

## **12 “Must Haves” for a Happy Family Hike**

1. **DRINKS/SNACKS:** Nobody wants to force hungry, thirsty children on a march through the woods. Take water breaks every 20 – 30 minutes. Bring more than you think you’ll need. Don’t run out.
2. **SOCKS:** Wool socks wick the moisture away from your skin. Cotton socks get soggy and make blistering more likely. Invest in wool socks, and bring a change for all if it’s a longer hike.
3. **NAIL CLIPPER:** Your toes will thank you and your socks will last longer. Descents will have your toes pushed up against the front of your boots. Trust me on this!
4. **BUG REPELANT:** DEET repellents work. Nothing kills the fun – and the wish to return – like mosquito bites and bugs buzzing in your ears. PERMETHRIN for gear and clothing is a great way to keep the ticks off. (DO NOT apply to skin!)
5. **SUNSCREEN & HAT:** You know why.
6. **HYGEINE:** Bring what you need. There are no restrooms in the woods. TP and a small hand trowel (available at outdoors retailers) along with some hand sanitizer are essentials.
7. **FIRST AID KIT:** Things happen. Be ready for scratches and bug bites. Everybody trips sometimes, and you’ll be happy you can clean and cover a scraped knee.
8. **DOGGIE:** Bring a water bowl, extra water, a snack, and a brush if you bring your dog. Brush the dog and watch for ticks before getting back into your car.
9. **MAPS:** Children always ask, “Where are we?” Be ready with the answer by checking your map frequently as you go. With practice, you will get better at reading them and will soon be able to answer the question with precision and confidence.
10. **ZIPPER PLASTIC BAGS.** Put your maps in these bags so you don’t sweat on them or see them washed away in the rain. Also, a few extra bags will allow you to LEAVE NO TRACE. Carry out your trash.
11. **CELL PHONE POWER.** If you are going to be out for a while, consider bringing a backup power supply. GPS drains power quickly, so a backup can be crucial.
12. **RAIN GEAR:** If there is even a chance of rain, lightweight rain gear is easy to pack, and you will be happy you have it.

**IMPORTANT SAFETY POINT:** Some lands are OPEN TO HUNTING. If you are in the woods during hunting season, wear bright blaze safety apparel to alert hunters to your presence.

### **Other Ideas & Tips**

**Ease Into Hiking:** Don’t try to conquer long, difficult hikes too soon. An early bad experience can make it tough to get the kids out there again.

**Make It a Game:** If you are going somewhere with landmarks, artifacts, or structures, have your kids find them. Make up stories about what you find. Have fun!

**Geocaching:** This is a hobby that turns your hike into a treasure hunt. People leave treasures all around, often along hiking trails. With your GPS, you can find the hidden loot. Learn more with an internet search on the topic.

**Variety:** Mix it up to keep it fresh. There are *many* places to hike within 30 minutes of Monroe. Go find them! If there are other interesting things to see and do in the area, combine that with hiking to have a full day.

**Dress in Layers:** Temperatures and sun angles change throughout the day. Multiple light layers make adjusting to changes easy.

## **Family Friendly Hiking Spots Close To (And In!) Monroe**

**Webb Mountain Park (Monroe):** Park at the first parking area and walk the red trail to a stream crossing and then a climb to the giant boulder (suitable for climbing) at the top of the hill. Make a right to the overlook for beautiful views of the Housatonic River valley below. It's one of the best places in Monroe.

[http://www.monroerec.org/documents/webb\\_mountain\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.monroerec.org/documents/webb_mountain_brochure.pdf)

**Webb Mountain Discovery Zone (Monroe):** Many school groups have field trips to Discovery Zone, so you might have already done this. If not, check it out. It's flat and easy to walk, and there are many things to see and learn with the aid of signage at the Learning Stations.

[http://www.monroerec.org/documents/webb\\_mountain\\_discovery\\_zone.pdf](http://www.monroerec.org/documents/webb_mountain_discovery_zone.pdf)

**Kent Falls State Park (Kent):** This is a beautiful state park with picnic areas that will have you wanting to stay for a while. Bring a Frisbee, pack a lunch, and enjoy the entire park. The highlight, of course, is the falls. Bring your camera. Explore the town of Kent while you are there.

[https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2716&q=325228&deepNav\\_GID=1650](https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2716&q=325228&deepNav_GID=1650)

**Paugussett Trail (Monroe/Lake Zoar):** This section of the blue-blaze trail takes you along the Boys Halfway River, a peaceful, scenic place that will remind you why you enjoy being in the woods. The trailhead is on East Village Road (park on Robin Lane), or you can enter the trail on Barn Hill Road. It's a couple of miles to the Lake Zoar Drive-In. Mac and cheese bites, anyone?

<http://www.sheltonconservation.org/recreation/maps/Paugussett%20Trail%202016.pdf>

**Paugussett State Forest, Southern Section (Newtown):** This loop can be a challenging 7+ miles, or you can do a much shorter hike that takes you to the highlight of the preserve, Prydden Falls. You will hear it before you see it. There is one respectable climb, but nothing too challenging. Wear boots because there can be some wet spots. Park at the end of Great Quarter Road, off Rt. 34 at the Newtown/Monroe border, and walk along the river (counterclockwise from the extreme southeast corner of the forest).

<https://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/stateparks/maps/PaugussettSouth.pdf>

**Roxbury Land Trust (Roxbury):** This is only 30 minutes away, but it's a step back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Explore the remains of an iron mining facility from Connecticut's industrial past. Walk the whole loop to see the bat cages (*not* batting cages) and finish off with a scenic stroll along the Shepaug River.

<http://www.roxburylandtrust.org/minehill.html>

**Devil's Den Preserve (Weston/Redding):** This 1,746 acre Nature Conservancy property is the largest preserve in Fairfield County, and there is a lot to see. Be sure to find the remains of the up-and-down sawmill at Godfrey Pond. (No dogs allowed.) <https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/places-we-protect/lucius-pond-ordwaydevils-den-preserve/>

**Collis P. Huntington State Park (Redding):** Huntington made his fortune in the railroads, and this property was the summer getaway. Look for relics and artifacts, including small-scale tracks from Huntington's private railroad on site. Watch for horses as equestrians use the trails, too.

[https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2716&q=325222&deepNav\\_GID=1650](https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2716&q=325222&deepNav_GID=1650)

**Centennial Watershed State Forest (Easton):** For your first visit to this vast trail system, park at the Centennial Watershed State Forest sign on Rock House Road in Easton. The Aspetuck River flows under the road. Follow the blue blazes on the new section that goes south from here to the waterfall, or go north for an easy, quiet walk along the river. (No dogs allowed.)

<https://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/stateparks/maps/saugatuckreservoiraspetuckconnectortrail.pdf>