

Mike Mercer's Advice for Long Distance Hiking in Wet Conditions [Note: Mike has completed five Alonzo Stagg Hikes.]

- If possible, avoid wet feet (by either sweating or flooding)
 - Don't over-insulate
 - Leather hiking boots, thick wool socks, and sweaty feet = blisters
 - Use a wicking sock liner against skin (draws away moisture)
 - Think about your shoe choice:
 - Mesh shoes (trail shoes NOT SNEAKERS)
 - Breathes best
 - Floods easiest - but lets the water back out just as quick
 - Dries quickest - within 1-2 hours while hiking on ASH
 - Gore-Tex (trail shoes or boots)
 - Breathes – but just a little
 - Harder to flood but DOES NOT LET LIQUID WATER OUT
 - Will stay wet
 - Leather hiking boots
 - Does not breath at all
 - Hardest to flood but TRAPS ALL MOISTURE, including sweat
 - Will stay wet
 - Using gaiters (properly) for low profile shoes will achieve much of the water protection of a taller profile shoes
 - Beware of rain pants that funnel rain water right down into the tops of your shoes (if you cannot insert the top of your shoes INSIDE your rain pants, your shoes WILL fill up with rain runoff!)
 - Rain skirts are often better
- If you CANNOT avoid wet feet (from either sweating or flooding)
 - STOP and correct problems right away
 - Wet skin loses almost all resistance to blister formation
 - You are more likely to develop a hot spot or blister
 - Get the bulk of the water out of the shoe
 - Most mesh shoes will push water out just by continuing to hike
 - Gore-Tex and leather shoes need to be drained
 - A wicking sock liner against the skin will still help as long as you get the bulk of the water out of the shoe
 - Wool socks will still provide warmth when wet (if the water is cold)
 - But be careful as wool will trap a lot of moisture
 - If you choose to use wool, thinner is better
 - Your feet will be stay warm as long as you keep moving
 - Dry your skin as best as you can
 - At least let your feet air dry at stops, even if only briefly
 - Have a towel to dry your feet
 - Use foot powder to extract the excess moisture in the skin
 - Rub off as much of the residue as you can
 - Put on fresh socks (with fresh wicking liners next to your skin)

- Reduce moisture in shoes if possible
 - Bring spare sole pads (like SuperFeet) to instantly get a critical part of the shoe dry
 - Consider swapping shoes during ASH
- Protect your skin from absorbing moisture
 - 3M Cavilon - Dimethicone skin protectant (some pharmacies or running stores may have this in stock; otherwise online)
 - Desitin if you don't have anything else
 - VERY thin layers for either product and rub it in well
- Bandages/moleskin are not going to stay on or in place with wet feet
 - Remove old bandages and dry skin as above
 - Glue new bandage/moleskin down with Tincture of Benzoin
 - Tincture of Benzoin is an antiseptic
 - USE ALCOHOL WIPE TO REMOVE EXCESS AROUND BANDAGE
 - Or socks will stick to these parts and aggravate blisters
 - Tegaderm film bandages (very thin) also work well to protect hot spots and blisters
 - Does not aggravate injury with pressure, like moleskin
 - Conforming
 - Slippery and stabilizes a larger area of skin
 - Will protect the injury from absorbing moisture
 - Good solution if you know you have problem areas before you start hiking

Additional Comments from Bob

Obviously, picking your path carefully can help avoid puddles, mud, and/or slush. That said, "Leave No Trace" ethics discourage widening the path, which eventually makes a small puddle into a very large puddle. There isn't much room on the towpath for going around a bad spot, so if it's raining or recently rained heavily, everyone on the Lock 10 to Great Falls and back to Lock 10 section can anticipate wet feet. Be prepared to deal with them, and your hike will be far more pleasant. At the very least, avoid dunking yourself in deep puddles. Fail to deal with your wet feet, and your Hike will be much shorter – and your recovery time much longer – than you had anticipated.

John Brennan (six Alonzo Stagg Hikes completed) is a proponent of heavy Vaseline use on feet (which is an old military trick). This requires not only a heavy application to your feet, but placement of even more in your socks. It does both lubricate against friction as well as protect against water – but it's pretty messy. One or two supplemental applications are needed during long hikes. I have tried this with some success for 25 mile hikes, but have not for a 50 mile hike (yet). Be aware, your socks and possibly your shoes go right in the trash when you're done – you'll never get the Vaseline completely out of them.

Hike On!

[2018 Update]