

# Purchasing Outdoor Equipment



Here are tips to help select the proper equipment for use on campouts and backpack trips. You can equip your son for a very reasonable price without having to buy all the equipment at once. Garage sales are good places to acquire some great deals but take care not to waste your money on defective, outdated or worn out gear.

There are literally millions of Scouts, and since they ALL camp, the major camping gear makers, especially Coleman, carry special lines of quality, boy-sized equipment at affordable prices. Much of it even has the word "Scouts" or "Scout Sized" on it.

To get started, and since you may not know what brands of equipment are good for your son to use, consider renting equipment. REI or other sporting goods store are very reasonable (\$7 for a weekend rental of a good backpack). They will custom fit the equipment. REI considers Friday night to Sunday afternoon to be only one night.

## THE BARE ESSENTIALS

As you start shopping for equipment, this is the order of importance in which to buy.

**SLEEPING BAG** - A good bag is a must. You do not have to spend a great deal of money to get a decent one. We recommend a bag that is rated for at least 20° weather and weighs 4 pounds or less. Target, Sportsmart and REI are good places to shop. Remember, if your son is going to backpack the lighter and smaller the bag the better. Scouts usually enjoy backpacking with they reach 12 years of age. We do not recommend backpacking until they reach the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. If the bag does not come with a stuff sack, buy one. This will keep the bag clean and dry. Bag prices range from \$20-hundreds of dollars. Stay away from the bulky \$20 bags; they are the WORST thing for backpacking and provide no warmth whatsoever.

This is one of the most important item that a Scout can buy. DO NOT go cheap. It may be a quick fix, but the Scout will soon need a new bag. This is the item we recommend to splurge on. Some expensive bags purchased almost twenty years ago are still in use today. Spend a little extra now and you won't have to replace this in a few years.

After buying buy the bag, take care of it. Wash according to instruction every four or five trips. We recommend letting them air dry because some synthetic material does not take well to heat from the dryer. Also, allow the bag to air out

after each outing. Do not store it in the stuff sac! Permanent compression can occur which destroys the insulation.

**SLEEPING PAD** - for placement underneath the sleeping bag. This is necessary not only for cushioning but for warmth. Without a pad, you are sleeping on very cold ground. However, DO NOT send him with a mattress; a pad does not have to be thick to work. Suitable pads can be found at for under \$10. More higher tech pads are at any sporting goods store. Pads should be small and very light weight (most are only a few ounces) and take up little space. Never send a bed pillow either. He can roll up his jacket or use a small, lightweight backpacking pillow available for \$15.00.

We highly recommend buying a Thermarest®. This is a foam pad covered with a plastic covering that will inflate when the valve is open. When you leave the valve open for 3-4 minutes, the pad will self-inflate. They provide air insulation as well as foam insulation and padding. They are relatively inexpensive and will last forever if taken care of. If you are going to sleep outside however, you need a ground cloth as well, otherwise the mattress could get punctured or damaged.

Storage is the same as a sleeping bag, a Thermarest® should be stored unrolled, inflated with the valve open. Also, do not become rushed when setting up a Thermarest® by inflating it yourself. If you leave it unfolded under a bed it should inflate itself in 2 or 3 minutes. If you inflate it with you breath, it puts moisture into the pad that can cause mildew to form inside the insulation.

**BOOTS** - Boots are the single most important piece of scouting equipment. Remember, serious backpacking starts in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Do not rush to buy expensive boots if your son is in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He can make do with tennis shoes for now. Boots range in price from cheap to outrageous. Watch for sales. Realize that boots are on sale for a reason. Ask the sales people if they have had complaints about the boot. Also, do not buy boots too big thinking he will grow into them. It's okay to buy them a little large. Size the shoes with two pairs of socks (we recommend 2 pairs of socks for hiking). The last thing that you want is to have boots sliding around when hiking. This will cause serious blisters and various other aches and pains.

**CANTEEN/WATER BOTTLE** - This should be a good quality water bottle that will fit easily into a backpack and will not leak. (Page 209 of the *Boy Scout Handbook* shows a good water bottle. The opening is the right size for a water purifier to snap onto it.) Water is what the Scouts forget the most. ALWAYS ASK IF THERE WILL BE WATER WHERE HE IS GOING. If the answer is no, he needs to bring 1 gallon per day during the trip.

We highly recommend Nalgene bottles. They are indestructible and inexpensive. In fact - REI no longer carries any other brand of water bottle. These need to be cared for as well when not is use. Store water bottles completely dry. Wash them

in the dishwasher after every campout. Dry them, then place a little baking soda in the bottom and store in a dry place.

**FLASHLIGHT (and extra batteries/bulb)** - Flashlights are a camping necessity. It is against BSA policy (and safety rules in general) to have flames inside tents. A flashlight will be the only light he needs inside his tent, plus he will need find his way to the outhouse (or the nearest bush) in the dark. Maglites are a good brand and they come in all sizes. If you want a lightweight flashlight look, check out Princeton Tech. Contrary to popular belief, bigger and brighter are not better.

Flashlights are simply supposed to light up a tent or the area directly in front of you. If you want to light up anything larger use a lantern. Most Scouts appreciate darkness on campouts and generally go without a flashlight. Many become agitated with large nuclear flashlights that could light an entire city.

Combination flashlights, such as those with built-in radios are not allowed. Radios and other electronic devices are not permitted on campouts. Campouts are for experiences different then they have at home.

**MESS KIT, EATING and COOKING UTENSILS** - You don't have to spend a lot of money. Find the cheapest mess kit that has copper-bottomed pots. These will last for a long time. Do not buy the Boy Scout brand, the kind that looks like a flying saucer. Scouts melt these - not fully, but to the point that they are unusable. The copper bottom versions come with a drinking cup, a small pan with lid and a skillet that can be used as a plate.

Don't forget a knife, fork and a large spoon for cooking and eating. As the Scouts become more accustomed to camping, they will bring only the utensils they need. An experienced backpacker will only bring a lightweight small pot and a spoon, nothing else. Another good-to-have item is a pot grabber. This is a device that looks like a pair of bent pliers that holds onto the side of a pan and keeps the pan from rocking and spilling. They cost about \$2.

**PATROL STOVE** - Patrols will be cooking together. It teaches the Scouts to work as a team. Each patrol must have access to a two burner propane stove to cook upon.

**TENT** - For most campouts, Scouts sleep with a buddy in a tent. During patrol meetings, Scouts will figure out who has tents and who does not. For backpacking most tents are very heavy (about 10 pounds) and way too big even when split between two boys. If your scout is interested in going on "ALL" backpacking trips, consider a small, one-person tent that weighs four pounds or under. Don't be confused when the tent box says "two person." This really means "one person and his/her stuff." (Page 238-39 of the *Boy Scout Handbook* show pictures of different types of tents. The dome tent featured comes in all sizes from one-man to family size.)

Watch out for cheap tents because the mesh is sometimes second-rate and will let mosquitoes and ticks through. Again, this is another area we recommend that you not go cheap. You may have had success with a \$30 dollar tent, but that is very rare. For a good car camping tent, or a tent to split between two people we recommend anything by Sierra Designs. You can generally pick them up at REI. They cost anywhere between \$100-\$300 depending on the size.

For backpacking buy something durable but light weight. Don't get discouraged when you see a \$500-\$600 North Face or Polar Tech tent. It does not mean yours is junk. These are the kinds of tents used by climbers on Everest and other large expeditions. Take careful consideration into the tent you buy. We recommend that you set it up and take it down in the store. If they will not allow you to do this, then there may be something wrong with the tent. We recommend you start at REI. Even if you do not buy a tent there, they allow you to practice setting up all of their tents. They also have a very informative color binder of nearly every tent available. The biggest thing to watch out for when buying a tent is the fabric. Many tent makers use really cheap mesh. The mesh should be tightly bunched and barley see through. Check out the stitches on the sides and bottom of the tent. Look for loose strings at the ends of stitches - this is a sign of shoddy construction. Also, do not buy a tent that only has a rain fly at the very top or none at all. No matter what the ad says the material is not waterproof. Although it keeps water out on its own, when a Scouts bumps up against the side of a tent without a fly - or with a fly only at the top, the water simply flows right through. The fly should cover every inch of the tent - and should rest about an inch above the tent fabric. If the fly touches the tent fabric, the inside of the tent can get wet.

Tent care is important. Always use a ground cloth that is just slightly smaller than the size of the tent. Never enter a tent with shoes on. We recommend tents have a vestibule - an area where the rain fly sticks far out from the tent and allows for outside storage.

It is important to set tents up after every campout and wash them off. Let them air out for a few hours. Never pack a tent wet. Storing a wet tent will lead to a very smelly kind of mildew. Although it may seem convenient to fold a tent then stuff it into its bag this is a bad idea. This develops creases in the same parts of the tent and wears them down with time. Simply stuff the tent into the sac, if possible.

This is an area where an indulgent grandparent may want to consider as a special birthday or Christmas present one of the more expensive backpacking tents available. Like all other camping gear, tents range in price. The most expensive tents are the all-season tents. As we have no plan to backpack in the Arctic, and a \$500 expedition-quality tent would be total overkill.

If it was very rainy or cold, have the Scout bring an extra plastic tarp to place on top of the tent.

**TARP** - Make sure you also buy a tarp to go under any kind of tent to serve as a ground cloth. Buy a plastic tarp that is a little smaller than the tent or as close as you can get. A plastic tarp will protect the bottom of the tent from tearing on sharp rocks and will give an extra-added layer of insulation against the cold ground. If the tent has a nylon floor, it will keep the floor dry.

**COMPASS** - All Scouts will need a compass. The proper one to get is one similar to the Silva Starter Compass. More elaborate compasses tend to confuse the beginner Scout. (The compass should look similar to the one on page 118 of the *Boy Scout Handbook*).

**HAT** - A hat with about a 6 inch brim is a must desert climates. Hats with brims that shade the neck as well as face are recommended. In cold weather, a stocking cap or wool bennie is a must for evening and sleeping wear. Most body heat at night is lost through the scalp.

**GARBAGE BAGS** - Troop 14 practices Leave No Trace camping when we are in the wilderness. This means, among other things what we pack in, we pack out. When we are in established campsites, garbage bags come in handy as convenient places for trash. An extra large black trash can bag can be used as emergency rain gear (poncho) as well.

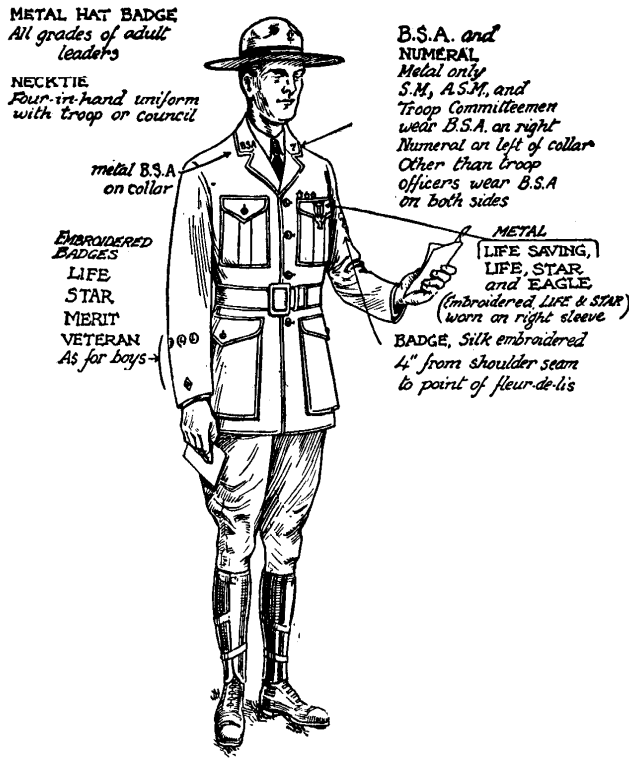
**KNIFE** - A good, sharp, well cared for pocketknife is used for so many things during a campout that it is an essential. All Scouts will be taught knife safety. They will receive a 'Tote-N-Chip' card when they successfully complete the course. When they can show you the card, make sure they bring a knife to every campout. Sheath knives are not allowed for Scouts. To fillet a fish, the knife should be packed with cooking utensils.

**PONCHO** - A Scout is prepared. It may be dry in the valley or at home, but raining in the mountains. An inexpensive, but sturdy light-weight poncho will keep one dry. They are available for a couple of dollars. As with most camping gear, ponchos come in cheap plastic and expensive Goretex. However, do not go too cheap or waste money on 'emergency' ponchos. They are designed to be used once, then thrown away.

**TOILETRIES** - A comb, deodorant (yes, your son is growing up!), shampoo, soap, toilet paper, toothbrush and toothpaste should be considered essential for every campout. A small plastic garden trowel is used to make a latrine. Scouts should never go on a campout without one or have one available per patrol. Make up a kit inside a small cloth bag or large Ziplock bag and keep it on hand for all outings.

**FIRST AID KIT** - All Scouts are expected to bring along a personal first aid kit.

The contents are described in the Boy Scout Handbook (e.g., Mole-skin, Neosporin or Polysporin, cloth, Band-aids, 4x4 dressings, roller gauze, adhesive tape, and 2 triangle bandages).



## CLOTHING SUGGESTIONS AND HINTS

Rule No. 1 in hiking and camping clothing is "avoid cotton." This is because cotton holds moisture, is heavy, and dries very, very slowly. In cold weather, cotton gets damp from sweat or moisture in the air. It will stay wet for a very long time and can cause hypothermia. Here is a quick list of clothing made of cotton:

1. Jeans
2. T-shirts
3. Sweats
4. Underwear

In the summer time, the above-listed clothing is acceptable. For cold weather camping and especially backpacking, try to avoid cotton.

In general, unless they are very well-worn and comfortable, jeans are not to be used for hiking due to chafing.

Like all other camping gear, it is possible to spend a fortune on high-tech camp clothing. Make do with what you have available at home. Check your closet or your son's closet, his floor or under his bed for the following:

1. Nylon mesh - These were popular until very recently so chances are good he will have these already. Nylon dries quickly and is very warm. The open mesh will allow sweat to evaporate.
2. Nylon warm-up suits - These are great since they are very warm, lightweight, comfortable, and will also dry quickly.
3. Polyblend sweats - check the label for fabric content. Much of the sweatwear available is 50-60% polyester with the rest being cotton.
4. Wool Pendleton type shirts and pants - Wool is nature's "high tech" fabric. It will stay warm even when it is very wet and it dries quickly.

5. Athletic socks – those Nike (or other name brand) socks your son insisted on having to be cool are great. Unbeknownst to your son, not only are they hip, but they are made to keep sweat from being a problem. Wet, sweaty socks are the leading cause of blisters.

6. Fleece wear - Again, this material is warm, lightweight, is NOT made from cotton and very likely to already be in your son's wardrobe.



## THE "NICE TO HAVE" NONESSENTIALS

This next list is the recommended equipment that will be useful for backpack outings (in addition to the above listed gear):

**BACKPACK** (probably not needed until 7<sup>th</sup> grade) - A good pack can make the difference between a miserable experience or a great adventure. When selecting a pack:

<b>DO</b>	<b>DO NOT</b>
<p>Have your son try on the pack at the store and make the store personnel load it up to verify fit.</p>	<p>Get confused between a backpacking pack and a day pack. Ask for help from the store people. And I am sorry to report that you CANNOT get a backpacking pack at Target.</p>
<p>Make sure the pack fits snugly around your son's hips. (This is where he will carry the total weight of the pack. It is essential that the waist strap (belt) fits well.</p>	<p>Borrow a pack from an adult and expect it to be usable by your boy unless he is a teenager (aka a boy in an adult body). If you must borrow one, adjust it to fit. Be alert to the fact the waist strap (belt) MUST fit snugly.</p>
<p>Make sure the shoulder straps are not draped around his shoulders. They should actually extend straight back. Otherwise this means he is carrying the weight of the pack on his shoulders instead of his hips.</p>	<p>Let your son overload his pack and don't YOU overload his pack. He really won't need those extra socks or that Army blanket. Rule of thumb is to have the filled pack weigh about 1/3 of the body weight of the Scout (25 lbs minimum)</p>
<p>Keep in mind he is growing and look for a pack that will shrink then grow.</p>	<p>Pack belts are meant to be worn on the upper part of the hip bones. Don't let the Scout wear the pack so that the weight is on his shoulders, it should be on his hips.</p>
<p>Make sure the pack is not too big and roomy. This leads to the temptation to overload it.</p>	
<p>Remember that the total weight of the fully loaded pack should not exceed 30-35 pounds (or 1/3 your son's body weight). 25-30 pounds would be best for some of the smaller kids.</p>	
<p>Watch for sales. Decent packs range from \$50 to \$200. Stay in the cheaper range since your boy will outgrow this pack in a few years.</p>	

Good places to purchase packs include sporting good stores and REI. Page 214 of the *Boy Scout Handbook* shows a picture of an external frame pack. These are the least expensive and easiest for the boys to use. Page 229 shows an internal frame pack. This type is best for mountaineering or if you are going through brush as it hugs the body, but is difficult to pack because most brands have only one large compartment. Also, internal frame packs can get a little pricey.

It is a good idea to get your boy in the habit of using a backpack for every campout because he will be able to keep all his gear together instead of having it tossed around loose – a sleeping bag here, a duffle bag there, a sleeping pad who knows where. Many Scouts keep dry goods in their packs between campouts, so they are half packed before they leave.

We would recommend putting a lot of thought into buying a backpack. With careful consideration one can be found that will last a long time even for a growing boy. When trying on the pack make sure you try it on with weight. Also, the pack should stay in place without shoulder straps. This is the only real way to test if the weight is truly resting on you hips. We recommend buying name brand packs. We have not had good luck with Jansport packs. We found they had a cheap aluminum frame and cheaply made seams and pockets that frequently blow out. Unfortunately, if the pack seems a little expensive, it is probably about right. Stay away from used stuff for a first pack. Think about it, if the pack was so great, why would it have been returned? We recommend a Kelty backpack if you are purchasing an external frame (which you should for a first pack). A good second pack would probably be an internal Arc'Teryx.

**BACKPACKING STOVE** (needed in 7<sup>th</sup> grade) – Backpacking stoves are easy to use and very light weight. Cost is about \$25-35. They work by being attached to a canister of propane/butane mixed gas. This makes them REALLY easy to use. The fuel canisters last a long time and are only about \$3.50 each.

Ask a serious backpacker and he will tell you that the best stove to use is a Whisperlite. The problem is that this brand and others like it require LIQUID FUEL which is not recommended by BSA. The Whisperlite has a lot of moving parts, any one of which can cause the stove to malfunction when on a campout. (Page 253 of the *Boy Scout Handbook* shows a picture of the stove NOT to buy.)

**ROPE & BAG / BEAR CANISTER** - Where we camp there is normally very little danger from bears, however we have had run-ins with ravenous squirrels, raccoons and other small mammals. We recommend all food be stored in bear bags (bear canisters) or in cars at night. To make a bear bag, you need a plastic or cloth bag that your food will fit into and about 50 feet of nylon rope.

## QUESTIONS?

As you shop, do not hesitate to ask store personnel for suggestions or tips. Tell them you are buying for a Scout. Many sale personnel were Scouts themselves. Feel free to ask any Venturing Scout or Assistant Scoutmasters about suggested gear.

Your best reference guide on clothing needs and camping gear needs is the Boy Scout Handbook. Not only does it show equipment but it also describes its use and proper care. At our weekly meetings we sometimes will discuss equipment and gear so you may want to consider sitting in on those nights to see what other members of the troop use.

Since your son is getting older, it is probably getting a little difficult to know what to get him for Christmas or birthdays - he is too old for toys and too young to want clothing. Camping equipment is the best gift, especially because of the range in price from a dollar or two to unaffordable. Next time Aunt Martha or grandma ask for a gift suggestion, mention padded hiking socks, a pot grabber or a Thermarest® sleeping pad.

