

Fall and Spring Personal Backpacking Equipment

INTRODUCTION

Please remember three words when gathering your gear:

1. Quality. High quality - especially of boots and packs - is appreciated when price is long forgotten. Consider borrowing or renting. Ask for advice.
2. Weight. The objective is to keep the maximum load to a limit of 25% of body weight. This objective will not be met at certain times. Watch the ounces. They quickly add up to pounds!
3. Bulk. It all has to fit in or on the pack, **including your share of crew gear** (pots, food, tent, rope, etc.). **Items which serve more than one purpose and items that can be shared can save space and weight.**



If you have any questions about equipment, please ask at meetings or contact an adult leader.

THE FOUNDATION - BOOTS -- Rugged, comfortable boots in good condition and with room for cushioning socks are essential to enjoying the backpacking experience. The most common medical problem for backpackers is blisters. Acquire your boots long enough in advance to have extensively used them with a fully loaded pack. Waiting to buy until the last few days before departure may create big trouble on the trail. On the other hand, don't make the error of buying too far in advance. Scouts -- and their feet -- grow, sometimes in spurts. **Boots rated for "backpacking," "rugged trail," or "off-trail" are preferred. Lists of boots and ratings are available in L.L. Bean "Sporting Specialties" catalog, Cabela's catalog (800-237-4444), or the Backpacker Magazine "Buyer's Guide" issues.**

Soles: Trails can be steep, rocky and uneven. A mile can result in about 2000 to 2500 impacts on those rocks. The sole and shank of the boot must be stiff enough to protect the foot. A steel shank is best. In doubt? Try a test with a full pack (40 or more lbs.). Walk on some rough rocks. If it hurts here, it can hurt on the trail. "Vibram" (yellow label) is a high quality brand of sole. You need lugs or ridges for traction.

Support of the heel and ankle: The counter of the boot is the part that curves around the heel parallel to the ground in a "U." It must be stiff to prevent the heel from rolling over if you step on something uneven (a rock, hole, or root). The tipping or rolling of the heel is the beginning of a sprain. The boot top should reach above the shin, and the boot should have a contoured footbed to support the arch of the foot.

Weight: Due to the way we humans are built, a pound on the foot takes as much energy to move along the trail as about five pounds on your back. Four pounds a pair should be about the upper limit. Two pounds a pair is really pushing the low end, except for tiny feet.

Upper Materials: Combinations of leather and nylon dominate available choices. All leather is good, but watch the weight. Gor-Tex is not essential but keeps water out. Look for heavy stitching.

"Break-in": New boots should be worn at least ten miles, preferably while wearing a fully loaded pack. Discover any problems here. All leather boots generally need much more "break-in" than cloth and nylon models; however, the problem may be a seam that rubs, not stiffness as such. You can practice around your block.

THE SECOND ESSENTIAL - THE PACK

Fit & Condition: The pack must be sturdy and in good condition. It must fit comfortably. Try it out with a full load. Be sure no stitching is failing, zippers going out, or parts falling off. Check welds on metal frames.

Size: You must carry your share of crew gear - some quite bulky. Rough rule of thumb: packs with an external plastic frame should have a capacity of at least 2600 cubic inches; internal frame packs should hold your sleeping bag plus 2600 cubic inches and have lash points to allow external attachment of a tent.

Features: The pack must have a padded waist belt (transfers weight to the hips) and well-padded shoulder straps. You will need lash straps (not "bungee" cords) to attach sleeping bag, pad, and crew gear to the pack. Even if the pack is "water-proof," a rain cover is needed (a couple of heavy plastic bags will do).

Cost: It is not possible to buy an adequate pack new for under \$50.00 unless you hit a 50% off sale at a reputable vendor. Suitable packs are available for under \$90.00. (Please ask adult staff about sources.)

AND THEN TO SLEEP

It can get cold at night in the Fall and Spring. You need a bag rated for freezing temperatures, but it should not weigh more than five pounds. Since the body crushes the air out of the sleeping bag insulation under you, you also need a foam pad (or equivalent), which also helps with rocks, roots, etc.

OTHER PERSONAL ITEMS FOR THE TRAIL - WEEKEND OUTING

This list is based on the experience of many backpackers over the years. You may be able to improve on it, but at least apply some thought and knowledge of the subject before rejecting its suggestions.

Packing

pack cover or heavy plastic bags plastic bags to keep items (**esp. clothes**) dry (2d line of defense)
 waterproof sleeping bag sack (best is plastic sack inside nylon stuff sack.)

Clothes:

brimmed hat to shade neck and ears (not a baseball cap)
 3 changes of hiking socks (A set of socks may be more than one pair. It depends on the boot/foot combination.)
 1 pair, long pants (Normal jeans are too heavy/too tight.) **nylon** poncho or **waterproof** rain suit
 insulation layer (Polyester fleece is best/ wool ok.) 1 extra pair underwear
 light sneakers for camp sweat pants hiking shorts (Check expected weather.)
 light long sleeve shirt T-shirt lightweight windbreaker

First Aid & Toiletries

sun block (check weather) towel, small small (say 1-2 oz.) liquid detergent
 moleskin or molefoam tooth paste, small chap stick
 tooth brush comb, small toilet paper
 personal first aid items and medicines insect repellent (small) (unless you're sure there are no mosquitoes)

Eating etc.

2 sturdy, plastic, 1 qt. water containers with leak-proof tops spoon light cup
 emergency food (1000 calories) light, deep plastic bowl

Other

pocket knife hiking staff bandanna compass
 waterproof ground sheet, 5'x 7' sun glasses sponge (bathing & bailing out tent)
 \$10 in small bills candle whistle mirror (signal)
 flashlight (AA/AAA LED best) extra batteries & bulbs 50' "parachute cord" (AKA 550 cord")
 20-30 matches and striker that works - in waterproof container

Optional (watch the weight!)

pad (small) and pen or pencil camera & film rubber bands
 watch, rugged bic type lighter

A FINAL WORD

Acquiring gear for backpacking is like buying anything else. Good quality gear can last a lifetime. Prices for the same item vary from source to source -- sometimes very greatly. Troop adults can help.

NOTES
