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Preface

I'm going to hazard a wild guess here and speculate that you've been walking for a lot of years. Odds are you're an adult, and you've been bipedal now for, what, 20 years? 30? Maybe 40, 50, 60, 70 years, or more? That's a lot of experience.

Walking is one of the earliest physical skills we learn. We're really quite good at it. A college anthropology professor once told my class, referring to our species, "We're great walkers." He said this with a pride that I found amusing, the way a parent might boast about a child's athletic skills, but he was right. Although most of us will never excel at running, jumping, throwing a ball, or propelling ourselves on a bicycle or skis, virtually all of us, with a little bit of physical training, are capable of walking impressive distances.

So what keeps most of us from walking up a mountain or off into the woods? It's not our feet—it's our heads. As soon as we change the verb from "walking" to "hiking," some of us have visions of severely strenuous activity, rough terrain, breathing difficulties, sore feet, getting cold and wet, and perhaps worst of all, getting lost. To someone unfamiliar with what lies beyond the trailhead parking lot, the woods and mountains can seem like terra incognita.

I'm writing this to tell you that anyone can learn basic day-hiking skills. This book teaches you those skills simply, without requiring years of postgraduate study. Maybe you've done some day hiking but always went with more-experienced partners who made sure you didn't perish from hypothermia or in the jaws of lions, tigers, or bears. Here's a news flash: *You* can become that more-experienced hiker. This may be an unwise thing for an author of a book like this to admit, but day hiking isn't laser eye surgery. All it takes is a fundamental knowledge of where to go, what to bring, and how to get there and back comfortably and safely. Beyond that, it's just walking—and you're already pretty good at that.

Looking for exercise? Nothing comes more naturally than walking, and the health benefits of walking are well documented. If you already walk or run around town for exercise, just think how much you'll enhance your workout by walking up and down a hill. Add the weight of a light pack on your back and you'll burn even more calories. But a day hike doesn't have to turn into a life-threatening epic on par with climbing Mount Everest, either. If you read this book, yours won't be. Instead, you'll learn how to prepare for and choose the right hike for your abilities, fitness level, and interests.

Of course, hiking isn't all about exercise—that's just a side benefit. Hiking in the forests and mountains is as far removed from hitting your local gym as Kathmandu is from Chicago. Hiking is about walking amid a New England forest ablaze in a kaleidoscope of autumn colors or a vast grove of Rocky Mountain

Reasons to Hit the Trails

In addition to the healthy benefit of exercise, hiking allows you to do the following:

- ▲ **Watch birds and wildlife:** Get a field guide to birds and wildlife in your region.
- ▲ **Study geology:** Read about rocks and become a lay geologist.
- ▲ **See wildflowers:** Few spectacles of nature are as beautiful as a mountain slope carpeted in colorful wildflowers in bloom; a field guide can help you identify and learn about them.
- ▲ **Become an amateur nature photographer:** Whether wildlife or scenery, everything is at your fingertips from the perspective of the trail.
- ▲ **Fly-fish:** The fish won't come to you—you have to go to them, and a hiking trail may be the only way to get there.
- ▲ **Keep a journal:** A journal is a rewarding way for an individual, a couple, or a family with children to preserve and relive the memories of a hiking trip or outdoor vacation. Record your entries right away so you don't forget little details.
- ▲ **Have fun:** Day hiking is just plain fun. It's something almost anyone can do, at any age. It's an activity you can do with the family, no matter what age the kids are—really—and that you can enjoy throughout life. It costs next to nothing. You can choose hikes as easy or as difficult or as short or as long as you like. With a little experience, you'll find yourself wanting to take longer day hikes and perhaps even taking vacations to great hiking destinations

aspen trees turned golden with their own foliage transformation. Hiking takes you to the summits of mountains where you hear and feel the wind and gaze out over a rolling sea of peaks that rearranges your whole idea of the scale of the world. Hiking can take you to the bottom of deep canyons amid colorful stratified rock that harks back nearly to the planet's birth, or it can take you along a rocky seashore where waves pound the land incessantly and seals frolic in the water just offshore. Even if hiking takes you no farther afield than the trails through your local woods, you'll still discover a depth of quiet and peacefulness that you'll wonder how you ever lived without.

Now I'm going to make you a promise: Hiking can transform your life. No, I don't mean you'll suddenly decide to shed your worldly possessions and all of your clothes and go off to live in a cave in the woods. What I do mean is that hiking can change your priorities and perspective on what's important. I speak from experience. Although some avid hikers began as children, I only took it up in my 20s. I was an adult before I discovered the pleasures of hiking, and the activity completely changed my interests and how I spend a big part of my leisure time. It eventually inspired me to redirect my career so that I could make a living from writing about hiking. You may never go that far, but just maybe you'll wish you could.

So read on and enjoy. This book is entertaining as well as

informative. But more importantly, transfer what you learn here to the trail. You'll be glad you did.

Michael Lanza

A Note About Safety

Safety is an important concern in all outdoor activities. No book can alert you to every hazard or anticipate the limitations of every reader. The descriptions of techniques and procedures in this book are intended to provide general information. When you follow any of the procedures described here, you assume responsibility for your own safety. Use this book as a general guide to further information. Under normal conditions, excursions into the backcountry require attention to traffic, road and trail conditions, weather, terrain, the capabilities of your party, and other factors. Keeping informed on current conditions and exercising common sense are the keys to a safe, enjoyable outing.

The Mountaineers Books