

# Baby on Board

Hiking with the little ones can be challenging, but fun.

JOANIE ROBERTSON



*Have child, will travel: if you start out on small trips, hiking with a baby can be fun and rewarding. Here, Fiona Engelson prepares for a more strenuous trip: a one-night backpack to Peek-A-Boo Lake.*

BY ANDREW ENGELSON

There is a popular, but unfounded, view that if you have kids, you can kiss your hiking days goodbye.

Admittedly, you probably shouldn't be trekking the entire Wonderland Trail with your 5-year-old. And through-hiking the Pacific Crest Trail with a 6-month-old baby probably rises to the level of child abuse.

But there are plenty of other trail experiences out there for parents and their families. It takes a little bit of extra work, some creativity, and a lot of flexibility in your plans. But it can be done, and you don't have to be an Iron Man tri-athlete to do it.

There are two sorts of hikes you can do with children, and the difference lies in whether your child is able to

walk or not. My daughter falls into the second category, and that makes hiking a somewhat easier prospect.

I'm relatively new to parenthood; but I've been hiking for most of my adult life. My daughter Fiona was born in February, and as her 6-month birthday approaches, she's already been on a half-dozen hikes, including one overnight backpacking trip. In addition, I've taken her on countless trips through Seattle's Arboreteum.

What do you need to consider when setting out on a hike with an infant or toddler who can ride in a carrier?

**Make sure you have a comfortable carrier system.** Since you're going to be spending a fair amount of time carrying your kid (whether she's not yet walking, or later, when she's tired of walking and wants you to carry her),

you'll want to buy a carrier that won't break your back and discourage you from going on other hikes. For the first five months, my wife and I have successfully used a **Baby Bjorn**, a front carrier that allows your baby to face you, or to face outward once she can hold her head up. We've also had luck with the **Kelty Pinnacle**, which is reviewed in this issue.

**Pick short, low elevation-gain hikes to start with.** This is crucial if you want to protect your body and your sanity. We began by taking Fiona on short day hikes along river valleys. The South Fork Cascade River Trail in the North Cascades and Gold Creek near Snoqualmie Pass are great examples of these sorts of hikes. It also makes sense to pick trailheads that aren't difficult to find and not too far from home to minimize time spent driving.

**Get your child used to being in the outdoors.** A hike doesn't have to take place in the deepest Wilderness. At least once a week, I strap on the carrier and take Fiona for a walk in a city park. This also helps you get used to the feel of your carrier. Wear what kind of gear you would normally take on a hike: fill your day pack with diaper and hiking gear, and get out in your neighborhood.

**Pack wisely.** You're a responsible and loving parent, so you're definitely going to take the ten hiking essentials with you on any hike. In addition, you're going to need to bring the "diaper bag" although this doesn't mean a foofy leather thing from Nordstrom. A day pack works great. Diapers, wipes, changes of clothes (including plenty of warm clothes such as a hat and sweater) pacifier, changing pad, and a few toys are all essential. If you're bottle-feeding (or taking a hike without Mom), you'll need



*Sleeping like a baby: A car seat zip-up blanket doubles as a sleeping bag.*

breast milk or formula, nipples, and bottles. You should also pack some sort of rain covering, either a rain hood or poncho, that can cover both you and your child.

**Keep your child protected from the sun.** Since doctors generally recommend that babies not use sunscreen until they're 6 months, you'll have to take special precautions to ensure your child doesn't sunburn. Choose shady hikes, have her wear a sun hat, and cover her in a lightweight receiving blanket to keep her protected.

**Be flexible.** Don't push on to the summit if your child doesn't like it. You want her to enjoy this activity, so that she'll want to keep doing it as she grows. If you have to turn around after only a hundred yards, don't get discouraged. Keep trying and try to make things fun for your child. Sing songs. Let her touch tree branches. Take her out of the carrier often and let her lie on the ground looking up at you and the trees above. You'll both be green-bonding and bonding with each other.

**Get assistance from others.** If your spouse isn't into hiking, but you want to take your child with you, try it

yourself. Or talk to other parents of young children. King County's PEPS groups are great ways to meet other new parents and find potential hiking partners. Joan Burton's book *Best Hikes with Children* is an excellent resource for easy, interesting, and kid-friendly hikes in Washington.

**When taking an overnight trip, plan ahead.** You'll probably need to hike with a partner. Pack light, but of course bring all the essentials and plenty of diapers. And remember that you don't lose pack weight when carrying diapers *out* of the backcountry. An extra pad, small sleeping bag, and lots of warm clothes and a hat will keep your baby comfy during an overnight.

**Be considerate of others.** Selecting a camp is a tricky thing with a baby. Be sure to give your neighbors plenty of space (the last thing most hikers want to hear at a solitary mountain lake is a screaming baby). Camping along a river or rushing stream helps decrease the impact of nighttime crying.

**Don't overreach.** Pick short, level hikes. Try just one night to see if your baby is comfortable sleeping in a tent. Keep a sense of humor, and keep trying!

## The Pinnacle of Child Carriers



There are baby carriers and there are baby carrying systems. The Kelty Pinnacle is the uber-carrier in Kelty's line of child backpacks

For everyday use in the city, the Pinnacle is probably overkill. And at close to \$300 retail, it's not cheap. But for those interested in doing longer hikes with Junior on your back, it's a great investment.

The child seat is rated up to 45 pounds, so even small toddlers impatient with the trail can ride. The Pinnacle has two roomy compartments, including a top pack that can hold most of your diaper bag needs on a day hike.

Other neat features include a cell-phone carrier (I used mine for sunglasses), rain hood, and a built-in hydration system.

The Pinnacle was comfortable on the trail, although if you maxed out both packs and carried a 40-pound toddler, it would probably be cumbersome.

Fiona gave the carrier her seal of approval: she especially liked the thick drool guard (yum yum!) and little lanyards for hanging toys.

—A.E.