

Go Take A Hike!

I prefer exercising outdoors whenever possible, and am frequently on local trails in almost all kinds of weather. In the past though, I stayed on paved or well-maintained gravel paths rather than striking out off trail into more rugged hiking terrain. A recent trip to the Southwest changed my mind. While there I did some hiking on varied types of terrain. What a difference it is to get away from the paved-path mentality and really get into the landscape, and how much I'm enjoying it, with more to look forward to as the seasons begin to change.

The outdoor activities I enjoy can be done alone - swimming, cycling, skiing, golfing, walking, hiking. Of course all of these can be shared with others as well, and sometimes I enjoy that too. But if the schedules of others don't allow for companionship, then the solo choice is just fine, and lately that solo route is my preference, especially with hiking. There is something both soothing and energizing about being on a hike by myself, in a place where there are few people providing distracting outside human noise. This type of situation allows me the head space to bring myself back into balance emotionally, mentally and physically.

I live in a "noisy" world.. I teach college, see clients, spend my whole life talking and interacting with others. There are distractions all around me constantly, and all of them create that "noise." For me it's important to seek out quieter environments that are human-noise free, hence my preference for hiking solo. When I go for a hike, I might bring my Ipod, but other than the noise of my own personal soundtrack and the sound of my own breathing, I don't encounter any noises but those of nature - birds and insects and the sound of the wind through trees.

What is it about hiking that makes it so different from regular walking? It's being aware of everything - around me, above me, and underneath me. I'm not on a paved path, so I need to watch for the blazed trail markers in whatever form they take. It might be a patch of paint on a tree, it might be a pile of rocks in a metal cage, but it won't necessarily be a marked and spelled-out English language sign, so I have to learn to read other types of signs. I need to pay attention to the conditions of the sky and be prepared for weather changes. I need to keep some of my focus on my footing. No matter where I hike, the terrain is constantly changing underfoot, so footing is extremely important.

There is something satisfying on more than one level when I arrive at the end of whatever trail I've chosen for my hike. I have elevated my heart rate and worked my body's muscles. I have spent time alone, giving my brain a chance to process thoughts and feelings, and taking the time for myself that is necessary for me to stay in balance. I have spent time outdoors immersed in a natural setting, with no human noises other than my own. I go on with my day, feeling energized and revitalized, and looking forward to the next hike to come.

So go take a hike! You won't be disappointed.