

time out

Learning to hike



There is a picture of me, four months pregnant, glowing with pride after an 11-mile hike to a remote spot. My husband, Steve, and I daydreamed aloud on that trip about the wilderness journeys we'd take with our child, but at the edge of those daydreams was a nagging fear that this baby would change our lives to the extent we'd no longer recognize ourselves.

So I began reading books about people who sailed around the world with young children and articles on

records for outdoor diaper changes.

"See?" I would tell myself. "You don't have to change your life to be a mom. Your child can be a part of your world."

Somewhere around the end of ski season and the start of hiking season, things did change, though. Dylan disliked the back carrier we'd switched him to and often cried. Many times we planned a half-day hike, only to turn around after half an hour.

We had failed to unlock the secret to adventuring with a young child. Hiking and skiing became activities

friends whose houses were kid-friendly. Still, as the leaves turned crimson and gold before Dylan's second birthday, I began to feel restless.

"What about a hike?" I asked Steve one Sunday.

"A hike sounds good," he said slowly, glancing toward Dylan, who was busy building a playhouse out of blocks.

We hiked for about an hour, Dylan now happy in his back carrier. We helped him run his hand against a moss-covered tree or put pinecones in his pocket. When he got fussy, we stopped for lunch beside a stream. Dylan began picking up pebbles and throwing them into the water.

"Wock!" he screamed delightedly.

Steve and I gave each other fleeting smiles, then scrambled to find bigger and bigger rocks to throw alongside our son. Soon the forest was filled with the sound of splashes and the three of us screaming, "Wock!"

We spent almost as much time throwing rocks and petting trees as we did hiking. Yet Steve and I agreed that it was one of the most relaxing and satisfying hikes we'd ever taken.

That was two years ago. We still daydream about lengthier trips with

A child teaches his parents how to blaze a new trail. By Megan Ault

backpacking with babies. As we eyed my growing belly each night, I offered these examples to Steve like gifts.

Dylan was born that winter. In six weeks he was in a front carrier, safely smothered in fleece, while we cross-country skied. I breastfed him through my winter coat, and Steve set speed

reserved for when Dylan was with a sitter. Our buddies sneered that we'd turned into the dread Mall Walkers—but this was the only way we could exercise in the dead of Montana winter.

In a way, we were relieved. It was easier to work out with a video during Dylan's nap or get together with

Dylan, and with his infant brother Connor, when they get older. For the time being, though, our sons are teaching us the joys of not-really-hiking up trails we never knew. ■

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