

# All-weather athletes

## Hikers, bikers, rowers and runners revel in Juneau's wet weather

By CATHY BROWN  
FOR THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

In autumn, when rain, wind and darkness can sock in Juneau for weeks at a time, many of us store our bikes and hiking gear and head to the gym – or the couch.

Not Rob Welton. He pulls on water-resistant tights and overshoes, mounts heavier tires on his bike and revels in the mess.

"I'm kind of a biking nut," Welton said. "I don't care if it's raining or windy, it doesn't matter."

What's the secret of those outdoor enthusiasts who keep pedaling, hiking, running or rowing when most Juneauites are hibernating at home?

Good gear and a good attitude, say all-weather athletes.

"The hardest part is getting through the front door jamb," said Ed Mills, who with his wife, Linda, leads city Parks and Recreation Department hikes on Wednesdays in the fall and winter. "Once you get your foot over that door, it's not usually as bad as it looks."

Dave Ringle, president of the biking club Juneau Freewheelers, echoed that sentiment.

"The worst thing about riding in the rain in Juneau is thinking about riding in the rain," Ringle said.

"Once you get out, you're moving, and it's not too bad," Welton said.

Cheryl Levitt doesn't let the rain stop her from doing anything – biking, running, kayaking, even skiing.

"I just get really good gear,"



MICHAEL PENN / THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

**Soggy athletes:** Rob Welton rides his bike in the rain along the North Douglas Highway after work Wednesday.

Hikers to avoid flats by switching out bike in the rain are rubber just 50 feet into the timber can anytime the air temperature gets

...ning.  
"I just get really good gear," she said.

For bikers good gear can include tights made especially for biking with semi-waterproof front panels and a more breathable back panel since the backs of the legs are less exposed to the wind.

On top, Welton said he wears polypropylene, topped with a layer of fleece, then a raincoat over that if it's really rainy. If it's just sprinkling, he'll carry the raincoat on his bike, along with a spare fleece vest to avoid hypothermia if he has to change a flat tire.

"Fixing a flat in the rain like this is a real bummer," Welton said.

He tries to avoid flats by switching to tougher, heavier tires. His mountain bike also has fenders, which greatly increases comfort.

"No fenders is miserable," Welton said. "Water sprays in your face, and you get that stripe up your butt in the back."

Many wet-weather bikers also buy neoprene overshoes or "booties" that fit over their bike shoes. But not everyone. Welton has a friend who wears plastic bags between his socks and his shoes.

Gearing up to hike or run in the muck is simpler.

Among Mills' secrets to a pleas-

ant hike in the rain are rubber boots and layers of clothing, starting with polypropylene underwear, a synthetic fleece middle layer, breathable rain pants and a raincoat if it's raining hard.

If it's not raining hard, he tucks the rain clothes in his day pack, along with lunch and an extra undershirt to change into if the first one gets wet with sweat. Wool or wool-blend gloves, hat and socks are also a good idea, he said.

Mills said he avoids leading hikes in the high alpine when it's blowing or raining hard, simply because a more protected trail will be more enjoyable. Getting

just 50 feet into the timber can make a big difference on a day like that.

"It's pretty nice in there," he said. "There's always something neat to see."

This time of year, the fall colors are showing and mushrooms are thriving, he said.

Rowers and kayakers have to pay closer attention to weather forecasts than other outdoor athletes, so they don't find themselves in rough seas.

Ron Flint of Nugget Alaskan Outfitter, who occasionally rows in colder weather, recommends wearing a dry suit on the water

anytime the air temperature gets around 50 degrees or lower.

"You gotta be a little bit safer because if you fall over on the side of the road, it's different than if you fall out of a boat," Flint said.

Autumn and winter also mean less daylight. Lights and reflectors are essential for bicyclists to ride safely at night. Runners also need to wear reflective clothing if they're out at night, and make sure drivers see them. Some also wear headlamps if they're running in an unlighted area.

The mounds of gear needed to keep warm, dry and safe aren't

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cheap.

"It adds up. Boy, that's a fact," Welton said.

He figures his biking tights alone cost \$90 and the booties \$25 or \$30. You can get bike lights for under \$20, but Welton's eyeing some new, much more powerful, lights that run as much as \$400.

Flint said you can spend \$600 to \$700 on a dry suit for kayaking year-round.

Still, Levitt figures gearing up for the weather is no more expensive than going to a gym, and good clothing will last for years.

"I see it as an investment in my health," she said.

Plus, she figures by living in a laid-back town like Juneau, she saves money on expensive work clothes.

Wet-weather athletes can't be too fussy about things like hair and makeup.

Levitt recalls putting her hair in a braid before starting a kayaking trip to Pack Creek on Admiralty Island and leaving it braided for four days of pouring rain. When the sun finally came out, she pulled it loose.

"It had been so wet, my hair was actually moldy," she said. She didn't find any actual spores, but the texture had changed and it took a

week to get the smell out, she said.

Some outdoor enthusiasts also work out indoors at times, but say it's generally far less satisfying.

"There's nothing like, after being at work all day, just getting out and getting big gulps of fresh air and being in beautiful surroundings," Levitt said.

Ron Flint scoffs at the idea of using an indoor rowing machine.

"Oh, God, breathe the air that everybody else has been breathing?" he said. "I only do that as a last resort."

"I just like being outside, seeing something different," Flint said.

When the rain turns to snow, many all-weather athletes finally abandon their bikes and hiking shoes - and put on their skis or snowshoes.

But even that can turn into a water sport.

Levitt said one of her favorite Juneau memories is of a visit here for a ski trip one April when she was living in Sitka. It was, of course, raining, but people were skiing anyway.

She was charmed by the contrast between Juneau and expensive ski resorts like Aspen or Vail.

"Everybody was skiing in their rubber rain gear," she said, "their rubber fishing gear."

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*Cathy Brown is a Juneau writer who has worked for the Empire and The Associated Press.*