

## *Training for a 50/20 Hike* (2014 Update)

It is important for everyone going for 50 Miles to understand that this is a *performance* event, and that in order to succeed it is critical to undertake a training program starting well in advance of the Hike. The following suggestive comments are from Dr. Bob Klein, ASM-111, who to date has completed eight 50/20 Hikes.

“If there is a magical formula to completing the entire 50 miles, it's training. Meaning a *lot* of hiking. Past experience has shown that the \*average\* hiker who hasn't trained can make from 20 - 25 miles, but they'll be “dead” for 2 or 3 days afterwards. Those who are particularly determined, and who are also reasonably athletic, can make it up to about 35 miles. While it is possible to go 50 miles without training, doing so incurs an increasing risk of injury or of being “wiped out” for a week or more (and if you're “wiped out,” you're more susceptible to getting sick!) For these reasons, leaders should not allow hikers (adult or youth) to sign up for 50 miles if they have not done at least one 25 mile hike in the month before the event. The bottom line being, if you are unable or unwilling to properly train, you should limit yourself to a 20 or 25-mile distance. max.

For many years, my personal training consisted of doing daily 4.3-mile hikes for the 3 months leading up to the hike (starting just after Thanksgiving). “Daily” meant every available day, so minus Scout trips, snowstorms, or heavy rain. I would also occasionally do a 10-mile practice hike, but not on a consistent basis. Although I was “reasonably” successful, routinely hitting 40 miles or more on the ASH's in the late 90's and early 00's, I found it extremely difficult to push through to 50, and I made it only once from 1996 - 2003 (in 2002). In 2004, however, I changed my approach, as follows: In December, I did one or two 4.3-mile or greater hikes per week. In January, one 10-mile hike per week. In February, one 20-mile hike per week, and in March, one and sometimes two last “tune-up” hikes of 25 miles. In all of these longer distance hikes, I pushed hard, averaging 3.5 to 4 mph from start to finish. As a result, I felt a lot stronger during the last third of the hikes, and finished 50 miles each year from 2004 through 2008, and again in 2011 and 2013 (I did not hike in 2009 or 2010, and had to stop at 37 miles in 2012 due to a very badly swollen foot). In short, extending the training hike lengths was critical. That is, doing fewer hikes but longer distances was a lot more important than hiking on a daily basis. Most of the other hikers who have finished the Hike undertook similar training, have lifestyles that involve a lot of walking, or are otherwise very athletic with extensive running and/or biking exercising.

It is also important that your long-distance practice hikes properly mimic the Alonzo Stagg Hike with respect to your equipment. **You should wear the same clothing, socks, and footwear that you intend to wear on the Hike.** It is also useful to start at the same time – 5:30 am – and to practice proper layering of your clothing, removing items as the day warms up. Carry a *light* daypack on the practice hikes for removed clothing and to carry fluids, snacks, and First Aid gear. Try to eat and drink the same sorts of things you'll be getting on the hike (that is, what you'll be getting at the Support Stops).

Finally, practice minimizing your rest-breaks. It is routine to see a group of Scouts hike strong for 25, 30, 35 or even more miles on the actual Alonzo Stagg Hike, and then decide to sit down and rest for 20 or 30 minutes – at which point, they're completely stiffened up and done for. In contrast, when I pull into the support stops, I sit down, change my socks, add or delete clothing as needed, get up immediately, shift my gear bag to the shuttle vehicle that is heading to the next rest stop, grab something to eat and drink (that I eat and drink as I'm walking away), thank the volunteers, and leave. I shoot for 3-4 minutes, and I never stay more than 5 minutes unless I'm making a bathroom stop – and even those are as quick as I can manage. Efficient time management is something else to practice on long-distance prep hikes.

Bottom line again, if you want to make 50 miles, “train for it.”

**Good Luck! Hike On!**