

Backpacking Gear 101

by Brad Wilson

Presented by Venture Crew 797

The upcoming trip to the Emery Creek trail will provide a great chance for people to become acquainted with backpacking. Backpacking, in its simplest form, is carrying everything you will need with you from point A to point B with intermittent stops along the way. The main difference between this and regular “dump” camping is that backpacking allows one to witness wildlife and the greater outdoors to an extent that people who never venture far from paved roads will ever see. Though backpacking is a simple activity it does require some specialized equipment. I have listed below a concise list of the most important items a person new to backpacking should have.

- **Backpack (Internal or External)-** This is probably the single most important piece of equipment you will carry. There are two categories of packs, internal and external. I would recommend for beginners an external frame pack since they are usually cheaper and better suited for general backpacking, but are generally harder to find nowadays at outdoor stores due to the popularity of internals. Internal frame packs, I think are more comfortable than external frames, but their complicated setup and more expensive price tag places warrants their use only by more experienced hikers. You can buy a decent pack at virtually any sporting good store, but I would recommend going to REI or Galyan’s and paying a little more because they help you pick the right sized pack and often they will guarantee their products to a certain extent. Brands that I myself, or fellow backpackers have used and would recommend, include JanSport, The North Face, Kelty, Lowe, REI, Gregory, and Arc’ Teryx. The use a pack cover to shed rain is a must since packs are not waterproof.
- **Boots-** Boots are important because they are usually the deciding factor of whether a trip was enjoyable or not. If your feet hurt the majority of the trip you are less likely to have a favorable memory of the trip. The best way to buy a good pair of boots is to try them on with the socks you will be wearing on the trip, which usually consists of a thick wool sock and a thin cotton liner. The boots should be leather, have a sturdy sole, cover up to the ankle, and be comfortable. If the boots do not have a waterproof material in them, such as Gore-Tex, I would recommend a waterproofing agent such as NikWak. Good boot brands include REI, Merrill, Asolo, Dunham, and Vasque, but inexpensive brands hold up just as well as long as they are properly waterproofed.
- **Tent-** The big tents we all used in Cub Scouts that could hold countless people are useless to backpackers because they are too heavy. The perfect backpacking tent is one that sleeps two and weighs under 8 lbs. It should also be easily split up between two tent mates. Some good brands to consider are Eureka, The North Face, Kelty, Marmot, and REI.
- **Sleeping Bag-** The sleeping bag you have now is probably fine for backpacking as long as it is carried in a waterproof stuff sack. Lightweight bags are available, and are often cheaper than some might think, but are not necessary unless you are sure backpacking will be your thing or if your loaded pack can’t be picked off the ground and you have to cut weight somewhere. I would also highly recommend

the use of a sleeping pad, whether it be a foam mat from Wal-Mart or a high end Therm-a-Rest, because you will sleep a lot better.

- **Raingear-** It should be lightweight and compact. It does not need to be Gore-Tex and can serve as a wind breaker since we will be hiking in November when it can be quite chilly at night.
- **Stove and Food-** Stoves are used to boil water for cooking. They can be shared with up to three other scouts. Choices for meals are very important. A trail menu should be high in carbs and calories because you will need all available energy hiking. Food bought from a grocery store works as long as the preparation, disposal, and weight are taken into consideration. I myself like the backpacking meals made by Backpacker's Pantry and Mountain House which are available at REI, Galyan's, or Sport's Authority. They are easy to cook, taste okay if cooked properly, and are very lightweight, but they are also expensive at about six dollars a meal.

The items mentioned above are the main items needed for backpacking, not the only ones. A more comprehensive list is available in the scout handbook or on the troop website. Also, remember that many of the items listed above can be shared with other scouts, such as tents and stoves. If you don't want to commit to buying gear yet all of these items are usually available to rent at REI, except for boots, raingear, and food. You could also ask fellow scouters if they have gear you can borrow. But, if you are serious about backpacking you need your own gear that fits you. If you have any questions about backpacking gear or any backpacking related topics you can email me at Venturecrew797@yahoo.com.

Backpacking is Fun!!!

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