouble at all and may well be wishing for more! For hot weather walks it is not a bad idea to have a tube of tablets of flavoured “Gastrolyte” in your pack. It is easy to lose so much body salts that you will feel nauseous and may cramp. Replacing lost sodium and potassium chloride will help greatly. A small vacuum flask of coffee or tea is also an excellent addition for lunch and “tea” breaks.

Food - An easily digested light lunch, high in carbohydrates is recommended. Fruit and a reserve of high energy food (muesli bars, chocolate) should be carried. Always keep some for that unforeseen event – you can eat it once you are back at the cars.

Personal first aid kit - Whilst your leader will probably have a reasonable (but small) first aid kit it is wise to carry a small one of your own. If you have a dicky knee or ankle carry the appropriate support in case you need it. A compression bandage for snakebite is also a sensible thing to have.

Insect repellent - This may offer some protection from leeches as well as biting insects.

Insect net – the large mesh type worn over a hat and covering the face is probably best and offers great protection from bush flies and “March flies”.

Sunscreen and lip salve

Whistle – this is an essential piece of equipment in case you become separated from the group. Keep it to hand, especially if you wander off track for a “toilet stop” – it is easy to become disorientated.

Mobile phone – include at least one “ICE” (In Case of Emergency) number in your phone number library.

A waterproof container - (old 35mm film cassette) containing name, address details of an emergency contact, blood group allergies etc.

Thin polypropylene gloves, bandana or light scarf, fleece beanie hat, spare pair of wicking socks

Trekking umbrella

LED torch - (preferably head torch) and also spare batteries.

Pocket knife

Small notebook and pencil

### Bubble plastic for sitting on

A large inner plastic packliner - this will also offer some shelter as a survival bag.

### Space blanket or survival bag

Spare laces, a short length of cord and a short length of duct tape – these are useful for repairing footgear and walking poles (don't think it can not happen, I have fastened detaching soles on a walker's boots with duct tape, for example).

### Box of matches

Safety pins – one large (kilt pin) and one small will serve to hold torn clothes or packs together (may save you some embarrassment!).

New Zealand sheep wool and a blister pack – these will save you from blisters if you apply to "hot spots" on sore feet.

## **5. Walking Poles**

As far as I am concerned these are an essential piece of equipment. Some club diehards still eschew them but there is no doubt that when used properly they increase your safety, reduce wear and tear on muscles and joints, improve your stability and increase the available driving force for forward progression. Walking poles are not the same as walking sticks; you need to learn the correct technique for using them. One walking pole is better than none but two are more than twice as good as one! To obtain most benefit, use two and seek advice about their proper use (the Walks Coordinator will be glad to assist). Walking poles differ greatly in quality; it pays to invest in a good pair. They add to the weight you are carrying so a lightweight pair is an advantage. Strong lightweight poles are made from three adjustable sections of titanium or carbon fibre (most expensive!), aluminium poles are heavier. They should have comfortable cork handles fitted with padded adjustable straps – the straps take your weight and are used much more than the handles. The poles should have small baskets and tungsten carbide tips. They need to be adjusted to the correct length in the correct way - so ask!

## **6. Navigation equipment**

Hopefully you will be interested in where you are, where you have been and where you are going. If you are, then a map of the area, a "Silva" type compass and, if possible, a GPS, are indispensable. The club runs navigation courses from time to time and your walk leader will usually be pleased to help you learn how to use these aids. It does make the walk more interesting and you will have a better understanding of the topography and flora and fauna. You will also develop essential skills for becoming a walk leader yourself in the future!

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