

Weekend Hikemaster Handbook



Boy Scout Troop 849
Manhattan Beach, California

Credits

This handbook is based on the “Troop 849 Weekend Backpack Hike Preparation” documentation that was written by Richard Hoesly in 1998. That has been supplemented with notes from Mike Vahey and my own personal observations.

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Introduction

Weekend outings are great opportunities for physical conditioning, skill building, advancement, and character building.

The following outlines the steps required to prepare for a Troop 849 backpack hike. Remember that it is the responsibility of the hike leader to see that all the preparations are made, but not necessarily to do them. When possible use Scouts or other adults to help in the preparation. Ask one or two of the older Scouts on the trip to plan and lead a special activity during the trip - skill or advancement. It helps them in leadership and reduces your work load.

Available Training

The High Adventure Team of the Greater Los Angeles Area Council (GLAAC-HAT) provides an excellent course titled Adult Leader's Backpack Training. It is offered every February and is highly recommended.

The objectives of the training are to provide a Scouter with a basic understanding of outdoor activities and to stimulate his/her participation and leadership at the Unit level. While the emphasis is on backpacking, the training, in two parts, is generally applicable to all types of outdoor activity. The first, a conference, is conducted as a series of demonstrations and discussions. The full range of outdoor topics, including leadership, preparation and conditioning, equipment, clothing, menu planning, cooking, risk and safety, orienteering, route finding and mountain travel, outdoor courtesy, and long-term planning, are covered. Clothing and equipment are exhibited and demonstrated. The many forms and permits required by Scouting America and the agencies which administer outdoor locales are discussed and samples are provided. Books, maps, and other materials which are needed for planning an outing are discussed and displayed.

The second part is a weekend field trip in the local mountains. You practice the skills and use the equipment, which are discussed at the conference. This backpack is in the range of 5-7 miles, round trip.

Completion of this training earns the Scouter recognition as a Backpack Leader and the award of a special patch. As this is the introductory program to High Adventure training, there are no prerequisites to attendance.

It is assumed that the reader has taken, or will take, this very valuable training. This handbook builds on the principles taught during the course and shows how Troop 849 has applied them to it's backpacking program.

Guidelines

The basic rules for a safe and enjoyable hike are the same as for a long-term hike. See the Guidelines section of the Long-term Hikemaster Handbook. Keep in mind that this may be the Scout's first hike so you can't count on emotional maturity (yet).

Hikemaster Wisdom

See the Long-term Hikemaster Handbook for many pearls of hikemaster wisdom. Most of them apply to weekend hikes too. The following apply just to weekend hikes.

Make the best use of the available time by keeping these suggestions in mind.

- Leave on Friday night when possible - it gives the Scouts an extra night of camping, which they need for Camping merit badge and Order of the Arrow candidacy.
- If your camp location allows wood fires consider cooking over the open fire. This helps build skills and provides second class advancement.

(Note this should be the standard plan for all car camping trips, i.e., the rocket hike, and rock climbing trip. Do Dutch oven cooking on car trips - cobblers.)

- Bear bag when possible. Canisters are easy to use, but getting a chance to practice bear bagging is a good skill development. Scouts get to apply knot skills and learn how to protect food when a canister is not available.
- Have more complex meals if time permits - boiling water does not build good cooking skills - try a stew from scratch or foil cooking, pancakes, bacon, and eggs for breakfast. How about cooking fresh bread or biscuits?
- Rest breaks are a great opportunity for quick skill building. Try:
 - Which way is North (or South or East or West) without using a compass?
 - Where on the topo map are we now and why?
 - What elevation are we at now?
 - When do you think we will be at camp and why?
 - What is the name of that tree or flower that you are sitting next to?
 - Quick first aid questions for younger Scouts. (i.e. burn, cuts. etc.)
- When at camp and not climbing a peak, pull out a sharpening stone, do some compass work, use the topo for Second Class map symbols, explore the local trees/plants, or do some knots and lashing. Have the older Scouts set up a short compass course; it helps them strengthen skills and provides a learning opportunities for the younger Scouts.

During the hike.

- Respect the ability of hikers in your group and any limitations that could prevent them from staying together. In general, people should not hike alone.
- Once we arrive at the campsite, the Hikemaster will determine the area where we are to pitch tents and he will designate a cooking area. Tent site selection is order-by-rank.

Hike Locations

Route Planning

The hike locations are usually decided at Troop Committee meetings months before time. A list of most of the past weekend hike locations, and some possible new ones is available from the Assistant Scoutmaster for Hikes. New locations are always encouraged so do don't feel constrained by this list. Some of the factors that affect the type and numbers of hikes offered include:

- If hikes are in areas that have group size limits, it usually mean more hikes are required so all Scouts wanting to go can.
- During long-term training season, May through July, it is important that the correct types and numbers of hikes be provided so all long-term participants can get the required training hikes.
- During long-term training season it is also desirable to provide easier hikes for younger Scouts

who are not yet ready for long-term.

- During other times of the year, the type of activity planned generally determines the hikes chosen. These activities include snow camping, desert camping, night hikes, trail conservation work, mask camp and others.

The following are the general rules for the selecting the difficulty of hikes.

- Long-term Training Hikes - The minimum requirement for a long-term training hike is seven backpack hours. Most long-term training awards require a minimum of two training hikes within 90 days of the long-term. Troop 849 usually requires three hikes. Ideally each hike should be harder than the previous one, with the last being more difficult than a normal long-term day. The most difficult hike should be at least seven backup pack hours and also include a required peak. All participants are expected to climb the peak. These trips will usually be at least 10 hiking hours, including the peak climb, have at least 3000 feet of elevation gain, and spend time above 9000 feet. Because of group size limits, and the number of long-term participants, it is usually necessary to hold multiple long-term training hikes each weekend.
- Non Long-term Hikes - During long-term training season, we also offer an easier hike for younger Scouts the same weekend as long-term training hikes are held. The only requirement for these hikes is a minimum of 5 miles (round trip) for a Training Hike Award. During other times of the year, the difficulty of the hikes is less important and is usually dictated by the types of activities involved. For example winter hikes are shorter because snow shoe travel is more difficult. Similar desert hikes are shorter because of the large quantities of water that must be carried. When planning these hikes try to take into the skill levels of the expected participants.

The troop normally leaves for weekend hikes on either Friday night or Saturday morning. The location of the hike normally dictates the schedule.

- When the hike is to a higher altitude, we like to leave Friday evening to give the Scouts some additionally time to acclimate to altitude by camping Friday evening near the trail head. This also makes it easier to get an early start Saturday morning when the driving distances are large. This usually applies to hikes in the San Gorgonio and San Jacinto area.
- For a hike in the San Gabriels, Cucamonga and Los Padres area, we normally leave Saturday morning.
- Some hikes are planned to include night hiking. This usually involves a Friday departure, and hiking that evening.

For the first time hikers, schedule extra time at the trail head to get their packs adjusted.

For trips in dry years or later in the season (mid June and later), check with the ranger a few days before the trip to be sure water will be available. We have had trips canceled for lack of water or saved by the ingenious Scout who had a watermelon in his pack - true story! You can check various websites for recent adhoc water reports - the ranger data may be different.

For the early spring trips (through June) snow is often on the trail and in the camp area. Check with the ranger a few days before the trip to be sure the trail is passable. Scouts may want to bring gaiters if much snow is expected. Climbing peaks with snow is hazardous and should normally be avoided.

Awards

Awards are available from the High Adventure Team of the Greater Los Angeles Area Council. The hike must involve at least one night of camping to qualify. Award requirements vary. See Hike Aid 6 "High Adventure Awards" for details. The three most popular awards are:

Training Hike	Any location, five or more miles round trip.
National Forest	Campsite and at least half of the scheduled hours hiked must be in a National Forest, seven or more backpack hours. Award recipient to have previously earned two Training Hike awards.
California State Park	Campsite and at least half of the scheduled hours hiked must be in a California State Park or Forest, seven or more backpack hours. Award recipient to have previously earned two Training Hike awards.

Topo Maps

Copies of the appropriate section of the topo map are generally provided to all participants. The troop has a box of topo maps for our normal hiking areas. Pick up a few maps before the trip and return them afterwards. Additional maps can be purchased at <http://store.usgs.gov/>. Our maps tend to disappear into the Scout's packs or get worn rapidly on rainy trips. Full size, color topos are useful for map work.

The troop has CDs with all of the topo maps for our local hiking areas. One CD covers the Angeles National Forest. The other CD covers the San Bernardino National Forest.

Permits

Wilderness Permits

Most of the areas the troop hikes in require Wilderness Permits. Since there are usually quotas on these permits, it is important that the location be chosen early enough to insure that the permits can be obtained. The first available date you can apply for a Wilderness Permit varies from trailhead to trailhead and year to year. Check with the appropriate ranger station. See the Reservations page of our website for the latest reservation information.

You will be sent a wilderness permit by mail.

Fire Permits

California fire permits are required for campfires and stoves outside of established car campgrounds. These permits are free and good for one calendar year. Pick one up at a ranger station early in the year and keep it in your wallet.

Equipment

Personal Equipment

Each participant is required to provide their own personal equipment as described in the "Weekend Hike Personal Equipment Checklist". Usually a pack inspection is done the meeting before the hike for any first time Scouts. Make sure the weight of their gear is reasonable and they are not taking things that are not part of the standard equipment list. It may be OK to be missing a couple of things as long as it does not compromise safety. After the first inspection for each hiker, no inspections are done for weekend hikes.

As a quick check before leaving the Scout House, ask each person if they have - a sleeping bag, ground pad, wool hat, sweater, and wind breaker. If they have at least those, they can be taken safely on the trip. If they are missing something like their spoon - they won't have as much fun, but they will learn to be prepared.

It is OK for Scouts to bring their handbook on the shorter trips if advancement is planned and they are physically mature enough to carry the extra weight. Otherwise, they may want to copy the advancement page they are working on, so the weight is only one sheet of paper.

The Hikemaster's Pack

Depending on the hikemaster, you might find some of the following items in his pack. These are above and beyond the normal checklist items.

Safety:	A more complete set of topo maps for the area Super bright search light Heavy duty space blanket which doubles as a tarp Extra pair of eye glasses Water pump
Handy:	Spare backpack rings and pins Extra large trash bag Good tweezers Good scissors 5-10 feet of duct tape
Fun:	Fishing gear Astronomy charts showing the planets for that week Binoculars Various edible treats for everyone
Advancement:	Lashing ropes Extra compass Axe sharpening stone Plaster for molds of animal tracks Plant and tree guide book

Troop Equipment

The troop will supply the following for all backpacking hikes:

- Tents - The troop has good three-season tents. Two Scouts can share a troop tent, saving weight and backpack space. This is strongly recommended.
- Stoves and fuel
- Cook kits (pots and pans)
- Frying pan (if needed)
- Large water bottles for cooking
- Water purifying supplies
- Group first aid kit (this is in addition to the personal first aid kit)
- Trowels

If multiple hikes are planned for one weekend, check with the Troop Quartermaster to make sure the required equipment will be available.

Food

Planning

Menus are usually planned the Tuesday Scout meeting before the hike. Weekend hikes typically use fresh food but dehydrated food can be used. Try out all food items (including dehydrated food) on weekend hikes before committing to them on long-term. Food portion sizes go by the suggested serving size on the package. Other portions sizes can be found in the “Estimating Portions” section of the Long-term Hikemaster Handbook. Food buying is usually done by a Scout working on First Class because this is part of the rank requirements. Once the menus have been planned they should be review by a knowledgeable adult to make sure they are appropriate and the Scout understands the correct quantities of food to buy. Be sure paper towels are on the buy list.

Buying

Food costs are allocated based on a fixed cost per meal. See the troop Treasurer for the current cost allocations. It is the responsibly of the Scout buying the food to plan his menu such that the above costs cover the food bought. Be sure to tell him what the expected budget for food will be.

Food is usually bought the night before the hike. This allows time for any final changes in the trip roster before the buying occurs. The hike leader should call the food buyers with the final count. Any participants canceling after this time are required to pay for the food that was bought.

Cooking

Since the group size for weekend hikes are in the 12 to 15 range, it is usually not possible to cook by patrols. We therefore normally cook as a single group. For larger hikes, where no trailhead limits are involved, the group should be broken up into cook groups of 8 to 10 people. This size is ideal because two cook kits and stoves can easily handle the group. In this case it is also desirable to form the groups before the hike and designate a leader for each one. This reduces the last minute tasks the day of the hike.

For long-term training hikes it is also a good idea to organize the cooking tasks in a manner similar to long-term. This means 3 or 4 people will be responsible for the preparation and clean up of each meal. This is especially true if you have Scouts that never have been on a long-term. This will familiarize them with the tasks that will be expected of them later.

Travel

The usual departure point is the Scout House.

Drivers

Drivers should be finalized several weeks before the hike. This is normally not a problem because the number of participating adults that are willing to drive is adequate. On rare occasions it has been necessary to get additional adults to drive.

Try to keep the number of drivers to a minimum for several reasons.

- Trailhead parking is often limited.
- Many hike locations require Adventure Passes for each parked car. The troop has a limited quantity of these and cars without the proper passes are subject to a \$200 fine. These are only required if you will be parking in San Bernardino, San Gabriel, Los Padres or Cleveland National Forests.
- Drivers are paid by mileage and any costs above those collected from the participants must be covered by the troop.

Each driver should be provided with the following information the day of departure.

- Driving map showing the location of the trailhead or Friday night camp site.
- Emergency phone number to contact in case of any problems. Usually several of the drivers will have cell phones and these numbers make good choices.

Car assignments can be made ad hoc (based on friendships, etc.) or as follows. First, distribute adults evenly between the vehicles. Then Scouts whose parent is driving may choose to travel with their parent. Lastly, Scouts line up order-by-rank and choose vehicles.

Food

Each participant may need a sack meal. If the trip departs Saturday, the Scouts usually bring a sack lunch so only dinner and breakfast is required. If the trip leaves Friday, then all three meals on Saturday plus breakfast for Sunday are required. If the hike is a long one, it may also be required to include lunch on Sunday, although usually the Scouts bring money and we stop on the way home.

Equipment Distribution

How food and equipment is distributed depends on when the hike departs. For a Saturday departure, this is usually done at the Scout House prior to leaving. All food and group equipment is organized and separated into a pile for each hiker. The hikers then collect their share (by rank, lowest rank first, to be fair to the younger Scouts) and store it in their packs. For a Friday departure, this is usually done at the camp site Saturday morning. In this case you just need to bag up the food and equipment and make sure it is all taken.

It can also save time on departure day if the group equipment can be organized the Tuesday Scout meeting before the hike. The cook kits, stoves, fuel molotov's, etc. should be collected for each cook group and stored in a separate box or bag. This minimizes preparation time the of day departure.

Cost

The cost of weekend hikes is minimal and should be set so the hike is self supporting. The per person costs are figured as follows:

- Food cost (see above).
- Travel costs are figured at fixed rate per one way mile. See the troop Treasurer for the current rates. Adults generally do not pay mileage. Alternately, drivers can be reimbursed in any way the hike leader deems fair.
- Any required permit or reservation fees (usually none).

Calculate the total cost and announce it at the same time you announce the departure time and location. Moneys are usually collected at the Scout House the day of departure. If time is important, the money can be collected at the previous Scout meeting to speed up departure. Food buyers are usually reimbursed the day of departure from the collected cash. Keep records of all hike related expenses so a hike cost summary can be easily created. Excess cash should be turned in to the troop Treasurer. He will write the checks for each driver and to cover any additional expenses that were not reimbursed from the collected cash.

Attendees that cancel at the last minute are still required to pay for any permit or reservations fees that the troop has spent. If they cancel before the food is bought, then they are not required to pay for food costs. If they cancel after the food has been bought they must pay food costs too.

Checklist

Regardless of the destination or duration of the hike, a basic set of tasks and events need to happen. This is a list of those activities in an approximate time order.

Overall Time Line

First of the year	Get a California fire permit
Months before	Request wilderness permit
Weeks before	Circulate sign-up sheet
Tuesday before	Final prep and checkout equipment
Night before	Buy food
After the hike	Return equipment, submit reports

Months Before

- ☐ Finalize hike locations.
- ☐ Apply for a wilderness permit as soon as it becomes available.

A Month Before or Earlier

- ☐ Circulate a sign-up sheet at troop meetings.

Several Weeks Before

- ☐ Complete the GLAAC-HAT paperwork.
 - ___ Fill out a High Adventure Award Application.
 - ___ Make up a trail schedule.
 - ___ Make up a trail profile from the trail schedule. It is a good idea to have an interested Scout help create the profile.
- ☐ Get hiking maps for everyone. Remember that maps are one of the ten essentials.
- ☐ Make up a map and directions to the trailhead. Make copies for all drivers.
- ☐ For any Scout attending their first backpack trip, ask them to bring their pack to a meeting for inspection.
- ☐ Check with the troop Quartermaster to make sure the required equipment will be available.

Tuesday Before

- ☐ Finalize the list of attendees. Remember that a minimum of three adults is required by troop rules and a minimum of three Scouts is required if a High Adventure Award is desired.
- ☐ Determine the drivers. Make sure you have the required information for each driver.
- ☐ Sit down as a group and decide what the meals will be.
- ☐ Determine what the trailhead food will be and who will buy and prepare it.
- ☐ Assign a Scout to buy the food. Normally this is a Scout working on First Class.
 - Give them a specific budget.
 - Remember the paper towels.
- ☐ Determine tent buddies.
- ☐ Make sure everyone knows the cost of the hike, departure time, and place.
- ☐ Have everyone check out tents and bear canisters if required.
- ☐ Checkout troop equipment.
 - ___ Cook kits. Each with a stove and fuel bottle. (about 5-6 people per kit). Each has lighter, scrub brush, soap, ladle w/handle, and pot holder.
 - ___ Molotov's (32 oz each, allow about 2.5 oz per person per day).
 - ___ Cook spoons (optional).
 - ___ Water cubes (1 for every 6 people).
 - ___ Large iodine bottle. (2 preferred).
 - ___ First aid kit with thermometer and splint.
 - ___ 2 trowels.
 - ___ Pliers (optional).
 - ___ Repair kit (optional).
 - ___ Adventure Passes (if required, one per car).
- ☐ Perform pack inspections for any Scouts going on their first hike

Day Before the Hike

- ☐ Call the Ranger Station in the vicinity of hike to check on water, trail and weather conditions. (Only if there is any doubt.)
- ☐ Notify the food buyer of the final count of attendees.

Morning/Evening of Hike

- ☐ Bring.
 - ___ Map/directions to trailhead for drivers.
 - ___ Wilderness permit.
 - ___ Hiking maps for everyone.
 - ___ Ice chest for trailhead food.
 - ___ Extra water and paper towels for use at the trailhead.
- ☐ At the Scout House.
 - ___ Collect money from the attendees and reimburse food buyers.
 - ___ Verify that all Scouts have either a medical form (yellow card) or a parent going along.
 - ___ Verify that all first time Scouts have at least the minimum equipment for a safe hike.
 - ___ Distribute hiking maps and food. (Or later at the trailhead.)
 - ___ Assign Scouts to the cars.
 - ___ Pass out driving maps/directions.
 - ___ Exchange emergency contact information (cell phone numbers). It is good idea to put the contact information on the driving maps.
 - ___ Make sure each driver has an Adventure Pass. (If required)
 - ___ Assign attendees to cars.
- ☐ Optional - Stop by the ranger station.
 - Get a California fire permit if you don't have one.
 - Verify where fires are permitted.
- ☐ Count off at the trailhead so each person has a number.

Last Day

- ☐ Collect Adventure Passes from each driver.
- ☐ Have everyone recombine tent halves.
 - If tents are wet they need to be dried out by the Scouts at home and returned at the next Scout meeting.
 - Otherwise, recombine tent halves and recombine them.
- ☐ Have the Scouts that carried cook kits wash them and return them to the locker at the next Scout meeting.
- ☐ Collect the common troop equipment except as noted above. Please make every effort to collect all the troop equipment. The troop loses a lot of equipment because it taken home and never returned.

After The Hike

- ☐ Return Adventure Passes and tents to the locker.
- ☐ Return tents to the locker.
- ☐ Turn the GLAAC-HAT paperwork into the GLAAC-HAT store and buy the awards.
- ☐ Submit an expense report to the troop Treasurer. Include all receipts and any extra cash. It is convenient to do this at the next Troop Committee meeting.
- ☐ Submit an Activity Report to the troop. This is usually done electronically. The Activity Report form is available on the Forms page of our website.