

GO!

GET ACTIVE

Muddy spring hike? Go through the puddles, not around them

By **Debbie Juniewicz**
Contributing Writer

Don't play in puddles ... don't step in the mud ... don't get dirty - not a chance.

"This is one time you can feel like you're misbehaving and doing the right thing at the same time," Andy Niekamp said with a smile.

The founder of the Outdoor Adventure Connection and the Dayton Hikers is an advocate for muddy boots this time of year because walking through the mud - rather than around it - is better for the trails. While a single hiker avoiding the muck and mud might not seem problematic, multiply that by 100 hikers traveling the same trail over the course of the day.

"Most people aren't aware of their impact, but when a park has a lot of visitors and everyone walks around the mud, it actually makes the puddles bigger and it can damage the vegetation around the trails," Niekamp said. "It's about minimizing the impact on the trails and the parks."

The impact - while generally unintentional - can be drastic and long-lasting.

"In Sugar Creek (MetroPark), you can drive a semi down some of those trails, they're that wide," he said. "And it's really hard to rehabilitate once that happens because you have compacted soil and it's difficult for things to grow on top of that."

And spring showers can mean lots of mud on area trails.

"This is the season when parks are most susceptible to impact," Niekamp said. "That's when hikers can cause the most damage to trails."

So, what are some best



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practices for wet, spring hikes?

Preparation is key. Dress appropriately for the elements - layers that will keep you warm and dry. Sturdy footwear is a must - hiking boots can handle the mud.

"With the materials and the way boots are designed, the mud washes off," Niekamp said. "They can get muddy repeatedly and still look good."

Wool socks are also advisable to keep your feet warm and dry. And trekking poles can also be helpful for added stability and traction on muddy or uneven terrain.

"I've seen people try to go around the mud and it can

almost be more dangerous," Niekamp said. "This is the one time you should go against your mother's advice and go right through the mud."

"We are so lucky to have the number of trails we have in this area. It's up to us to protect them."

Hiking tips to minimize our impacts to the trails and parks

These seven principles are provided by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, a national organization that protects the outdoors by teaching and inspiring people to enjoy it responsibly. For more information visit www.lnt.org.



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Before you go on a hike, get a weather forecast and dress accordingly. Get a map online at the trailhead. Wear shoes and clothes that can get dirty and muddy.

Know before you go

- Get a weather forecast and dress accordingly.
- Get a map online at the trailhead.
- Bring a leash and plastic bags for pet waste.
- Wear shoes and clothes that can get dirty and muddy.

Stick to the trails

- Stay on the trails.
- Walk through mud puddles not around. Walking around mud puddles creates even bigger puddles and damages vegetation.
- Don't shortcut the switchbacks or the zigzags on the hills. This creates erosion and destroys the trail.

Trash your trash and pick up poop

- Pack out all trash including water bottles, apple cores, orange peels and banana peels.
- Pack out your pet waste in a plastic bag. Many times plastic bags are located at trailheads.
- Remember, nobody comes along and picks up these plastic bags.

Leave it as you find it

- Leave rocks, plants, feathers and other natural items in the woods.
- Avoid picking wildflowers.
- Don't etch or carve on

trees, rocks or picnic tables. Leaving your mark is over-rated.

Be careful with fire

- Check the regulations first, if fires are permitted, build campfires or cooking fires in fire rings and grills that are provided.
- Fully extinguish all fires before departing.

Keep wildlife wild

- Don't feed wildlife like ducks, squirrels or deer.
- Don't leave food scraps behind in picnic areas.

Share our trails and manage your pet

- Be courteous to other park visitors.
- Keep your pet on a leash or under control at all times. Most parks have leash laws for the safety of your pet, other pets, park wildlife and other visitors.

Reducing our footprint - Dayton Hikers weigh in on best practices

■ **Laura Castro:** Pick up trash along the way, and practice the "Leave No Trace" principles.

■ **Debby Eagle Gil- laugh:** We use hydration water packs on our back instead of water bottles. We carry a plastic bag for our trash, put in our packs and throw it away in trash can.

■ **Laurel Slate:** Don't hike at the most used parks and head over to your secret place for solitude.

For more info on the Dayton Hikers or to check out one of their hikes, visit www.meetup.com/Dayton-Hikers/.

Contact this contributing writer at djuniewicz@gmail.com.