



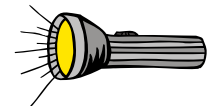
Winter walking has many advantages; no bugs, no crowds, better views (none of those darn leaves); even your companions don't smell so bad. A little more thought is required to keep us safe and comfortable in the colder weather. Let's start with comfort. Most of your clothes will be suitable for winter walking.

*Bottom Half* – Your regular boots and “sock-and-a-half” system (polypropylene liner and wool outer sock) remain the same. Synthetic hiking pants (tights work well) are helped along by gaiters that keep the snow out of your boots.

*Top Half* – Tops come in three layers: 1) polypropylene underwear (keeps you dry), 2) fleece pullover (keeps you warm) and, 3) a wind/water proof jacket. A fleece hat and mitts are light and can be taken on and off to regulate your temperature. A fleece neck warmer can be cozy. You may have noticed that I haven't mentioned cotton in any layer. Cotton has its place, but it isn't in winter activities; cotton's problem is that it retains moisture, both yours and the elements. Close to your skin this moisture cools leaving you with a cold or frozen layer which is the primary cause of hypothermia. This cold moisture layer draws heat away from your skin surface. Dry is both comfortable and safe.

Safety should be a consideration summer and winter but mistakes made in winter are less forgiving.

- 1) *Shorter Days* - Know your route. Know when sunset is and plan to be off the trail well before it starts getting dark. Carry a map and a flashlight. I use a website called “Custom Sunrise Sunset Calendar” [[www.sunrisesunset.com/custom\\_srss\\_calendar.asp](http://www.sunrisesunset.com/custom_srss_calendar.asp)] that provides sunrise and sunset times for Kitchener when I am planning hikes in the non-summer months.
- 2) *Ice* - Ice may be present. Consider a trekking pole or two (looks like a ski pole) with a carbide tip that “chunks” into the ice. You will probably use the pole year round; it is a great knee saver on the down hills. If you once use "Icers" you know that they are like magic to take the danger out of walking on ice. Icers are Vibram soles with stainless steel screws that Velcro on to your boots.
- 3) *Dehydration* - Our normal sense of thirst lets us down in the winter but we must keep drinking water.
- 4) The consequences of dehydration (i.e. confusion, fatigue, headaches, bladder infections and kidney stones) are best avoided.
- 5) *Sun Protection* - It is still required. The cool weather will try to fool you but use that sun screen and a hat.
- 6) *Don't Hike Alone* - Hike with a group or at least a friend. Your mother told you that there was safety in numbers and at the time you probably did not think she was talking about hiking but the advice fits. Problems can arise and the presence of others helps.



### **What to Pack**

Let's pack our pack with a few *additional* items that will add more comfort and safety to our hike.



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a first aid kit (a St. John Ambulance first aid course wouldn't hurt)</li><li>• an extra layer such as a small down jacket for when we stop</li><li>• a piece of closed cell foam to keep our “sit upon” warm and dry when we take a break</li><li>• a “space blanket”</li><li>• more water than we think we will need and a hot drink (e.g. tea)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a good lunch and some high energy snacks</li><li>• a spare pair of socks and mitts</li><li>• rain pants</li><li>• lip protection</li><li>• a cell phone has become an important safety item (with charged battery).</li><li>• flashlight (and fresh batteries) in case of a delay</li></ul> |
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## **Winter Pace**

Walking in winter can be likened to treading a fine line. We want to walk quickly enough to keep warm but not so hard or fast that we perspire which will make us uncomfortable, cool and potentially unsafe. Hike leaders should be especially aware of this, watching the pace of the hike and providing stops for “clothing adjustments” and rests.

## **Where to walk?**

In the southern parts of the Ontario there are areas of little or no snow such as the Niagara and Iroquoia sections of the Bruce Trail and the area south of Cambridge on the Grand Valley Trail. Increasingly we have more rail trails becoming available to us. In the Toronto area the Islands, Leslie Street Spit and the ravine system of trails are worth considering. In the central and northern part of Ontario many a fine winter walk has been had on quiet country roads. A little snow should not deter you anyway, just keep in mind that cross country skiers do not appreciate you walking on their trails.

## **Wellness and Winter**

I do not need to tell you that Canada's winters are long and cold however that should not keep us from enjoying nature and getting adequate exercise. Wellness experts advise that one of the best ways to beat seasonal affective disorder, or S.A.D. (a distinctive type of winter depression) is to exercise outdoors. The stress management benefits of hiking should not be missed in the winter months, this is probably the time we need these benefits the most. The bottom line then is to continue to enjoy hiking and reap the benefits – year round.

## **Snow Shoes and Snowshoeing**

Check my The Right Stuff article entitled “Snowshoeing” for another way to enjoy winter and exercise too.

Happy hiking,  
Greg

### *About Greg*

Greg is an experienced and certified hike leader and instructor. He has been a long time member of the Bruce Trail Association ([www.bruce-trail.org](http://www.bruce-trail.org)), the Grand Valley Trails Association ([www.gvta.on.ca](http://www.gvta.on.ca)) and other hiking organizations. Greg has an extensive background in aviation and air traffic control. Greg has taught introduction to hiking courses and map and compass courses for several years. Currently his website, Greg Vincent's Hiking Site, resides at <http://home.golden.net/%7Egvincent/>



Other The Right Stuff articles are:

- “On the Up and Up” or Icy Walking
- Footwear - Boots & Socks (how to care for your feet & how to choose boots & socks)
- Clothing (how to keep warm & dry)
- Packs (what kind to carry & what to put in them)
- Bugs (how to avoid them & prevent their bothering you)
- Trail Safety (how to ensure you hike without incident)
- Trekking Poles (modern ones - what are they & why use them)
- Medical Emergencies (how to prepare for & respond to a medical emergency while hiking)
- Warm Weather Walking (the scoop on hiking in warm weather)
- Snowshoeing (If you can walk, you can snowshoe – no ifs, ands or buts.)
- Global Positioning System or GPS (What is it and how it works.)