

Trekking Poles And Hiking Staffs

Are walking sticks longer than trekking poles? What about hiking staffs and hiking sticks? Whatever you call them, and whatever their differences, they are supposed to help your knees more than anything. This they do very well, at least when you're going downhill.

What else are they good for? They help you keep your balance. You can use them as defense against wild animals as well. I use a walking stick to rest my head on from time to time, and I also use it as a monopod for steadying the camera.

Do You Need Trekking Poles?

What if you don't have knee problems, and you are hiking on level ground? Then maybe there is no point to using trekking poles. They can be just more things to carry.

Do they save energy? They take weight off your joints, but logic says you'll expend more energy by carrying them. I use a walking stick at times, when my knees insist, and it's fun to poke at things, but it's not a necessity. For what it's worth, Ray Jardine, the "father" of ultralight backpacking, doesn't recommend trekking poles.

If you decide to use them, consider the incredible Bozeman Mountain Works Stix Xls Trekking Poles. They're made of a high-strength carbon fiber and weigh 2.7 ounces each! That's is half the weight of the nearest competition.

Walking Sticks and Other Options

I often cut dead sticks and use them until I lose them. I always lose my walking stick - a good reason not to buy the expensive ones. If I do still have it at the end of the trail, I leave it for the next hiker. Hand-cut walking sticks are heavier than high-tech trekking poles, but you can just leave them behind when you get tired of them.

You can use bamboo to make good light hiking staffs. It's stronger than it looks, so use a piece that's only about 3/4" thick. I bought cheap decorative bamboo at Pier One Imports, and cut it to size. You can glue some soft scrap leather on for a comfortable handgrip.

Finally, ski poles work as trekking poles. It's best if you remove the baskets, especially if you're hiking in wooded areas where they may catch on something.

About the Author

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