

# Backpacking for Beginners

**Proper Gear** Having the right equipment and clothing is essential to having an enjoyable backpacking experience, but it doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of money. Often the best equipment for a scout is not the most expensive. The troop has equipment that scouts can use until they can accumulate their own – it can seem overwhelming when starting from scratch. Scouts will need a backpack, properly fitting boots, a tent, backpacking stove and mess kit, and sleeping gear (see the attached packing list for more info). Before heading into the backcountry, do a test run with all your equipment. A short hike around your neighborhood in full gear will often reveal any rubbing, blistering or an overweight backpack. Scouts should also practice loading and unloading their backpack since it is common for a scout's parents to help them load their gear, but then they have trouble getting everything back into their backpack on the trail. Also, first time backpackers tend to bring too much gear and become exhausted from carrying the extra weight. Think carefully about bringing items that are not on the packing list.

**Be Prepared** It is the Boy Scout motto, but it is also just common sense. Planning for and practicing proper safety on the trail and at the campsite are the key elements of a successful backpacking trip. Make sure to pack a first aid kit, have plenty of water or a purifier, bug spray that contains 20%-30% DEET to repel ticks, sunblock, waterproof matches, a reliable light source, and a good map and compass. In addition to practicing the principles of trail safety, it is also important to know how to properly store food and other items that have an odor that attracts wild animals. Never keep lip balm, toothpaste, garbage, food or other scented items in your tent. The best way to store them is in a bear bag away from camp. We will have troop bear bags with us for scouts to use.

**Be Physically Fit** Know and understand your physical abilities and limitations. Backpacking requires you to be fairly physically fit, given that you will be encountering rough, uneven and often strenuous terrain. All while carrying a backpack and being exposed to the elements for a long duration. All of our backpacking trips are suitable for the youngest scouts, but being physically fit will ensure they have a good experience in the backcountry.

**Leave No Trace** Most seasoned backpackers are well versed in the "Leave No Trace" credo of the outdoors, but new scouts are sometimes unaware of certain outdoor ethics. Before you start on the trail, understand the importance of packing out everything you packed in, camping at a reasonable distance from water sources, staying on designated trails (even in the backcountry), and using existing campsites where available.