

## Excerpts from Hiking Safety Handout

The overall condition of the trails in British Columbia's provincial parks, national parks, and regional and forest service areas ranges from good to excellent. Trailhead parking, interpretive panels and displays, as well as signage, are generally excellent. Backcountry junctions are usually signed, and trail conditions generally range from good to excellent. That said, it never hurts to take precautions—no one wants to come home with stories about how good the medical service is in British Columbia.

### COMMON AILMENTS

#### Drinking Water

Do not drink water from any lakes, rivers, or streams in British Columbia! Though it may be some of the cleanest water on the planet, and free from industrial chemicals, water could contain harmful bacteria and parasites. Boil or filter untreated water or carry water from a treated water source. Tap water is generally potable.

#### Mosquitoes & Ticks

Ticks are present in many locales in British Columbia, particularly in wooded areas with lots of leaf litter and in dense underbrush characteristic of the coastal environment. They attach to human hosts in warm areas where they will go undisturbed; behind the ears or knees, armpits and in the scalp.

At the conclusion of a hike in an area where ticks are present, check your fellow hikers (and have them check you!) for ticks. Brush off your clothes. In a post-hike shower, scan your body one more time. Make sure to wash your hiking clothes.

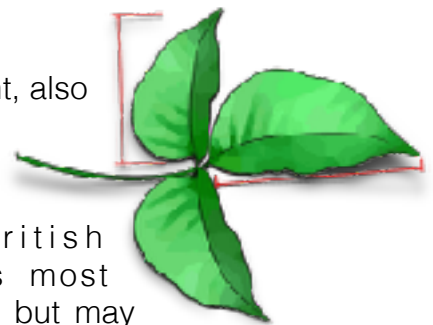
To remove a tick, dab rubbing alcohol on the skin around the tick and on the tick itself. This sterilizes the area and some experts argue that it causes a tick to loosen its grip, making it easier to pull out. Firmly grab the tick with a pair of sharp pointed tweezers right where the head meets the skin. Slowly pull the tick straight out.

Like ticks, mosquitoes feed on the blood of animal hosts. But unlike ticks, only the females bite. They lay eggs in standing water, in anything from marshy meadows to tiny puddles, which makes it nearly impossible to avoid them on many summertime hikes.

The strongest and most effective insect repellants contain DEET, which overpowers the scent that mosquitoes and other biting insects normally pick up from humans.

#### Poison Ivy

This infamous plant, also known as poison oak, grows abundantly throughout British Columbia. It is most commonly a bush but may also take the form of a vine and climb up trees. "Leaflets three, let it be" is the warning for poison oak leaves that have three lobed leaves, one to four inches long and glossy, as if waxed.



All parts of the plant all times of the year contain poisonous sap that can severely blister skin and mucous membranes. It's sap is most toxic during spring and summer. In fall, poison oak is particularly conspicuous; its leaves turn to flaming

Crimson or orange. However, because its colour change is more a response to heat and dryness than season, its “fall colour” can occur anytime in British Columbia.

A long sleeve shirt and long pants comprise a helpful barrier, but not an impenetrable one. Rash outbreaks can occur as quickly as 6 to 12 hours after exposure, but usually in the 24 to 48 hour range. Most common of multiple remedies is the regular application of calamine lotion or Cortizone cream.

## **WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS**

The rugged wilderness of British Columbia is also home to a very active population of wildlife. Hiking here is hiking in wildlife territory, that's part of the appeal, of course. But it's extremely important that you are prepared for any wildlife encounter you may have on the trail at the trailhead, or on the road to the park.

Wildlife in British Columbia includes black and grizzly bears, cougars (Mountain lion), big horn sheep, elk, moose, deer, skunks, lynx, fox, coyotes, and many other mammals.

General wildlife rules include:

- Never feed, entice, or disturb wildlife
- Photograph wildlife from a distance
- Don't make sounds to startle an animal
- Keeps pets on a leash at all times
- Keep children within close reach at all times and never encourage them to pet or feed wild animals.

## **Bears**

Are very intelligent and complex animals. They can frequently be seen in the mountains of B.C. but bear attacks are extremely rare. Each bear and each and every encounter is unique; there is no single strategy that will work in all situations. Bears do not like surprises. When hiking in bear country, sing, chat loudly, yodel, and make as much noise as possible. Bear bells will help with this no surprise factor. And bear spray, when used properly, should effectively turn back the bear that is at close range (make sure you thoroughly read bear spray instructions before hitting the trail!). But it's best to never get close enough to actually need bear spray.

Here are some important tips on how to deal with the bear encounter. Review them before hitting the trail:

- Stay calm: Bears usually don't want to attack; they are mostly curious at first to determine if you are a threat. They often bluff an attack to gauge your reaction.
- Immediately pick up small children.
- Stay in a group.
- Don't drop your backpack
- Back away slowly— never run!
- Talk firmly, calmly, and loudly to the bear. If the bear rears on its hind legs, it is trying to identify you. Remain calm and continue talking so it knows you're not a prey animal. Screaming or quick movements may startle the bear.
- Leave the area: as soon as possible, back away, always leaving the bear an escape route.
- If a bear attacks, do not play dead. First, try to escape, preferably in a building, in a car or up a tree. Use bear spray, if possible. Shout and do anything you can to intimidate the bear.

## Elk

Elk are dangerous animals, particularly in calving season (mid May to the end of June). Give them the right way and stay at least three bus lengths away.

## Cougars

The cougar, or mountain lion, is solitary, elusive, and active mainly at night. Avoid meeting a cougar on the trail by hiking in groups and making lots of noise. If you encounter a cougar:

- Immediately pick up small children
- Face the animal retreat slowly. Do not run or play death.
- Trying to appear bigger by waving your arms.

## TRAIL HEAD SAFETY AND PARKING PRECAUTIONS

Returning to the trailhead after a joyful day on the trail to find a car window smashed and valuables missing can ruin your hiking vacation. Many of the featured hikes in this guide begin at what land managers characterize as "developed trailhead" –which is to say, they're usually safer and better patrolled than undeveloped trailheads, such as pullouts and dirt lots far from the highway. Others are very remote; yours maybe the only car parked there all day.

Statistics suggest that after three decades of "Lock your car and take your valuables with you" signs and campaigns in North America, hikers are finally heeding the safety advice, resulting in fewer reporting car break-ins.

A few simple steps can minimize the likelihood of your car being broken into; don't leave the labels in the car (Best idea); lock valuables in the trunk (Second best idea); Bring at least your wallet and

keys with you, rather than hiding them in your vehicle.

Another important issue at many trailheads in British Columbia are the critters who live nearby. Porcupines, in particular, have gotten used to the salty tidbits they find on many vehicles and have wreaked havoc on brake lines. In such trailhead parking lots, with the help of Parks staff, chickenwire is available for you to wrap tightly around the base of your car. Use nearby stones to secure the wire in place and make sure you cover all four wheels.

Source: Best Hiking Trips in B.C. 2009

### What Really Lost Hikers Should Do

- S.T.O.P. (Stop, Think, Observe, Plan).
- Blow whistle to signal you need assistance.
- Stay put. Most likely, if you've informed friends and authorities of your itinerary, the rescue effort will be launched quickly on your behalf after field show up at the appointed time.
- Drink enough water.
- Put on your extra clothing. Avoid getting cold or hypothermic.
- If appropriate, build a fire for warmth and as a locator. Make sure to build a simple fire pit so that you don't set the woods on fire with your blaze.

### Additional resources:

- [www.bearsmart.com](http://www.bearsmart.com)
- [www.adverturesmart.ca/land/survive-essentials.htm](http://www.adverturesmart.ca/land/survive-essentials.htm)