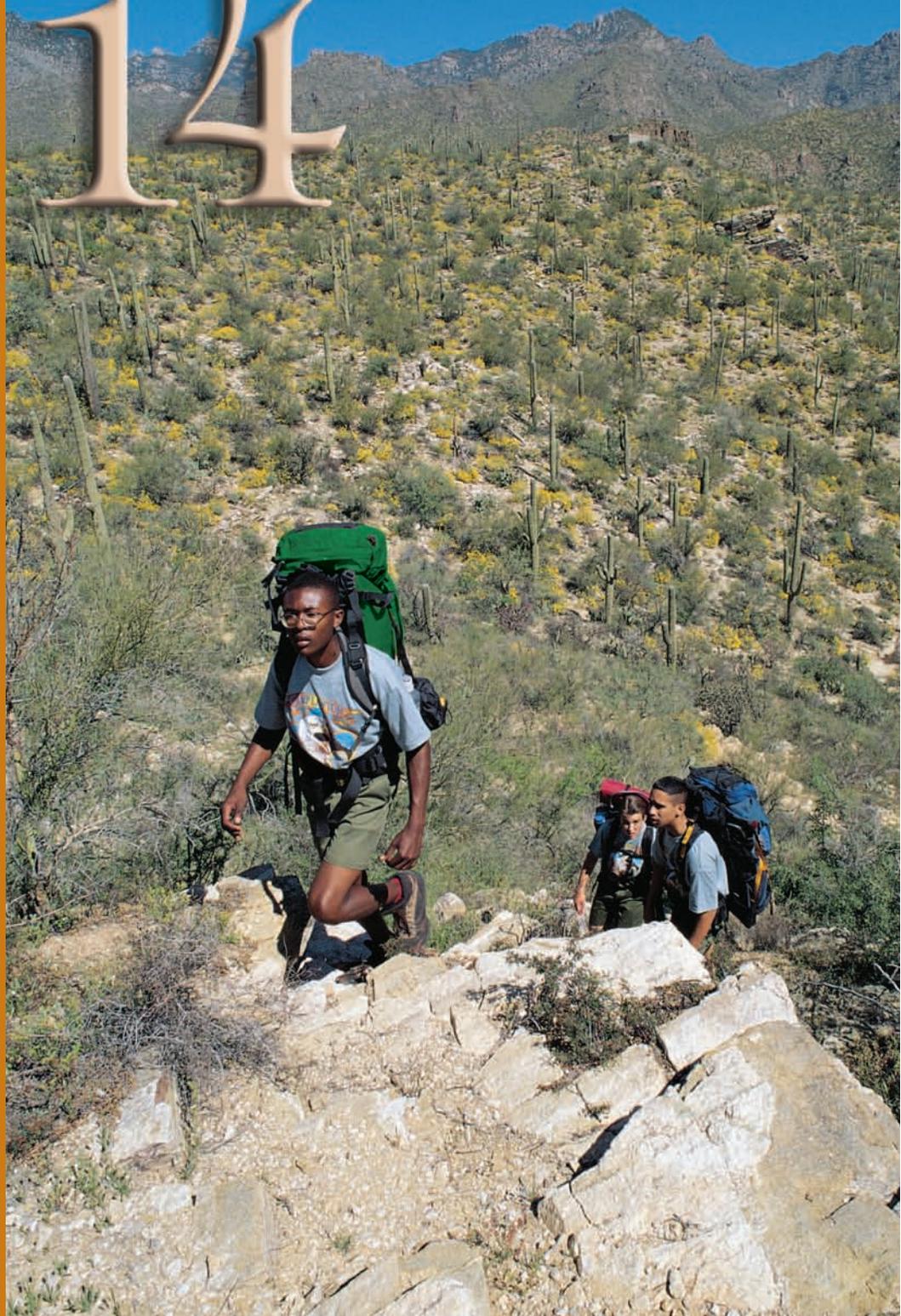




# CHAPTER

# 14



## Hot-Weather Travel and Camping

*"The weather was hardly the best for walking. Across the first two States it was oppressively hot, and then I had several days of trudging in a pouring rain. However, it did not drench the spirits within, and it was welcome as an experience."*

—Charles F. Lummis (long-distance hiker, journalist, archaeologist, and adviser to President Theodore Roosevelt), *A Tramp Across the Continent*, 1892



The ability to travel and camp in hot weather can expand the range of your adventures to include magnificent portions of North America throughout the year. Go to the desert and find yourself surrounded by space and sagebrush, shimmering clarity and quiet. Discover a fragile environment of arid lands, wildlife, and vegetation shaped by water, and by its absence. Go to the tropics and find yourself deep in complicated ecosystems millions of years in the making.

Explore the magnificent wetlands and tangled forests of the Southern states, delighting in terrain you might have thought you already knew. Set off in rafts, canoes, and kayaks to paddle the rivers of summer, drifting through the timbered territory of the Southeast and Midwest and between the sheer canyon walls of the Southwest. Make your way to the sparkling coastlines of bays, gulfs, and oceans where you can camp just above the high-tide mark and then snorkel, swim, and hike as you enjoy the rich ecology where the land meets the sea.

Why go in hot weather? You'll find your own reasons when you get there; environments baked by the sun can stir your soul like no other landscapes on Earth.

**THE THERMIAS—  
HYPO- AND HYPER-**

**Thermia** is the Latin word for “heat.” **Hypo** means “less than.” **Hyper** is the equivalent of “too much.”

- **Hypothermia** is the condition of having too little heat—being cold.
- **Hyperthermia** occurs when there is too much warmth—being hot.

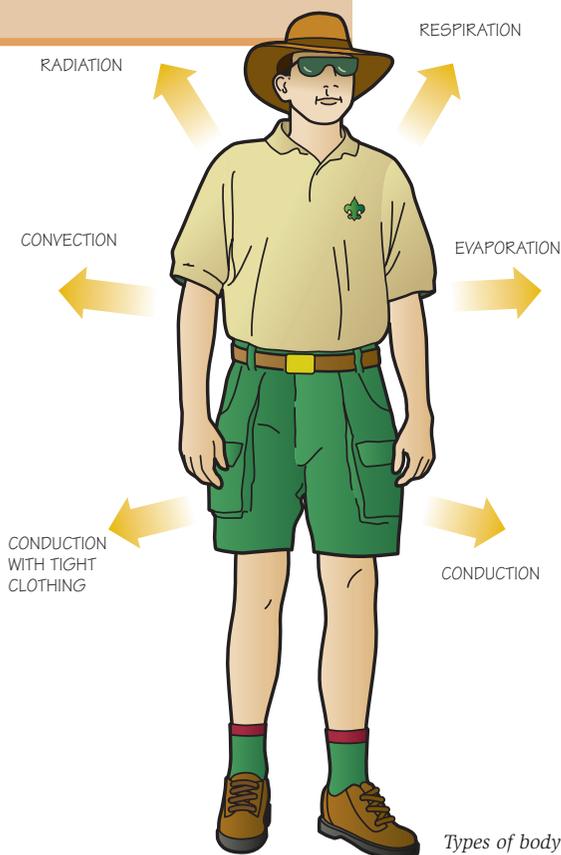
**Staying Cool in Hot Weather**

Coping with heat is the flip side of camping and traveling in cold weather. Just as winter adventurers must plan ahead, choose your hot-weather equipment and food with care, and then use lots of common sense. In frigid conditions, the focus is on staying warm and well-hydrated. When the thermometer soars, the most important factors are keeping yourself hydrated and cool and matching your activities to the conditions.

Understanding how your body reacts to high temperatures can help you plan your clothing, gear, and provisions for the trek. It also can guide you in deciding *when* to carry out activities during a trip. The big issues to cope with are *heat*, *humidity*, and *hydration*.

**Heat**

Your body operates best with a core temperature of about 98 degrees, shedding excess warmth primarily by means of *radiation* and *evaporation*. *Radiation* takes place when body heat dissipates into cooler surrounding air. That ceases to be effective as the outside temperature rises. *Evaporation* is your body’s other mechanism for staying cool, occurring when you perspire. As moisture on the skin evaporates, it carries heat away with it.



*Types of body heat loss*



## Humidity

Dry climates are ideal for evaporation to occur. However, air saturated with humidity can't absorb much additional moisture from evaporation. People sweating heavily on a hot, humid day might not be losing much heat at all.

## Hydration

Perspiration draws a great deal of fluid from the body, depleting it of water and essential electrolytes. Water requirements vary among people, based on their size, physical makeup, activity levels, and general health, as well as environmental factors.



### *Drink, Drink, Drink*

Thirst is not always the best indicator of your body's need for water. Instead, drink often enough for your urine to remain light-colored or clear.

- In hot weather, refresh your water containers at every opportunity. Drink your fill, then refill your container before leaving a water source.
- Keep water readily available and drink small amounts frequently.
- Don't ration water. If you are thirsty, you need to drink.
- Avoid consuming a lot of caffeinated drinks, which can act as *diuretics*—agents that purge fluids from the body.
- Don't underestimate your need for water. During strenuous activities in hot weather, your body might require two to three gallons of water per day.

## Planning Hot-Weather Trips

In some ways, planning adventures for hot weather is not much different from getting ready in any season of the year. Your group will need food and gear, a route to travel, and a way to get to and from the trailhead. You will check with the land managers of the area you wish to visit for current information on conditions, for permits you might need, and for guidelines on the best ways to use Leave No Trace principles as you travel and camp. Permits for popular stretches of rivers, canyons, and other public lands might be in great demand and could take weeks or months to acquire.

Preparing for hot-weather journeys also demands a few special considerations not common for trips into more hospitable climes. The following are among the most important:

- Water weighs about 8 pounds a gallon. You can carry only so much. Determine where you will be able to refill your water bottles—desert route selection might be a matter of stringing together a series of reliable water sources. For longer trips with critical water needs, have backup plans—points where you can change your route and get to certain water in a reasonable amount of time.
- Once in the field, travel early in the morning and in the evening rather than in the midday heat.
- Be aware of seasonal trends. Some years are drier than others, and that could have an impact on your ability to find water in the region you intend to visit.
- Packing lightly lessens the effort it takes to hike. That, in turn, reduces the exertion that generates body heat.
- If you know that the area where you are going is remote with few visitors, then be prepared to camp in pristine areas and practice stringent Leave No Trace techniques. In areas popular with the public, expect to see more people and plan on camping in existing campsites. Check with land managers for camping regulations, permit information, and suggestions about your route.



## Hot-Weather Nutrition

Hot weather can cause you to feel less hungry than you might in more temperate conditions. Even so, a nourishing diet is important to maintaining your health and keeping up the energy you need to make the most of outdoor activities. A balanced menu with a higher percentage of carbohydrates will serve you well. Some people prefer eating snacks and light meals throughout the day rather than having a large lunch and supper.

When planning provisions, shy away from fresh meat, eggs, dairy products, and other protein-rich foods that can spoil in the heat; grains, dehydrated foods, and trail mix are durable and lend themselves to a diet more appropriate for hot weather. Groups planning canoe journeys without long portages can take along heavier provisions than groups toting everything on their shoulders. Rafts, sailboats, and other watercraft might be equipped with ice chests capable of keeping almost any foodstuffs fresh for several days or more. The larger the raft or boat, the less the concern over the weight and bulk of provisions.

For more on selecting food for a trek, see the chapter titled “Outdoor Menu.”

### *Finding Water in Arid Regions*

To be certain of your water supply in dry environments, bring plenty of fluids with you. Embarking on any trip beyond a day hike, though, will probably require you to refresh your water containers along the way and to treat any water you intend to drink.

Up-to-date information provided by land managers and other travelers can be your best guide to the locations of back-country water. Check your map for springs, wells, stock watering tanks, and windmills. Look for bright green vegetation that might indicate a seep or spring. Clusters of cottonwoods,

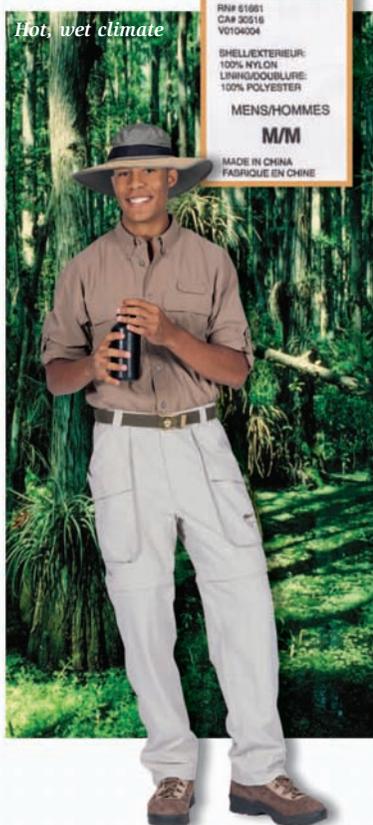


sycamores, and willows are indicators that water might be close at hand. Damp sand or earth might yield seepage if you dig far enough, and in canyon country, water sometimes collects in shaded depressions in the rock. Assume that potential water sources could be dry when you reach them, though, and carry enough water to enable you to reach second and third sources of water.

## Hot-Weather Clothing and Body Protection

Selecting the right clothing will go a long way toward keeping you happy and healthy in hot weather. As with any form of adventure travel and camping, use the layering system to ensure the greatest versatility in the clothing that you carry and wear. Keep these basics in mind:

- Nylon shorts and shirts are the favorites of many hot-weather travelers. The fabric is cool, durable, and quick to dry. Shirts might be most comfortable when made of a nylon-cotton blend.
- Cotton can be a good choice for warm days. It absorbs sweat and ventilates well. However, it will prove useless if it becomes wet in chilly weather.
- Polyester is a good insulator, does not hold water, and dries easily.
- Pick light-colored fabrics not as likely to absorb heat, and stay dressed. Going without a hat or a shirt can lead to an increase in water loss and much greater potential for sunburn and overheating.
- Temperatures at night can be chilly or even cold. Plan your clothing and sleeping gear accordingly.
- In insect-infested areas, you might want a head net, long-sleeved shirt, long pants, and lightweight gloves.



## Beyond Clothing

Use sunscreen to protect exposed skin, giving special attention to your face, ears, nose, and neck. Although skin appears to recover from sunburn, damage to the cellular structure accumulates and can, in later years, lead to skin cancer. (To be effective, sunscreen should have an SPF of at least 15. SPF numbers greater than 30, however, add little extra protection.) Sunlight reflected off open water can intensify the negative impact of solar radiation, and a wet T-shirt offers little defense against the sun. Wear sunglasses to prevent eyestrain, and shield your lips against chapping and sun damage by applying a lip balm with an SPF of 15 or higher.



Insect repellents containing the chemical DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) are effective but, to avoid the possibility of negative side effects, closely follow the manufacturer's recommendations for use. Hot-weather travelers in wooded regions might successfully ward off ticks, chiggers, and other insects by lightly spraying their clothing with repellent containing permethrin.





## Hot-Weather Gear

Your pack for hot-weather camping can be much lighter than the one you carry in the winter. You'll need less in the way of clothing, and you won't require nearly as much in the way of a shelter and a sleeping bag. Because you won't be melting snow for water, you can get away with less fuel. Regions experiencing high humidity might be subjected to frequent showers and occasional storms, so pack your rain gear. Layers of warmer clothing will see you through a chilly night.

## Shelters for Hot-Weather Camping

For hot, dry weather, a lightweight sleeping bag spread out under the stars is ideal. A ground cloth will keep it clean, and a sleeping pad will provide plenty of cushioning and insulation. If you need more shelter, choose from among bivouac bags, tarps, lightweight tents, and hammocks.

### *Tarp*

A nylon tarp or a 4-mil sheet of plastic, offering maximum ventilation with minimum weight, often are just right for hot environments, especially if there aren't many insects.

### ***Leave No Trace in Hot-Weather Environments***

For traveling and camping in deserts, see the chapter titled “Traveling and Camping in Special Environments.”

In addition, the *Fieldbook* Web site can lead you to plenty of online resources for techniques, gear, training opportunities, and destinations for hot-weather adventure. 

### ***Hot-Weather Tent***

A tent might be the most practical shelter in humid climates and where insects and crawling creatures are an issue. A tent with large mosquito-netting panels can be used without the rain fly unless the skies threaten. Four-season tents, single-wall tents, and other shelters that don't allow much ventilation can be stuffy, damp, and uncomfortable.



### ***Hammock***

A hammock designed for tropical camping is essentially a small shelter complete with mosquito netting and a pitched nylon roof to shed the rain.



*“If you cannot endure a certain amount of thirst, heat, fatigue, and hunger without getting cross with Nature, it is best to stay home.”*

—William T. Hornaday (author, wildlife advocate, and founder of the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.), *Campfires on Desert and Lava*, 1913