

DIRTY IS THE NEW CLEAN

Redefining personal hygiene for the active outdoorswoman

By Laura Lancaster • Adam Tycaster Photos

“**W**ow, that guy's Old Spice was strong.” I was wrapping up five days in the backcountry of Northern California with my husband when we ran into

a trio of day hikers. The smell of Old Spice hit us first, but it was soon followed by others: Dove, Herbal Essences, Tide. The smell of clean skin, hair and clothes, sure, but also the artificial fragrances and chemicals that went along with them. We held our breath as we passed by.

We surely smelled awful to the day hikers, too. After all, we hadn't showered in nearly a week and had been wearing the same outfits for just as long. But here's the thing: Even covered in the accumulated dirt, sweat and sunshine that comes from extended periods in the outdoors, I didn't feel all that dirty. As it turned out, the frontcountry luxury I

was looking forward to most wasn't a shower, but a hamburger (and a beer to go with it). Five days in the backcountry was all it had taken to turn my notion of what it means to be clean on its head.

FORGET THE MIRROR

Lotions, foundation, sunscreen, mascara, deodorant—women's beauty routines can get pretty complex. And that's fine, at least at home, where it all comes off in the daily shower or with facial wipes. But it's a different story in the backcountry, where there are no showers and where rinsing off makeup or bug spray in mountain

streams can have a negative impact on water quality.

Out in the woods, anything you've layered on top of your skin is likely staying put, along with the inevitable fine sheen of dirt that attaches to those tacky sunscreens and lotions, resulting in caked-over, pore-clogged skin. In short, your daily beauty routine can actually make you feel dirtier out in the woods. That's why one of the first steps to backcountry cleanliness is to reduce the pile-up on your skin by forgoing your usual makeup, lotions and shampoos. The less that's on your skin at the start of the day, the less you'll wish you could shower

“**...your daily beauty routine can actually make you feel dirtier out in the woods. The less that's on your skin at the start of the day, the less you'll wish you could shower off at the end of it.”**

off at the end of it. Cut down even further by limiting your sunscreen and bug spray use with lightweight long sleeves and pants. And focus on how your body feels rather than how it looks by doing yourself a favor and leaving the mirror at home.

SELF-CARE ROUTINE

After thousands of miles of backpacking together, my husband knows not to bother me when we first get to camp. Before the tent goes up or dinner gets made, I need to go through my backcountry



FEMININE HYGIENE

Let's face it: Dealing with the hassle that comes around every month is bad enough in the frontcountry. Keep it to a minimum on your outdoor treks by carrying more feminine hygiene supplies than you think you'll need, and carry a dedicated Ziploc bag for discarded items. For those who would rather not have to pack anything out, there are several reusable products like the Diva Cup that can further minimize the time and mess. —Laura Lancaster



▲ Make sure to regularly apply hand sanitizer. This is essential for warding off dangerous bugs in the backcountry.



THE BENEFITS OF MERINO

If you've read my articles before, you know that I'm a major advocate for merino wool, and not just in socks. Unlike synthetic materials, which hold onto odors even after being thrown in the wash, merino has antimicrobial properties that prevent the buildup of smells over time. No longer relegated to designer sweaters, companies like Smartwool and Minus33 are making clothes out of merino wool (including base layers and intimates) that will work well on almost any outdoor adventure, even the dog days of summer. Another popular brand that looks to be making a comeback in the fall of 2018 is Ibex. —Laura Lancaster

self-care routine. First, I head to the nearest creek (or off to a private spot with a bandana and water bottle if no creek is handy), take off my shoes and socks and clean off my feet, and if it's been a particularly muddy or dusty day, I'll wash off my legs as well.

When I'm done, I let them air dry on the rock while I clean the dirt off my hands and out from under my fingernails. After that, I splash the cold water on my face and neck to remove the day's sweat and dirt. The last step is to pull out my "camp" socks—a thin pair of quality merino wool socks.

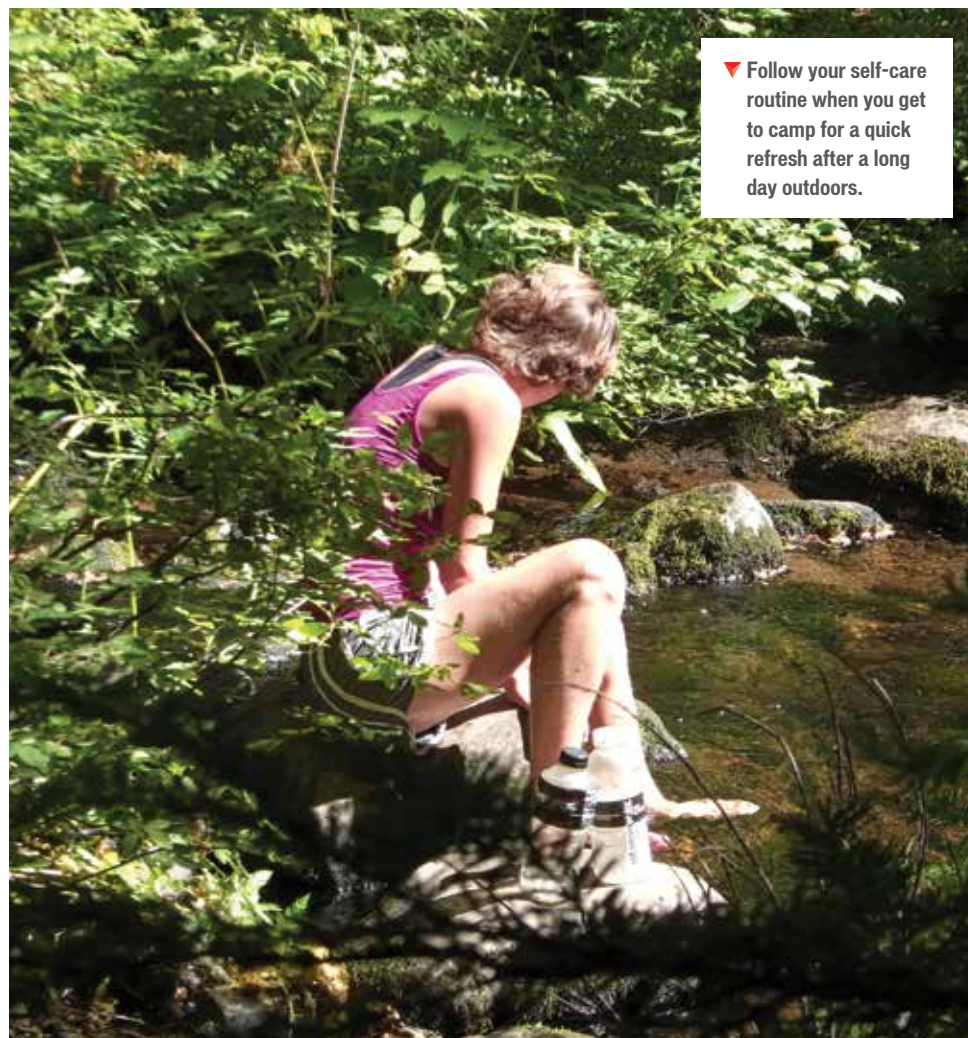
This backcountry self-care routine is pretty basic. Your personal routine might involve brushing your hair or rinsing out your shirt and changing into a fresh one. Figure out what

small acts of self-care help you feel refreshed and relaxed at the end of a long day.

DIRT ISN'T THE ENEMY

Your backcountry self-care routine is important for building a healthy relationship with the dirt and dust of the natural world. After all, as our mothers told us, it's just dirt. It won't hurt you. What will hurt you are parasites and bacteria.

The importance of filtering your water in the backcountry is widely known; less widely known is that one of the biggest reasons that the water is contaminated in the first place is other backcountry travelers—outdoorsmen and women whose bathroom breaks are too close to a mountain stream and who do not stop to take the time to



▼ Follow your self-care routine when you get to camp for a quick refresh after a long day outdoors.

properly sanitize their hands before eating. Not only are they putting themselves at risk, but they may also pass along those germs to their unsuspecting hiking partners, which is especially dangerous if they turn out to be an asymptomatic carrier of a parasite like giardia.

That's why, in addition to practicing appropriate hygiene and encouraging your fellow travelers to do the same, you can also protect yourself by declining food from others you meet on the trail and avoiding shaking hands. These days, a fist bump is considered an acceptable alternative on the trail.

In the frontcountry, how we look is always front and center through social media, friends and acquaintances, the mirrors that seem to be everywhere we turn. After a long

stint in the backcountry, however, without the constant reflections and expectations of our usual lives, many women find that they feel more present, and more comfortable, in their bodies. Sometimes, learning to love the dirt is also a way we can learn to love ourselves, to consider how good it feels to be in the world, and to appreciate how beautiful the world looks to us. Give it a try, and leave the beauty products at home. ☒

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▲ Eating nutritious food will keep your body strong and improve its ability to fight off dangerous parasites.



▼ These hikers look friendly enough, but they may be asymptomatic carriers of parasites.

DIY SHOWERS

Portable backpacking showers like the Sea to Summit Pocket Shower are getting lighter and more cost-effective all the time, and first-time and seasoned backpackers alike are increasingly turning to them to add an extra touch of luxury (and hygiene) to their backpacking routine. But if you don't want to carry the extra weight, there is an even easier way: Simply drill a dozen or so holes into an extra screw top for one of your water bottles. When you're ready for your end-of-day shower, just switch out the bottle caps, lift the water bottle above your head and squeeze. —Laura Lancaster