

Take an Epic Hike on the Olympic Coast

Washington TRAILS

A Publication of Washington Trails Association | wta.org



**Summer
Hiking Is
Coming!**

**Find Hiking Companions
Improve Trail Performance
Inventory Your First Aid Kit**

Mar+Apr 2014



Who's Your Buddy?

By Cassandra Overby



Like the peanut butter to your jelly, finding the right hiking partner is all about the perfect combination.

Whether you're new to the Pacific Northwest, someone looking for safety in numbers, or simply enjoy laughter and companionship on the trail, finding the right hiking partner or group is one of the best things you can do to improve your experiences on the trail.

As avid hikers—or aspiring avid hikers—we usually invest a significant amount of energy in planning our time in the outdoors. We memorize the Ten Essentials and keep our backpacks stocked with energy bars, extra socks and enough maps to outfit an invading army. We study weather forecasts and plan our hikes by season, hoping that all of our efforts will guarantee great days on the trail—fair weather, breathtaking views and successful summits. And yet, in our quest to remember everything from bandages to blister cream, many of us forget a simple truth: the only difference between a good day on trail and a great day on trail is having the right companions to share it with.

This is never truer in life than in hiking. Let's face it, the outdoors puts true companionship in perspective. A good hiking buddy is someone who

sees you in the most challenging of circumstances—when you're exhausted, dirty and drenched—and can make you smile at the humor of it all. They understand when you need to rest and encourage you to push on just a little more. They are someone with whom you'll reminisce and laugh for years to come, about the time marmots raided your backpack or the midnight rainstorm that flooded your tent.

Whether you're looking for someone to share memories, logistics or expenses, finding the right hiking partner can vastly improve your outdoor experiences. It can give you the opportunity to glimpse the outdoors not only through your own eyes, but through another's as well. Hiking with a companion or group can also offer a sense of security in knowing that should an accident or injury occur, help is nearby.

STEP ONE:

What Kind of Companion Do You Want?

The first step in finding a hiking companion is getting a clear idea of the type of experience you're looking for. Be honest with yourself. Hiking is an exercise in endurance and can test people's patience and character. The more accurate you can be, the better your chances of connecting with a like-minded partner—and the happier you'll both be on the trail. Here are some things to consider.

What hiking companionship have you enjoyed in the past?

Start by analyzing your previous hiking friendships. What did you enjoy, or not enjoy? Determine what to repeat or avoid with your next buddy.

What aspects of companionship are you looking for?

Are you looking for someone who will be strictly a hiking companion, or would you like a broader relationship that includes other hobbies and dating?

What are your preferences for hiking with groups or individuals?

Groups are great for socializing and meeting new people, but may be slower on the trail, while individual partners may offer the potential for deeper friendships.

What kind of experience are you looking for?

Everyone has an objective for getting outdoors. What is yours? Do you want to learn about the environment? Get in shape? Practice photography? Bag summits?

What kind of hiker are you?

This is one of the most important questions to answer honestly. Are you more of a trail chaser or a casual plodder? Do you have kids who could slow a group down? Do you have health conditions or physical limitations that affect your speed?

What kind of hiker do you want to be?

Are you looking to improve your hiking fitness and need to be encouraged? Are you a slow hiker but would like to get faster? Are you a little out of shape and would like to develop muscle tone and improve your endurance?

Once you have determined what kind of hiker you are, and what kind of companion you're looking for, you're ready to move on to step two.

OPPOSITE: Meet fellow hikers by expanding your outdoors resume with a mountaineering or climbing course with The Mountaineers. Photo by John Porter

BELOW: Hiking partners can be found in all walks of life, such as Marine Mom Friends, a group who all have children in the military. Photo by Jackie Lewin



Develop Your Community Through WTA

One of the best ways to meet fellow hikers is to get involved with WTA. Attend a volunteer work party or a local event. Here are just some of the ways that WTA can help you connect with others who love the outdoors as much as you do:

JOIN OTHERS ON TRAIL

Hike-a-Thon

ATTEND SOCIAL EVENTS

Hike the State Trails and Ales

PARTICIPATE IN A COMMUNITY

Share Trip Reports

VOLUNTEER FOR TRAILS

Trail Work Parties
Volunteer Vacations
BCRTs

For more information on all of WTA's community opportunities, visit wta.org.



STEP TWO:

Where to Find Your Next Hiking Companion

Once you identify the kind of hiking experience and companion(s) you're looking for, it's time to browse the organizations, classes and websites currently available to help connect you with your ideal outdoor adventure. There are extensive opportunities across the state to connect with like-minded hikers, ranging from community and fitness groups to hobby and enthusiast meetings. Try several and see what develops.



Make Friends or Find a Hiking Group

Northwest Hikers

Online forum for hikers throughout the Pacific Northwest.
» NWHIKERS.NET

Facebook Groups

Connects people and outdoor activities. Search by location or interest.
» FACEBOOK.COM

Meetup Groups

Expansive website that brings together people who share common interests. Search by your location or activity.
» MEETUP.COM

Evergreen State Volkssport Association

Statewide organization that promotes noncompetitive staffed and self-guided walking, biking, snowshoeing and cross-country ski outings.
» ESVA.ORG

Northwest Adventure Center

Outdoor organization serving families near Joint Base Lewis-McChord.
» JBLMMWR.COM/NW_ADV_CTR.HTML

OutVentures

Outdoor recreation organization for the LGBT community.
» OUTVENTURES.ORG

Learn Something New

REI

National retailer offers free workshops and seminars on the outdoors.
» REI.COM/LEARN.HTML

The Mountaineers

Outdoors nonprofit with instructional courses and guided trips.
» MOUNTAINEERS.ORG

Remote Medical International

Safety organization that offers wilderness first-aid clinics and training.
» REMOTEMEDICAL.COM

Washington Outdoor Women

State program that teaches hands-on outdoors workshops for women.
» WASHINGTONOUTDOORWOMEN.ORG

North Cascades Institute

Nonprofit with youth, graduate and adult education programs.
» NCASCADES.ORG

Mount St. Helens Institute

Dedicated to educating people about and protecting Mount St. Helens.
» MSHINSTITUTE.ORG

Get in Shape

Evergreen Trail Run

Statewide organization for competitive and noncompetitive trail running.
» EVERGREENTRAILRUNS.COM

Fun, Fit and Over 50 Club

Tri-Cities-based club with outdoor and intellectual outings.
» FFOFC.ORG

Your Local Parks and Recreation Department

Many departments host walks, hikes and outdoor fitness opportunities.
» WTA.ORG/HIKINGGROUPS

Pursue a Hobby or Interest

Zooniverse (Citizen Science Alliance)

Scientific research conducted by amateur and nonprofessional scientists.
» ZOONIVERSE.ORG

MerGeo

Washington-based orienteering club offering clinics and events.
» NAVRACES.COM

Puget Sound Mycological Society

Organization dedicated to everything mushroom-related.
» PSMS.ORG

Audubon Washington

The state field office of the National Audubon Society.
» WA.AUDUBON.ORG

Take an Epic Trip

Outdoors for All

Providing outdoor recreation opportunities for people with disabilities.
» OUTDOORSFORALL.ORG

Sierra Club Inner City Outings

Volunteer-run groups conduct outdoor outings for urban youth and adults.
» SIERRACLUB.ORG/ICO

Washington Trails Association Work Parties

Help fix your local hiking trails with crews of other great volunteers.
» WTA.ORG/VOLUNTEER

And More!

To see the entire list of groups and organizations that promote hiking in your area, or to suggest one, visit WTA.ORG/HIKINGGROUPS.

LEFT: Hiking companions can be found near and far. Author Cassandra Overby (left), introduced two friends from wine-and-movie girls' night to one of her favorite trails. Now she has two more trail companions. Photo by Cassandra Overby



RIGHT: You can also meet new hiking companions by joining a Meetup Group like Adventure Explorers. This group offers outdoor classes on hiking and mountaineering. Photo courtesy of Adventure Explorers



STEP THREE:

Know Before You Go

You've searched the groups, you've made connections and now you're ready to hit the trail with your new hiking group or partner. To guarantee that things go smoothly on your first outing, here are some things to keep in mind.

1 Do your research and know what to expect on hiking day. A conversation with your new companion or group leader can help avoid first-day awkwardness. Make sure you discuss logistics, including carpooling or contributing money to a gas fund, punctuality, RSVPs and speed or performance expectations.

2 Remember that you alone bear the ultimate responsibility for your own safety and well-being. Hiking with another person, or an entire group, can give you a false sense of security. You should always carry your own Ten Essentials. Also, be prepared for group-think and the possibility that you might need to turn back on your own if a particular section of trail is out of your comfort zone.

3 When you're meeting your group or partner for the first time, avoid conversations on touchy subjects, e.g., politics and religion—unless you're meeting with that specific type of group. Share some of your favorite trails hiked, volunteer experiences, books read or food—everyone loves food.

Finally, just be the kind of person that you want to meet. It doesn't matter if you're feeling nervous or shy. Chances are, other people will be feeling the same. Flash your best smile; be friendly and ready to participate in a fun outing. It may not be long before you end up with a hiking companion who's also your best friend.

So whether you're hiking for the first time, fifth time or fiftieth time, and you're looking for a buddy or group to share some quality trail time with, there are an abundance of resources just waiting to help you make those connections. All you need to do is determine what you're looking for and reach out. Chances are, there are quite a few fellow hikers out there looking for the same thing.

So as you get ready for another great hiking season, make this the best one yet by expanding your outdoors community. Before you know it, your time on the trail will be filled with more laughter, more fun and maybe even some homemade chocolate chip cookies. It doesn't get much better than that.

“A good hiking partner will have the same relative speed, the ability to carry on enjoyable conversation, and preferably wilderness first-aid knowledge. The single most important characteristic of a good hiking partner is that they bring good food and are willing to share!”

—Tami Asars, Guidebook Author

Start Your Own Hiking Group

You don't need to join someone else's hiking group to find new hiking partners. Often, the people in your existing communities—work, church and neighborhood—can make great companions too. Look around where you live and play. You might just find others who have been waiting for an invitation to join you on the trail.

Here are some tips for starting your own hiking group:

- Invite people who are cooperative and get along.
- Set group expectations together so everyone is comfortable.
- Discuss punctuality, RSVPs, carpooling and a group policy on dogs.
- Determine your collective fitness level and plan hikes accordingly.
- Schedule in advance and hike regularly.
- Take turns with trip planning and logistics.

CASSANDRA OVERBY is a Seattle-based freelance writer who loves to travel and explore the outdoors. Her writing often highlights the adventures and misadventures she gets herself into along the way. Cassandra has a knack for meeting interesting characters everywhere she goes. Her life philosophy is that strangers are just friends waiting to happen. Check out her writing and get inspired to have an adventure of your own by visiting cassandraoverby.com.

