



The World at Your Feet

Many people today never stray far from a warm bed, a cozy bathroom, and a well-stocked refrigerator. While they enjoy all the comforts of home, they miss out on the wonders of nature, the fun of exploring new places, and the exhilaration that comes with accomplishing more than they ever thought they could.

When you go backpacking, you carry all the essentials of home (if not all the comforts of it) on your back. No longer are you tied to one particular place. You can eat breakfast in a secluded valley, have lunch along a winding trail, and enjoy dinner by starlight on a mountaintop. Then you can bed down under the stars for a well-earned rest before beginning a new day of adventure.

Backpacking can be a single-day activity of several miles in a local park or a weeklong trek of 50 miles or longer at Philmont Scout Ranch. No matter what the distance, you will need to be prepared to meet the challenge, and you will need to follow the principles of Leave No Trace so that those who follow you can enjoy the same trails for decades to come.

Objectives

This month's activities should:

- Improve physical fitness.
- Create a sense of communion with nature and God.
- Foster a greater appreciation for the outdoors and a determination to follow the Outdoor Code and the principles of Leave No Trace.
- Offer opportunities to practice planning and teamwork.
- Strengthen self-confidence and team building.

RELATED ADVANCEMENT AND AWARDS

- Tenderfoot requirements 1a, 1b, 5a, 5b, and 5c
- Second Class requirements 1a, 1b, 3a, and 3b
- First Class requirements 1a and 10
- Backpacking and Hiking merit badges
- 50-Miler Award
- Outdoor Ethics awards
- National Medal for Outdoor Achievement
- National Outdoor Challenge Unit Award
- Historic Trails Award



Leadership Planning

As a leadership team, you may want to discuss the following items during your planning meetings when choosing backpacking as your program feature.

1. What will our main event be?
2. Where will we have our main event?
3. Do we have appropriate crew gear (e.g., stoves, tents)?
4. Do our Scouts have the appropriate personal gear (e.g., backpacks, boots)?
5. Who in the unit can teach backpacking skills?
6. Where could we find guest speakers who have worked at a high-adventure base or hiked trails like the Appalachian Trail and Pacific Crest Trail?
7. How proficient are our Scouts and leaders in backpacking skills?
8. Are we ready to tackle a trek at a high-adventure base operated by the BSA or a local council?
9. How can we involve parents?
10. What parts of the Backpacking merit badge can we focus on?
11. How can we use backpacking to promote team building?
12. To meet our needs, what should we change in the sample meeting plans?

PARENTS CAN HELP WITH THE BACKPACKING PROGRAM FEATURE BY:

1. Sharing their expertise
2. Providing transportation for the main event
3. Loaning backpacking equipment to the group

4. Supporting money-earning projects to raise funds for equipment
5. Maintaining current Youth Protection certification, which is required of all adults providing transportation for or participating in outings.

MAKING BACKPACKING FUN

Scouts who are new to backpacking can find it boring. Scouts who are less physically fit may view it as little more than hard work in disguise. Fortunately, there are plenty of things you can do to make backpacking fun. Here are a few.



- Hike to interesting destinations: a hidden waterfall, a scenic overlook, a historic site, or a spot to do some bouldering or horseback riding.
- Plan activities for evenings in camp. Take along cards, a flying disc, and other game equipment.
- Combine hiking with other activities. Play team-building games at lunch. Stop along the trail and have Scouts study the flora and fauna in a 3-foot-square area. Practice splicing at breaks. Use techniques from the Scouts BSA handbooks to measure the height of or distance to specific landmarks.
- Don't just walk. Take a 10-minute water break every hour, ideally in an attractive location—never at the bottom of a big hill!



- Practice techniques that help reduce fatigue. When climbing a big hill, try the caterpillar technique: When the leader needs a break, they step to the side of the trail and let the group continue. The new leader does the same thing after a few minutes, and so on. Eventually, the original leader, now rested, will end up in front again. Repeat as needed.
- As you hike, play the sorts of games you might on a long car ride, such as Twenty Questions.

BUDGET BACKPACKING EQUIPMENT

Although it is possible to spend hundreds of dollars on equipment, including backpacks, sleeping bags, and boots, backpacking doesn't have to be expensive. Some outdoor stores rent backpacks and other gear, and many Scouting units collect donated gear that Scouts can use. That is especially helpful with backpacks, which young Scouts can quickly outgrow.

Scouts also don't need the latest, greatest gear. Rather than buying an expensive zero-degree sleeping bag, you can add a fleece blanket to a less expensive bag rated to 20 degrees. Rather than buying fancy stuff sacks, use resealable zipper bags from the kitchen. If you are hiking on easy terrain, you can probably make do with good athletic shoes rather than hiking boots.





The Principles of Leave No Trace

Backcountry visitors have a responsibility to safeguard the land. Incorporate Leave No Trace principles into your activities.

- 1. Plan Ahead and Prepare.** Comply with area regulations such as observing limitations on group size. Schedule your trek to avoid times of high use. Obtain all necessary permits.
- 2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces.** In high-use areas, concentrate your activities where vegetation is already absent. In less-traveled areas, take different paths to avoid creating new trails that cause erosion. Always choose the most durable surfaces available: rock, gravel, sand, compacted soil, dry grasses, or snow.
- 3. Dispose of Waste Properly.** Carry out of the backcountry all trash, leftover food, and litter. Use biodegradable soap and properly dispose of dishwater at least 200 feet (about 80 to 100 strides for a youth) from springs, streams, and lakes. Help prevent the spread of disease: Catholes 6 to 8 inches deep in humus and 200 feet from water, trails, and campsites are often the most practical way to dispose of feces.
- 4. Leave What You Find.** Allow others a sense of discovery, and preserve the past. Leave rocks, plants, animals, and other objects as you find them. Examine but do not touch cultural or historical structures and artifacts.
- 5. Minimize Campfire Impacts.** Many natural areas have been degraded by overuse of fires and the increasing demand for firewood. Lightweight camp stoves are fast, eliminate the need for firewood, and make cleanup easier. After dinner, enjoy a candle lantern instead of a fire.
- 6. Respect Wildlife.** Practice these safety methods:
 - Observe wildlife from afar to avoid disturbing them, especially during breeding, nesting, and birthing seasons. Quick movements and loud noises are stressful to animals. You are too close if an animal alters its normal activities.
 - Store food securely and keep garbage and food scraps away from animals. Never feed wildlife.

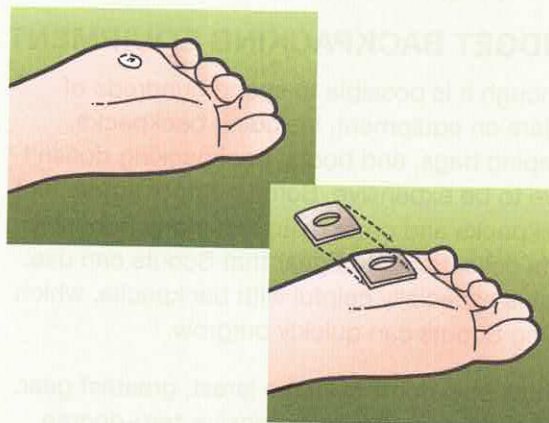
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors. Protect the quality of their experience by respecting their privacy and following these practices:

- Select campsites away from other groups.
- Keep your noise level down. Leave pets and all music players at home.
- Make sure the colors of clothing and gear blend with the environment.
- Respect private property and leave gates (open or closed) as found.

Blisters develop when skin is irritated by friction or heat and are often caused by footwear that doesn't fit properly. To help prevent blisters:

- Ensure that your footwear fits well and has been adequately broken in.
- Change into dry socks whenever your feet become damp.
- Wear two pairs of socks—a thin, close-fitting liner sock made of a synthetic material under a thicker, looser-fitting hiking sock.

If you notice a hot spot—the signal that a blister is starting to form—treat it immediately. Apply a gel pad intended for blisters. Alternatively, cut a piece of moleskin with a hole in the center, and fit it around the affected area. These steps will help reduce direct pressure and protect the blister from continued rubbing. Change bandages daily to lower the chances of infection.



The member-driven Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics teaches people how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. This copyrighted information has been reprinted with permission from the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics: <http://lnt.org>.



BACKPACKING GAMES

Dribble the Ball Relay

Equipment: One soccer ball per team

How to play: Divide into teams. One player from each team dribbles the ball around a course, then passes it off to the next player. The first team to get all players through the course wins. (This game is best played outside but could be done indoors—in a gym, for example.)

Throw-In for Accuracy

Equipment: One soccer ball per team, stopwatch or timer

How to play: Divide into two teams. Establish a sideline where one team member will throw in the ball using a two-handed overhead throw. Another player stands in the field to “head butt” the thrown ball. If teams have varying skill levels, you can position the head-butting players closer to or farther from the sideline.

Scoring: Each team scores 1 point for every ball that is head-butted.



Everybody Up

Equipment: None

How to play: This initiative exercise is a useful way to introduce the idea of group cooperation. Ask two Scouts of about the same size to sit facing each other on the ground or floor with the soles of their feet touching, their knees bent, and tightly grasping each other’s hands. From this position they try to pull themselves into a standing position. If they succeed, ask another Scout to join them and try standing with three players, then four, etc. Each Scout must grasp the hands of another while maintaining foot contact with the rest of the group. Thinking is required to come up with ways to get *everybody up*.

Scout Pace Contest

Equipment: Watch with a second hand

How to play: Players will complete a 1-mile course in exactly 12 minutes, traveling in pairs and using the Scout pace (50 steps running, 50 steps walking). Select a turning point that is half a mile from the meeting place, or have players go as many times around the same area as needed to make a mile. Space the pairs apart at 2-minute intervals.

Scoring: The pair that finishes closest to 12 minutes (more or less) wins.

The Leaking Backpack

Equipment: Paper and pencils; various camping items that could have fallen out of a backpack: compass, map, flashlight, piece of fishing line, matchbox, soap, comb, sock, spoon, toothbrush, toothpaste

How to play: Arrange the items not too conspicuously along one side of a path. The entire unit walks slowly along the trail in single file, silently looking for stray articles but not stopping or turning back at any time. Once they have passed all the items, each team huddles and compiles a list of everything they saw in the correct order.

Scoring: The team with the most complete list wins. If desired, teams can then arrange their list in order of how important the items would be to a lost camper.

Walking Race

Equipment: A safe, long-distance walking area with enough room for all players to walk alongside each other; judges to disqualify those who run instead of walk

How to play: A walking race differs from running in that one foot must be in contact with the ground at all times.

Scoring: See which player can reach the finish line first without running.



E.D.G.E. Ideas

Explain how it is done—Tell them.

Demonstrate the steps—Show them.

Guide learners as they practice—Watch them do it.

Enable them to succeed on their own—Have them practice/teach it.

EXPLAIN

- Teach the principles of Leave No Trace.
- Explain how to stay clean in the backcountry.
- Explain backcountry bathroom techniques.
- Discuss the requirements for the Backpacking merit badge, Outdoor Ethics awards, and 50-Miler Award.
- Discuss how to deal with potential backcountry dangers, such as bears.

DEMONSTRATE

- Demonstrate proper hiking techniques.
- Run a show-and-tell with different types of backpacks.
- Show how to pack a backpack.
- Show how to light a backpacking stove.
- Teach Scouts how to properly treat water from a stream or lake.

GUIDE

- Conduct a shakedown of backpacks.
- Have Scouts cook a backpacking meal and clean their dishes while you watch.
- Guide Scouts as they pack their individual and group gear.
- On an outing, point out Leave No Trace errors Scouts make, such as avoiding muddy spots and thereby widening the trail.

ENABLE

- Have Scouts practice determining directions to landmarks. (See the chapter on navigation in the Scouts BSA handbooks.)
- Have each patrol or team distribute the crew gear it would need for a backpacking trek, balancing weight and space.
- On an outing, let Scouts choose their own tent sites, and help them evaluate locations for appropriateness and adherence to Leave No Trace principles.
- Have Scouts make posters illustrating Leave No Trace principles.

MAIN EVENT SUMMARIES

● ESSENTIAL

Day Activity

Shakedown hike—Take a day hike in your area to practice backpacking techniques and explore interesting places. Whet your Scouts' appetites for bigger adventures.

■ CHALLENGING

Overnight Activity

Backpacking overnighter—Plan an overnight campout to practice backpacking techniques and explore nature. This could be a practice trip for a trek of a week or longer.

◆ ADVANCED

Weekend or Longer Activity

Backpacking trek—Take a backpacking trip lasting a full weekend or longer. The unit could travel to a BSA high-adventure base, a national park or forest, or even a destination such as the Appalachian Trail or Pacific Crest Trail.



BACKPACKING

Meeting Plan: Personal Gear



Week 1 Date _____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have several types of backpacks on hand for Scouts to look at and try on. Point out the advantages and disadvantages of external- and internal-frame packs. 		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Outdoor Code		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	Explain and practice hiking techniques that help reduce fatigue, such as finding a comfortable pace and swinging your arms in opposition to your legs.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 40 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach Scouts how to properly pack a backpack. Demonstrate that a backpack is a bag of bags, and show where to pack items based on priority (e.g., raingear on top). 		7:20 p.m.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice hiking around the parking lot with full packs. Stop every few minutes to adjust straps and redistribute weight. Discuss why it's important to move weight from your shoulders to your hips. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate ultralight backpacking gear. Use catalogs or go online to research brands and costs. Discuss which items represent good values based on cost and weight savings. 		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss plans for the main event. Review what personal equipment will be needed. Make plans for borrowing, renting, or buying equipment members don't have. 		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Play the Leaking Backpack (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.



BACKPACKING

Meeting Plan: Crew Gear



Week 2 Date _____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Set up a model backpacking campsite.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Outdoor Code		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm techniques for saving weight when backpacking. Talk about which techniques make sense and which ones don't. 		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 40 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach Scouts how to fuel and light a backpacking stove. Cover safety rules, local laws, and rules of the venue. Discuss how to shield the stove from the wind. 		7:20 p.m.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inventory and examine crew gear. Make any needed repairs. Cut ground cloths from heavy plastic sheeting. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using maps of your proposed main event location, determine starting and ending points for each leg of the journey. Look for likely campsites and water sources. Be sure to take into account terrain and hikers' abilities as you determine mileages. 		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss plans for the main event. Make a list of what crew gear you will need for the main event. Determine what you have and what you need to borrow or check out from the quartermaster. 		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Conduct a walking race (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.



BACKPACKING

Meeting Plan: Backpacking Food



Week 3 Date _____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	Cook several trail meals and desserts and let Scouts sample them as they arrive.		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Outdoor Code		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 5 minutes	Explain the concept of the "Bearnuda Triangle" used to increase safety in bear country: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cooking area, cleanup area, and bear-bag area are the points of the triangle. The crew tarp is within the triangle, and tents are at least 50 feet away. All "smellables" stay within the triangle. 		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 45 minutes	Cook a backpacking meal.		7:15 p.m.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a menu for the main event. Make a shopping list based on the number of participants. Assign someone to shop for or order the food. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a field trip to a nearby grocery store. Research ordinary food items that could be used instead of backpacking food. Discuss ways to repackage food to save space and weight. 		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review plans for the main event. Decide who will carry which pieces of crew gear. Assign tent partners so they can divide up tent parts (tent to one partner, tarp and poles to the other). 		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Run a Scout Pace Contest (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.



BACKPACKING

Meeting Plan: Leave No Trace



Week 4 Date _____

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	RUN BY	TIME*
Preopening 15 minutes before meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have participants bring their packed backpacks. Hold a weigh-in, and calculate the percentage of body weight each pack, including water and crew gear, represents (should be no more than 25 percent). 		6:45 p.m.
Opening Ceremony 10 minutes	Flag presentation Oath and Law Outdoor Code		7 p.m.
Group Instruction 10 minutes	Have leaders or special guests talk about the worst Leave No Trace violations they have ever seen and how those violations affected their outdoor experiences.		7:10 p.m.
Skills Instruction 40 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign members to learn about different Leave No Trace principles, found in the Scouts BSA handbooks and <i>Fieldbook</i>. After a few minutes, have the members teach each other what they learned. 		7:20 p.m.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quickly review the principles of Leave No Trace. Using the Start, Stop, Continue technique, discuss how well your group follows those principles. 		
	Discuss an ethical dilemma related to Leave No Trace. (See http://scoutingmagazine.org/2012/04/lead-an-ethics-debate-on-leave-no-trace-values/ for an example.)		
Breakout Groups 15 minutes	Do a shakedown of each member's packed backpack to make sure everyone has the right gear.		8 p.m.
Game 10 minutes	Play Everybody Up (described earlier).		8:15 p.m.
Closing 5 minutes	Announcements Leader's minute Closing		8:25 p.m.
Total 90 minutes of meeting			
After the Meeting 15 minutes	Leadership team reviews plans for the next meeting and for the main event.		

*All times are suggested.



BACKPACKING

Main Event: Shakedown Hike



Date _____

Logistics

Location: _____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: 6 hours

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster _____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self _____



Essential (Tier I)

Take a day hike in your area to practice backpacking techniques and explore interesting places. Whet your Scouts' appetites for bigger adventures.

Equipment List

- Trail or topographic maps and compasses
- Backpacks
- Backpacking stoves
- Backpacking food
- Water
- Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.)

Activity

- Find a location from which you can take two easy round-trip hikes of two or three miles each.
- After a brief shakedown, take the first hike.
- Back at the starting point, prepare lunch.
- Use the "start, stop, continue" method to discuss the morning hike.
- Give Scouts time to reorganize their packs, redistribute crew gear, and leave behind unneeded items. Then take the second hike.

Safety

- Use the buddy system.
- Have a first-aid kit available.
- Cellphones are a good idea.
- Special concerns in backpacking include getting lost, blisters, dehydration, and the use of untreated water.
- Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes



BACKPACKING

Main Event: Backpacking Overnighter



Date _____

Logistics

Location: _____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: Overnight

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster _____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self _____

Challenging (Tier II)

Plan an overnight campout to practice backpacking techniques and explore nature. This could be a practice trip for a trek of a week or longer.

Equipment List

- Trail and topographic maps and compasses
- Backpacks
- Backpacking stoves
- Backpacking food
- Water
- Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.)

Activity

- Determine a location for the overnighter and secure any necessary permits.
- Acquire and study topographic maps of the area.
- Travel to a trailhead on Friday evening and hike a mile or two to a campsite.
- Hike all day Saturday and have drivers pick up the group at the end of the trail.
- If drivers will also be hiking, ferry one or more cars to the pick-up point on Friday night.
- Plan a service project along the way, such as picking up trash or repairing damage caused by previous hikers.

Safety

- Use the buddy system.
- Have a first-aid kit available.
- Cellphones are a good idea.
- Special concerns in backpacking include getting lost, blisters, dehydration, and the use of untreated water.
- Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes



BACKPACKING

Main Event: Backpacking Trek



Date _____

Logistics

Location: _____

Departure time: _____

Return time: _____

Duration of activity: Weekend or longer

Budget: Completed _____ Approved _____

Camping: Duty roster _____ Menu _____

Transportation: Group _____ Self _____

◆ Advanced (Tier III)

Take a backpacking trip lasting a full weekend or longer. You could travel to a BSA high-adventure base, a national park or forest, or even a destination like the Appalachian Trail or Pacific Crest Trail.

Equipment List

- Trail and topographic maps and compasses
- Backpacks
- Backpacking stoves
- Backpacking food
- Water
- Scout Basic Essentials (Review the list and take what you need.)

Activity

- If the group is not experienced in backpacking, recruit an expert to lead the trek, or arrange to attend a high-adventure base run by the BSA or a local council.
- Determine a location for the trek, and secure any necessary permits.
- Acquire and study topographic maps of the area.
- Look for opportunities for side hikes to points of interest. (These could be optional, allowing more-experienced hikers to log more miles.)
- Plan in-camp activities (games, advancement work, nature study, etc.) to alleviate boredom.
- If pursuing the 50-Miler Award, plan to conduct 10 hours of conservation work during the trek (or soon afterward).
- Leave a detailed itinerary with adults who are staying behind.
- Over several days, hike from the starting point to the ending point.

Safety

- Use the buddy system.
- Have a first-aid kit available.
- Cellphones are a good idea.
- Special concerns in backpacking include getting lost, blisters, dehydration, and the use of untreated water.
- Two-deep adult leadership is required for all activities.

Notes



RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Books

Backpacking and Hiking merit badge pamphlets

Fieldbook

Scouts BSA Handbook for Boys

Scouts BSA Handbook for Girls

Websites

Backpacker Magazine

Website: www.backpacker.com

Trails.com

Website: www.trails.com

Related Program Features

Camping, Geocaching, Hiking, Orienteering

Photo and Illustration Credits

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