

Your First Hike



Boy Scout Troop 849
Manhattan Beach, California

Introduction

If you are new to backpacking, or new to backpacking with our Troop, then this brochure is for you. It will give you the basics of what you need to know before your first hike.

Why Backpack?

When backpacking you leave behind the rush of the city and pressure of school. Backpacking helps you break down the walls between yourself and the outdoors. It brings you together with good friends in your patrol. By using your best Scouting skills, you can live simply and well. Don't be intimidated if you are new to backpacking. The Troop leaders and your friends will be there to help you. But it is up to you to take the first step.

Go to the mountains and get their good tidings.

John Muir

Nature has many lessons to teach. As you seek them out, you will also find that backpacking refreshes you, fills you with energy, and makes you strong in body and spirit. You will also join the elite few who have escaped the city and seen Nature closeup. Along the way have adventures that you will never forget. Travel lightly and get the good tidings of the backcountry. There is no finer way to go.

©2007 Boy Scout Troop 849, Manhattan Beach, CA, 90266

Original draft March 1997 by Tom Thorpe.

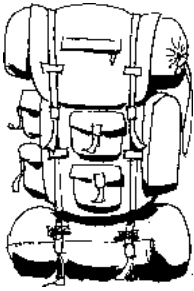
Second draft January 2007.

First printing January 2007.

Permission to duplicate and use for Scouting purposes is hereby granted to all Boy Scout organizations.

Please give Troop 849 credit as may be due them.

Getting Equipped



Use the *Weekend Hike Personal Equipment Checklist* to verify that you have packed everything.

- Bring very small quantities of personal care items like toothpaste, sunscreen and insect repellent.
- Save weight wherever possible.
- Do not bring things that are not on the checklist.

You do not have to have all of the equipment for your first hike.

- Some things you must have are a tent and backpack (you can borrow both from the Troop), sleeping bag, foam pad, jacket, comfortable shoes, and personal medications.
- You'll also want your own eating gear, water bottle, flashlight, and watch cap.
- If in doubt - ask! Experienced hikers love to help others.

Get a tent buddy. Check out a Troop tent and split it into halves. One half consists of the tent and ground cloth in the tent bag. The other half consists of the poles and the rain fly in its bag. Put half in your pack and give your buddy the other half. A Scout may not share a tent with an adult unless it is his parent. We encourage Scouts to share tents with scouts rather than their parent.



Hike Day



If something comes up and you can't make the hike then notify the Hikemaster immediately. Hike fees are refundable up to the point where the food is bought.

Do not fill your water bottle until directed to do so. We usually travel with empty bottles so they won't leak into your pack or the car.

Only bring food along that you are willing to pack up the mountain. Food should not be left in the car while you are on the trail. Large critters may smell it and break into the car, causing damage.

If we leave Friday night then either eat dinner before going to the Scouthouse or bring a sack dinner to eat on the way. A late evening snack is optional.

If we leave Saturday morning then eat breakfast before going to the Scouthouse. Bring a sack lunch to eat on the trail. (No sodas please. They are hard to pack and usually make you thirstier.)

Hike fees are assessed to make the hike self supporting. Please pay at the hike prep meeting or at the Scouthouse just prior to departure. Bring exact change or a check made out to the Troop.

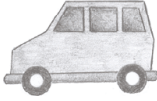
Also bring some lunch money as we usually stop for fast food on the way home.

Food and cooking gear will be distributed just before departing to the trailhead. Remember what you have been given so that you don't have to unpack your gear when someone asks you what you have, or says to the group "who has the crackers?"

Departing

Go to the rest room before you get in the car; stopping on the freeway takes time and peeing in a bottle is just plain gross.

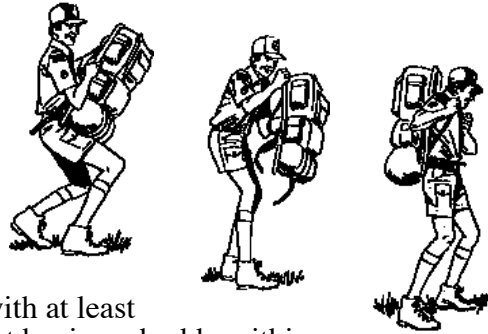
Please do not eat in the vehicle unless the driver approves in advance. Also, don't leave your trash in the vehicle or you may not be welcome again.



At the Trailhead

Do not lean your backpack against a vehicle because it may scratch the car.

Drink as much water as you can at the trailhead when you are filling your water bottle. Your body is about to need it. Besides, this is the last "good tasting" water you'll have for a while. Then top off your bottle one last time.



The Buddy System is always in effect on all Scouting activities, especially hikes. Always be with at least one other person. Never go off by yourself without having a buddy within shouting distance. If you do get separated from the group, or lost, don't panic. Stay where you are. Hug a tree - literally. We will come find you.

NOTE: Once we leave the trailhead, "me" turns into "we". We will stay together as a group, make decisions as a group, and act as a group. If one of us needs help then the entire group will be there to help him.

Hiking Along



The “pathfinder”, or trail leader, is a Scout who takes the lead. No one passes him.

No running, ever. It is very dangerous for you and for others.

No passing others on the trail unless they give you permission to do so.

Stay behind the person in front of you by at least 10 feet. This is minimum spacing, especially when you have a slow person with others stacked up behind. You need this spacing to keep from running over a person that trips, stumbles, or comes across a snake. You wouldn’t want to be so close that you push him into a rattle snake! This is the hardest rule of all because it is natural to want to walk close behind.

Don’t cut switchbacks.

When making a pit stop, leave your pack next to the trail, but not on it. Tell someone before leaving the trail unless it’s “urgent”. That person should wait there for you. Take your pit stop out of sight if possible, but stay within voice communication distance in case you need help.

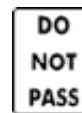
The trail sweep is the last person in the group. No one gets behind him. The Hikemaster is generally the trail sweep. He will remain at the end of the line and will stop and help any person that is having difficulty.

Right-of-Way

Do not hold up faster people coming up from behind. Let them pass by stepping off the trail. Your action will be much appreciated, and you would want the same consideration.



When you step off the trail to let someone pass, choose the uphill side if there is one. That way you if you accidentally get bumped you won’t go sliding downhill. Also, it is easier on the trail as the downhill side is easily damaged.



Do give other people the right-of-way. Step aside and let them through. (There is a proper trail etiquette that dictates the person who is going uphill has the right-of-way, but it is much easier, and nicer, to give everyone else the right-of-way.)

Rest Breaks

Drink plenty of water. Dehydration reduces your physical capabilities and even blood circulation. It is amazing just how much water you need during a hike. One easy way to tell if you are drinking enough is to look at your urine. If it isn't any then drink more. If it is dark yellow then drink more. If it is light yellow then you are getting enough water. In the mean time, drink!



Never throw rocks. 95% of all injuries on a hike are caused by rocks - falling on them, kicking them, being hit by them, stepping badly on them, etc. No need being hurt by someone's thrown rock that bounces off another rock. No skipping rocks on water, either.

Don't litter! Everyone is responsible for their own trash. The most common type of litter is small candy wrappers. Note the following Troop rule:

CANDY WRAPPER RULE: The Troop has a longstanding rule that if someone finds your candy wrapper laying around, then you owe them a candy. (The same thing goes for gum wrappers.) They can collect immediately if you have any left, otherwise you need to buy them one later.

In Camp



The first activity is setting up camp - pitch your tent, deliver the next meals food and cooking items to the kitchen area, refill water bottles, and set up bear bags.

Scouts should tell an adult when they take off to "use the trowel", and in which direction. Check in upon return. If you don't return in a reasonable time then help will know where you are. Adults are not immune to this rule and should check in and out too.

Never bring food into a tent. Repeat, never bring food or other "smellables" (things with fragrance or flavor, e.g. toothpaste, gum) into a tent. Even small crumbs are an invitation to critters to "come-on-in". If food should accidentally come in contact with a tent then make sure to wash it off immediately.

No candles, stoves, matches or lighters in tents. Don't risk burning down your house.

No packs in tents as they tend to poke holes in the floor. This is not good when it rains.

Unzip your backpack's pockets at night. Critters will get into any pocket that they smell food in, even if the food isn't there anymore. It is better to give them easy entry than to have them chew a hole in the pocket.

Cover your pack at night with a large trash bag in case it rains while you are sleeping. Wet gear ruins a hike.

Bring your boots inside the tent at night with you to keep them dry and varmint free.

Wear shoes at all times, except in a tent. It is very tempting to leave your tent at night with bare feet to get something from your pack. This is a big mistake as it is really bad to kick a rock in the dark with bare feet. Your feet are your only method of transportation.

Wear a ski cap to bed for more warmth. It will help keep your feet warm!

Waste Disposal

Pack it in - pack it out. (Once in a while there will be trash cans. Do not use them.)

Bury human waste 6-8" deep.

- Get at least 100' away from all trails, camps, streams, and lakes.
- If you are in a forested area, use a trowel to dig the hole. Note that the Troop trowels have depth markings on them. Place a rock on the spot when you are done to discourage animals from digging there.
- If you are in a rocky area, remove rocks by hand. Replace the rocks when done.
- If you do not know how to use the trowel, ask. If it comes back dirty, you will be carrying it for the rest of the hike.



Back at the Trailhead

Point out any broken equipment to the quartermaster.

Recombine your half of the tent with your buddies half immediately upon returning. Deliver complete dry tents to the quartermaster. Also give him any other Troop equipment (water bottles, trowels, etc.) except the cook kits. Take the cook kits home, clean them, and return them to the locker at the next Troop meeting.

Empty your water bottle before putting your pack into a vehicle. Also, loosen the top on the water bottle or it may be crushed when you arrive home (due to air pressure).

On arriving back in town, you will be dropped off at your house.

Additional Reading



Know the Outdoor Code and the principles of the No-Trace Ethic. (See your Scout Handbook.)

Troop 849 Publications

Eagle Court of Honor Checklist for the Eagle's Family

Eagle Court of Honor Checklist for the Troop

Equipment Guide for Weekend Hikes

Your First Hike

Trail Tips

Weekend Hikemaster Handbook

Longterm Hikemaster Handbook