



Fit for the challenge?

You should understand from the start that the Nevis Night Hike is a very strenuous undertaking that involves over 1300 metres of ascent and 10 miles of walking - in the dark! This, combined with the fact that you may encounter adverse weather conditions makes it a real challenge which will require adequate physical preparation to ensure that you have the fitness and endurance to complete the walk safely and as comfortably as possible.

Mountain Fitness.

Mountain walking is far more strenuous than walking on Downs or hills. Even in descent, your muscles and joints will be under stress. The best way to improve your chances of success would be to start with some training walks in the mountains and hills. This will not only give you an idea of the physical challenge ahead, but also allow you to assess your strengths and weaknesses, test your kit, break in your boots and improve your overall confidence.

On a day-to-day basis, why not walk the dog in local hilly areas? Use the stairs rather than the lift at work, try to cycle to work if possible and go swimming afterwards. Running for 30-40 mins daily can seriously improve your cardio-vascular fitness.

As a general guide, if you can sustain around 40 mins of light physical activity without becoming breathless then you have an adequate basic level of fitness, and a good starting point to build on. The longer you can sustain the activity at this level, the better your stamina will become. Your local sports club or gym should be able to test and monitor your fitness in a safe and controlled environment.

The golden rule for this event is that there is no better training for the mountains than walking the mountains themselves!

Walking Techniques - ways to avoid injury and discomfort

- Touch the ground heel first, roll forward through the arch, over the ball of your foot to your toes, which push off to start another step. This reduces the risk of shin splints and tendon pulls.
- Walk with your head up and eyes focused ahead.
- Keep your shoulders level, pulled back and down, lift your chest.
- Contract your abdominal muscles, pressing them towards your spine.
- Carry your arms at 90° angles and pump them forward and back, rather than side to side.

The faster you move, the better your cardiovascular workout. But try to keep an even stride and maintain a steady pace. To walk faster:

- Accelerate your arm movements.
- Take smaller, quicker steps.
- To prevent lower back pain avoid leaning forward and arching your back.

Footwear

You'll need a sturdy pair of walking boots for this event, with ankle support and a good sole. Use your training walks to break them in before the day of the event. Also, wear them around the house, on the way to work, around the office etc. Once they have conformed to the shape of your feet there is less likelihood of getting blisters.

Feet first!

There are some common foot problems which are very easy to treat and avoid:

- To avoid blisters keep your feet dry and wear socks made with fibres which draw moisture away from your skin - steer clear of pure cotton. Don't lace your shoes too tightly or too loosely. The irritation from the pinching and rubbing may cause blisters.
- Aching arches are usually caused by pounding when you walk. Make sure you touch the ground with your heel first and pushing off with your toe. Cushioned insoles may help too.
- Blackened toenails are caused by the big toe hitting the front of your shoe. Keep your toenails neatly trimmed. Make sure that if one of your feet is slightly larger than the other (as most are), that your boots fit the larger one.

Exercise Circuit

The exercises are designed to strengthen specific muscle groups. It is important to just use your own body weight in the early stages. In the latter stages, small weights added to the ankles, or wearing your fully packed rucksack can also help build strength. The idea of the circuit is to complete each exercise then move onto the next.

Once all exercises are completed, (i.e. one circuit), you then go round the circuit again 3, 4, or 5 times. You can also increase the number of repetitions for each exercise from 20 to 30/40 or 50 depending on how strong you're feeling. It is essential you stretch before and after the session to keep the muscle loose and long, not tight and short.

1 - Calf Raises:

Stand with feet together, arm length away from wall. Have fingers just touching wall for balance. Raise yourself slowly onto tip toes and then slowly lower. Repeat 20 times.

2 - Squats:

Stand with feet shoulder width apart. Hands on hips. Keep back straight and head up whilst you slowly lower yourself so knees are bent 90 degrees. Then stand up so knees are locked straight. Repeat 20 times.

3 - Step ups:

Using bottom step of staircase or low bench, start with left foot on step and right foot on floor. Stand up straight on left leg bringing right foot up to next step above and then lower back down to floor. Repeat 20 times. Change leg and repeat.

4 - Leg extensions:

Sit on high sofa/bed/bench with backs of knees just on the edge and feet hanging down. Lean back with hands behind you for support. Keeping back of knee on seat, slowly lift left foot up so leg becomes straight and lower down again. Repeat 20 times. Change leg and repeat.

5 - Leg Raises:

Lie front down on mat or soft floor with hands under chin. Keeping left leg straight slowly raise six inches off the floor and then slowly lower. Repeat 20 times. Change leg and repeat.

Basic Stretching Programme

1 - Calves:

Stand approximately 1 metre away from wall with legs straight and heels on floor. Step and lean forward and slowly push hips towards wall. Should feel a slow pull in the calf muscle behind. Hold for 10 secs, swap legs, repeat 3 times. Should feel pull but no pain.

2 - Hamstrings:

Stand with feet 1 metre apart. With legs straight and hands behind back slowly bend forward at the hips keeping back straight and head up. Should feel a slow pull in muscles at the back of legs. Hold for 10 secs, stand up and lean slightly backwards, repeat 3 times. Should feel pull but no pain.

3 - Quads:

Standing with feet together, bring left foot up and put left hand on lower shin by ankle and pull behind bottom. Keep back straight and head up. May need to balance with right hand on wall. Should feel slow pull down front of leg. Hold for 10 secs, swap legs, repeat 3 times. Should feel pull but no pain.

4 - Groin:

Stand with feet 1 metre apart and both feet pointing forward. Keeping back straight and head up slowly lunge down to right side feeling pull on inside of left leg. Hold for 10 secs, swap legs, repeat 3 times. Should feel pull but no pain.

5 - Hips:

Stand with feet shoulder width apart and hands on hips. Keeping head still rotate hips round clockwise 10 times and anti clockwise 10 times. Repeat three times.

6 - Torso:

Stand with feet shoulder width apart and hands on head. Keep feet pointing forward but twist body as far as is comfortable, hold for 1 second, face forward, twist body in other direction, hold for 1 second, face forward. Repeat 10 times.

7 - Shoulder:

Stand with feet shoulder width apart. Start with hands by hips and keeping arms straight slowly swing arms round backwards 10 times, change direction swinging arms forwards 10 times. Repeat 3 times.

8 - Standing stretch:

Stand with feet together. Place hands together and reach as high as you can, hold for 10 secs, relax. Repeat 3 times.

N.B. You should only stretch warmed up muscles. Don't stretch too far, all you should feel is a slow pull, never any pain. Never bounce, always stretch slowly. People with old injuries or bad backs should be especially careful whilst exercising and stretching.