

BAY-Hiking 7/3

HEADLINE: Mount
Belknap: Journey to fitness

1042 words

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If you asked someone “What is the primary motivator for going hiking?” I’m willing to bet that losing weight or getting in shape are at the top of the list.

It is with a great sense of joy that I head out on my sixth hike, because not only is it the half point for my journey, but I’m also going to learn about fitness, a topic of special interest to this slightly overweight reporter.

Amy Tripp, a personal trainer at Laconia Athletic and Swim Club, and her beautiful yellow lab Nivek join me to climb Mount Belknap. If readers remember, on my first hike I opted to hike Mount Piper instead of Belknap because it was an easy hike. Having five hikes under my belt I feel ready to take on this mountain. I mean, it can’t be harder than Gunstock.

I meet Amy at her house and we load up and head to the top of Carriage Road. There are several trails we can take to the top; each has different challenges and I opt for the blue trail. Amy tells me it’s longer but not as steep. We don’t stretch or anything beforehand and I ask her about that as we head down the trail with Nivek bounding along ahead of us.

“Actually it’s been proven that stretching, although it doesn’t hurt, actually isn’t all that helpful when exercising,” Amy said.

The morning is cool and foggy with the promise of rain, and it is very quiet and smells of the earth. The trail itself is the best cared for trail I think I have been on yet. It has natural steps and cleared trails with enough rocks and roots to keep it interesting. I am really enjoying how the walk is just not one long drawn out trail, but rather twists and turns and changes perspective the whole time. Sometimes there will be rocks and roots, sometimes there is open forest, and sometimes there are dense trees, blueberry patches and just the right amount of straight areas and up hill climb.

Amy says that you should be drinking the whole time you exercise, because if you are thirsty you are already a little dehydrated. Other signs include fatigue, headaches and profuse sweating. One of the biggest mistakes that people can make is that they don’t have enough energy and water to keep them going. Amy suggested bread with peanut butter, nuts and fruit as good trail foods.

“Anything that will stay with you,” Amy said.

If you opt for junk food, you’ll get a boost in energy for a short period of time, and when you finish a hike or any activity you’ll be starving. When a person’s body goes into starvation mode the metabolism slows down and your body is not getting the full benefit of the exercise.

She also noted that there are some very good energy bars out there on the market, but you should look for those that have the least amount of ingredients. Amy herself carried Nature Valley brand granola bars.

I was very excited when we finally saw the fire tower come into view and I managed to climb the steps and visit with the ranger who watches over our forests from his high perch. Dana Morse, the ranger in question, was very friendly and happy to talk to me. The tiny little room at the top of the tower houses maps and radios to keep an eye on all of us below. I explained to him what I was doing and he told me that the Forestry Department is holding their own patch program for hiking to the fire towers.

If anyone follows in my footsteps be sure to stop and say “hello” to this hard working ranger and sign his guest book. I signed his register and received a brochure on their program.

As we are going back down Amy and I chat heavily and the time goes swiftly. I comment that it always seems faster to go back down. Amy said that one of things that makes hiking good for older people is that even though you do impact the ground it is not jarring. Hiking is also exceptionally good for the heart, she said. Amy asked me if my legs hurt, which they didn’t really. She told me that was a good sign that my legs were getting into shape. I admitted that I felt it mostly in my chest, the heavy breathing and slight pinch in the chest means that your heart is working and if you hike enough you will have an amazingly strong heart muscle. One of the best ways to tell if you are working too hard is if you can talk. If you are having a hard time talking then it is a sign you need to slow down.

“It doesn’t have to be a whole sentence,” said Amy, “but you should be able to say something without too much effort.”

She also warned against overdoing the exercise and always taking things at your own pace and in moderation. Don’t try to do a six-mile hike on your first time out. Make sure that you are adequately hydrated and fed to get the most of your hike in a fitness sense.

Amy herself takes Nivek hiking about four times a week. In a gentle demonstration of what hiking can do for you, she jogged the rest of the way down the trail about 20 minutes from the bottom. She had an appointment and needed to get ready. I made my own way down and met her at the bottom to conclude our hike.

We may not all have or want six pack abs or butts you can bounce quarters off of, but it never hurts to get out there and get moving!

All total we hiked two miles to the top of Mount Belknap, which took us about two hours. This trail is really excellent and I recommend it for anyone as a good high-end beginner trail.

Danielle will continue to chronicle her 12-mountain goal throughout the summer. To get your own check-off list, maps, and other info about the Belknap Mountain Range, visit www.belknapsportsmensclub.com or email dwatsonmusic@hotmail.com.

If you go up Belknap stop in and say “Hi!” make sure to sign the guest register before you leave. Dana was very friendly and informative. (Danielle Delisle – Gilford Steamer)

CUTLINE (Hiking2) MY GUIDE FOR THE TRIP and his human. Amy Tripp, a personal trainer at the Laconia Athletic and Swim Club, and Nivek, her canine companion, showed me the finer points of hiking to get fit. (Danielle DeLisle – Gilford Steamer)

CUTLINE (Hiking1) THIS IS DANA MORSE forest ranger; he hikes up most days of the week and is on the lookout for fires in the area.