

Be Prepared for Camping & Backpacking



Gear Basics

- Bring the 10 essentials!
- Refer to the Boy Scout Handbook for information on camping and backpacking.
- Buy durable gear – it gets abused when camping and you don't want it to fail.
- Don't overspend – there's no need to buy top of the line gear.
- Share equipment – team up with a buddy or two on the heavy and more expensive stuff.
- Start with the basics and add as you go.
- Talk to others for recommendations – find out what they like or dislike about their gear.
- Check out the Boys Life website – www.boyslife.org/section/outdoors/

Clothing

It's best to have a set of clothing that is used exclusively for camping/backpacking. Put camping clothing in a specific drawer or container, then when you need it for camping you know where it is and it's clean and ready to go.

Cotton is Rotten!

Cotton clothing is not suitable for camping – it absorbs moisture, does not dry quickly and loses its ability to insulate when it's wet. Synthetic materials such as nylon, polypropylene, and micro-fleece are good choices. These materials dry quickly and can still insulate when wet. They also are easy to wash & dry when camping.

Layer Clothing

It's best to have several thin layers so you can take off or add layers depending on the temperature. Start with underwear made of polypropylene, followed by nylon pants and shirts, and wear a micro-fleece pullover if needed.

Pants

Nylon zip-off pants that convert to shorts are perfect for camping. The Boy Scout uniform pants are great, however if you take them camping it's likely that they'll get stained or ripped and then won't be suitable to wear as a uniform. Since the uniform pants are not cheap it's recommended that you have separate pants that are just for camping.

Shirts

Long sleeve shirts are best since they'll keep you warmer in cooler weather and you can always roll up the sleeves when it's warm. Nylon shirts provide good sun protection and also keep you from getting mosquito bites.

Socks

Use a thin sock liner made of silk or polypropylene. This will help wick moisture away from your feet and provides a smooth surface against your skin which will help you avoid blisters. Add a heavier wool sock – wool provides good cushion and keeps your feet warm even if they get wet.

Hiking Boots

Since boys outgrow shoes so fast, it's best to spend only about \$25 on boots. You don't need to buy the expensive waterproof/breathable boots. Buy some good fitting boots and waterproof them with Camp-Dry, Sno-Seal, or other water barrier. Make sure your boots have a fairly aggressive tread that will provide good traction on the trail.

Rain Gear

There are several options for rain gear. A loose fitting poncho is cheap and covers you well – the drawback is that it can be heavy and it doesn't breathe at all so you can get hot under them. A poncho can also be used for a ground cloth or to carry an injured person. A waterproof, lightweight rain jacket that has vents for breathability is a good choice. Thin is good since you'll have a fleece jacket in case you get cold.

Headgear

Wearing a hat on the trail keeps the sun off you but it also keeps the heat from getting out of the top of your head. If you do wear a hat find one that is vented so your head stays cooler. A hat with a full brim is nice since it protects your neck from sun and is also handy if it's raining. A bandana or scarf on your head can be a good choice since you can get it wet to keep yourself cool. Sunglasses are a good idea if you're hiking on a trail that's not shaded. Take a "watch cap" or stocking cap with you even in warm weather. You can wear it if the weather turns colder and while you're sleeping to stay warm.

Sleeping Gear

Sleeping Pads

A closed-cell foam mat is usually just fine for most boys. A mat not only gives you a little cushion from the uneven and hard ground, but more importantly it provides insulation between you and the ground. When you're in your sleeping bag, the bottom of your bag gets compressed and loses its insulating capability. A pad will help keep your body heat from being drawn into the cold ground. If you're "car camping" or going to summer camp you might want to take an air mattress. For backpacking an air mattress adds weight, so make sure you have a lightweight one – or just take a foam pad. If you do use a ThermoRest® or air mattress, it's a good idea to place a foam pad below the mattress in order to protect it. The foam pad also gives you a backup in case your air mattress leaks (which is common).

Sleeping Bags

There are primarily two types of sleeping bags – down and synthetic. Down bags are filled with goose down feathers which are one of the best insulators available. However, when down gets wet it totally loses its ability to insulate – and it takes a long time to dry. In the Pacific Northwest, it's best to use synthetic sleeping bags since they'll keep you warm even if they get wet. Synthetic bags weigh a bit more than down but they're much cheaper.

Get a sleeping bag that you can stuff into a stuff sack – you don't want the kind that roll up since they are bulky and heavier. Mummy style bags are best since they are lighter weight and they have less volume inside and will keep you warmer – most have material around the head area and a drawstring so you can get really cozy if it's cold outside.

Sleeping bags are rated for temperature. For most of the camping we do, a 20-25° F bag is about right. Avoid youth-size sleeping bags, since a decent bag should last for many years and you don't want to be growing out of it too soon.

Backpacks

There are two types of backpacks – external frame and internal frame. External frame packs have the framework on the outside and keep your body in a comfortable upright stance. They are also cooler to wear since they provide an air gap between you and your pack. Internal frame packs hold your pack weight closer to your body, are more form-fitting, and give you more freedom of movement and balance. They have straps that can be cinched tightly to force the weight closer to your body. Internal packs are now being designed with "cooling channels" to allow for better air flow between you and your pack. Internal frame backpacks are generally recommended and there is a much better selection since they're more common.

Most youth should carry a loaded pack of not more than 20-25 lbs. It is a challenge to keep it light, but too heavy of a pack can make your trip much less enjoyable. Consider each item that you put in your pack – if you don't absolutely need it you might want to leave it out. Start with your essentials and only add items that don't add too much weight.

Try before you buy!

It's recommended that you NOT buy a backpack without first trying it on. If you go to REI, they'll measure you (torso and waist), help you pick out a pack and will even put sand bags in a pack and let you walk around the store. There are a lot of different backpack designs and sizes and you want to make sure it fits your body just right. Some packs are adjustable and these are nice for growing boys. Unless you're small, it might be best to get an adult pack that you can grow into. If an adult-small pack is too large for you, consider getting a youth size pack. If you do, make sure it is adjustable and that it has plenty of room for growth.

What to look for.

Don't buy a large backpack since it's tempting to fill it up and then you'll have a lot of weight to carry on the trail. A pack with 3,000-4,000 cubic inches of volume is fine for most backpacking. Lightweight packs generally use materials that are less durable – better to get a pack with heavy duty materials such as HD Denier Nylon. If you have a choice of colors, choose a pack with a bright color – this helps other people see you and helps you find your pack at night.



Tents

A tent basically provides protection from weather and bugs. There are a wide variety of tents available so you have a lot of options to consider. You want to find the right balance between weight and comfort.

Seasons

Most tents are designed for three-season use. That means they'll handle the temperatures and weather of spring, summer and fall. A good three-season tent will have a rainfly that goes nearly to the ground all the way around the tent.

Weight

For backpacking, you'll want the lightest tent that's still large enough for your needs. When backpacking with a group, it's best to share a tent with your buddy. One guy carries the tent and the other carries the poles and rainfly. Aim for a tent that weighs no more than three to four pounds per person.

Breathability

It's important to have plenty of airflow – this keeps the tent cooler and helps avoid condensation inside the tent. Mesh panels at the top are also great for star gazing on clear nights.

Ground Cloth

To protect your tent, place a ground cloth between your tent and the ground. A piece of lightweight plastic works just fine for a ground cloth. Make sure the ground cloth is sized a few inches smaller than your tent, otherwise rain will get between the ground cloth and your tent and you'll get wet.

Take Care of Your Investment

A good tent should last many years if you take good care of it. Don't wear boots in your tent (use plastic bags or put them outside). When you get home from a camping trip, it's a good idea to set up your tent in your backyard or garage so you can clean it and let it air out and dry before storing it again.



Cooking

Food

For "car camping" you can cook foods similar to what you might have at home. Since you'll have cook stoves and coolers select a menu of foods that is tasty, easy to cook, and easy to clean up.

When backpacking, only dehydrated foods are allowed. These are much lighter to carry and safer since there's no risk of spoiling. Packaged dehydrated foods can be purchased at sporting goods stores and even some local food stores. These foods are very easy to prepare – you just boil water in your pot then pour it into the food pouch – wait a few minutes and eat! Clean up is simple – just put the food pouch in your garbage bag and all you have to wash is your eating utensil. Dehydrated foods are pretty good and besides, everything tastes better when you're camping! Almost any food you can think of (beef stew, chicken teriyaki, etc.) is available dehydrated – they even have dehydrated ice cream!

Trail mix or energy bars are great for snacking, but for meals use the dehydrated meals. You also might want to bring hot cocoa mix and Tang for breakfast!

Stove

A lightweight stove that is easy to use is best. The MSR PocketRocket is a good choice – it weighs just 3 oz. and you just screw it onto a fuel canister and light it. Three or four boys can share a stove – just make sure you bring enough fuel.

Utensils

A "spork" is very handy – this spoon and fork combination is lightweight and takes up very little space. A copolyester or acetal utensil set is also very lightweight and comfortable to use.

Dishes

No need for a plate – just use a lightweight large plastic bowl. An insulated mug is handy for hot cocoa or soups and other foods. A complete "mess kit" is fine, but they have more than you really need. A small pot is needed for boiling water – nothing too big or heavy. Small aluminum coffee pots can be found at many thrift stores. You can put items inside the pot such as your stove to maximize space.



Water

It's vital that you drink plenty of water when hiking or backpacking. Your body perspires a lot of water and you need to replace it as you're hiking. Carry a water bottle with you or have it in your backpack where you can easily get to it.

Water Filters

You should assume that water in the back country is NOT SAFE TO DRINK. Untreated water can contain some nasty germs such as Giardia which can make you very sick. All water should be filtered using a water filter. Several people can share a water filter.

Water Bottles

Use a Nalgene water bottle – they're nearly indestructible and good for hot and cold drinks. Don't put milk in them – it will make them smell bad for a long time! During cold weather, you can put hot water in your water bottle, put it in a sock and place it in the bottom of your sleeping bag to keep you warm – just be sure the lid is on tight and you might want to put it in a plastic bag as well.

Platypus brand bottles and containers are handy since they're collapsible – these are especially nice to have at a campsite so you have plenty of water available for cooking and cleaning up.

Other Items

Rope

100' of parachute cord – very strong and lightweight. Handy for repairing gear or clothing, lashings, making a clothesline, hanging up food in a tree, etc.

Toiletries

Put toiletries in a Ziploc – be sure and bring toothbrush, dental floss, toothpaste, biodegradable camp soap, toilet paper, Kleenex, a small washcloth (small kitchen washcloth works well), towel (microfiber works well – or a Sham Wow chamois cut into a small piece). Check out the sample section at the drug store – they have a lot of small packages of items that are perfect for camping.

Flashlight or Headlamp

Headlamps are recommended – they keep your hands free and they're harder to lose than a flashlight. These are about \$15 at discount stores. It's a good idea to bring along an extra set of batteries as well.

Fire Starter

Most meals are prepared with a camp stove, but if it's necessary to start a fire, you'll want to have a fire starter ready to go. A simple and effective fire starter can be made by placing cotton balls in Vaseline and putting them into a film canister. To start a fire, flatten the cotton balls and place them under kindling – they'll burn for 10-15 minutes.

Other Items to Consider

2 plastic garbage bags – handy for dirty clothes, garbage, covering your backpack, etc.

A small, plastic shovel is handy around a campsite.

Salt and pepper and other spices to spice up bland camp foods.

Bug repellent – don't use 100% DEET though – it's not safe for pre-adolescent boys!

Where to Get Gear

- The BSA website (www.scoutstuff.org) has a few items although the selection is limited.
- REI is great for looking at gear and trying it out. Their prices are a bit higher, but they have a great return & exchange policy. Watch for deals on their website or get their sale flyers. REI also rents equipment so you can try it before you buy it.
- Local sporting goods stores (Big 5, Sportsman's Warehouse, Cabela's) have good prices and selection.
- Local discount stores (Target, Wal-Mart) are great for clothing – you can buy synthetic underwear, shirts, etc.
- Shop online – there are many sites with a great variety and low prices – www.campmor.com is a good one.
- Used gear can be found at sporting goods second hand stores – check out Second Ascent in Ballard.
- Troop 86 has a few items that can be borrowed. Talk to the Troop Quartermaster about what's available.

