

Essential Camp Gear Primer for New Scouting Parents

Last updated September 2013, after heavily plagiarizing works from Scouters far more knowledgeable than me.

(Everyone, including BSA, has their own list of camping "Essentials". This is only one resource/guide).

Point #1: Read your son's *Scout Handbook on Essentials*. He needs no less, no more.

Point #2: Don't get pressured into spending several hundred dollars before your son goes on his first campout. There is plenty of equipment that can be borrowed from the troop, other adults or scouts to test out before you buy. If you have any questions, please ask the Scoutmaster or one of the Assistant Scoutmasters.

Types of Camping:

Car Camping: Weight is not a factor here. This is an opportunity to bring luxury camping items such as: folding tables, chairs, larger tents, cots, coolers, and cast iron skillets. Most of the Troops outings are car camping.

Backpacking: Everything must fit in or be tied to the pack. Hopefully, the overall pack weight is less than 1/5th (20%) of the Scouts body weight. No chuck boxes or ice chests. This calls for backpackable stoves (if fires are not available), non-perishable foods, etc. We hope that every patrol will have at least one backpacking trip a year.

Purchasing Insight (A Wise Scouter's Proverbs):

- ✓ Never purchase poorly made camping equipment; someday your son will be sorry
- ✓ Buy gear from sales associates with experience
- ✓ Expensive does not always mean it's the best; cheap doesn't always mean poor quality
- ✓ Test before you buy, if possible
- ✓ Sleeping bag temperature ratings are "approximate". (A 30 degree bag may be okay at 30 degrees with a fleece insert)
- ✓ The best looking gear is not always the best working gear
- ✓ He who has the most gear is not necessarily the best camper
- ✓ It's easy to spend more than you should

Essential Gear Recommendations:

SLEEPING BAGS:

- This is the one item that will make the most difference in a comfortable campout. A few extra bucks will buy a bag that will last longer, and keep your son much warmer.
- There are many high-tech synthetics and fills on the market (e.g. Hollofill 808, Hollofill II, Qualofill, Polarguard 3D, Polarguard HV, Polarguard FD). These insulate even when wet and are pretty rugged. Down fill bags are better suited to experienced backpackers. They are more expensive and require more care. Most good outfitter stores will have brochures to contrast the different materials.
- Read up first. <http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/issues/0209/d-outs.html>
- Use the temperature rating as a guide not a guarantee. A 30 degree bag from one company may be warmer than a 20 degree bag from another. Check the type and weight of the fill. A 20 degree bag should suffice for most winter campout experiences in this area.
- Fleece blankets or "poncho liners" are lightweight solutions for extra insulation in winter and are usually all that is needed in the spring and summer months.
- Don't buy a "junior" size bag. If taken care of, a sleeping bag could last a long time.
- Expect to pay \$50 – 150

SLEEPING PAD:

- A good closed cell foam pad is a must (\$10-15). It protects against moisture, heat loss and rough ground. Youth – with their lighter weight – don't really need much more than this.
- Self-inflating pads, such as Therm-A-Rest and Slumberjack, are very nice for larger adults, though they are much more expensive than foam (\$30-80).
- Don't even bother to bring a generic air mattress.

RAIN GEAR:

- Rain is inevitable. Rain suits are preferable, but a poncho and a pair of coated nylon wind pants are a good alternative. \$20-30
- The \$1 emergency ponchos are handy for emergencies, but not as a primary.
- Waterproof, "breathable" rain shells can be found for under \$100

CANTEENS/ WATER BOTTLES:

- Every Scout should carry a minimum of two quarts of water.
- A good one (1) quart water bottle, such as Nalgene, (\$8) is practically indestructible and fits well in a backpack and fanny pack pockets.
- Inexpensive alternatives are 20 oz soda bottles & military surplus canteens. Bike bottles will leak! Camelbacks are best reserved for older scouts – some maintenance is involved.

COMPASS:

- Select a compass with a rectangular, clear plastic base. These are easier to orient on a map. Silva, Suunto and Brunton are the leading brand names.
- Expect to pay \$7-15; plenty to pick from at BSA store or Academy

KNIVES:

- Sheath (hunting) knives are usually prohibited by troops and boys do not need them for camping.
- Scouts may not carry or use a knife until they have earned their Totin' Chip.
- Swiss Army type knives are the most popular. The only blades really needed are the main general-purpose blade and the smaller penknife blade. Other useful blades are scissors and saw.
- Expect to pay \$17 – 30

COOKING/EATING: (To eat, a Scout only needs)

- **BOWL or PLATE** (Tupperware, plastic butter tub, large Sierra cup)
- **SPOON** (metal sets are nice, LEXAN is lightweight and easily thrown away by mistake)
- **CUP** (Sierra cup, thermal travel mug).
- If the Scout has a metal bowl, it should have handles. Otherwise, his hot chili or stew will end up on the ground right after it burns his hand through the bowl.
- Each Patrol has a Chuck Box with pots/pans for car camping. Individual pots from these sets may be chosen for backpacking based on what is going to be cooked.

FLASHLIGHTS:

- A sturdy flashlight or headlamp is a must.
- LED lights are very popular and the batteries last a long time. Send extra batteries in a Zip-Loc.
- Cost \$3 – 30+

BOOTS/SOCKS:

- Tennis shoes will not cut it. When Scouts go hiking they need sturdy hiking shoes or boots.
- Name brands with "waterproof" labels can be found for about \$100.
- Wear them to school some to help break them in BEFORE the hikes.
- Just as important is a couple pair of wool-blend or polypro socks.

FIRST AID KITS:

- Simple to make your own. A band-aid box makes a good container.
- Each Scout must make an individual kit for Second Class advancement and there is a First Aid merit badge requirement to make a family kit for the home.
- Red Cross and other name brands are commercially available from \$15 - 50
- The Troop carries a "group" first aid kit for each campout.

TENTS:

- The Troop provides tents and patrol tarps
- Like sleeping bags, a large investment may get you a great quality product, but there are plenty of inexpensive options that keep you just as dry.
- Unlike sleeping bags, you don't really need your own, although every Scout probably wants one.
- Only plastic is waterproof. Every tent should be pitched over some plastic sheeting (3 – 6 mil) to keep water from seeping through the floor.
- Look into Boys Life article on tents <http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/issues/0205/d-outs.html>

BACKPACK AND RAIN COVER:

- Backpacks are not essential for car camping. Duffel bags or any tote bag can haul gear to/from the car just fine.
- External Frame packs are preferred for the beginner. It offers the greatest amount of comfort and adjustability. Shop for properly fitting frame and ensure that it has a padded hip belt.
- Internal Frame packs are more suited for experienced packers.
- If you are interested in backpacking, then do some research and talk to the local outfitters
- See the Boys Life article on the web at <http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/issues/0301/d-outs.html>
- Boys grow fast during these years, so you may expect to buy a larger pack in 3 years when your son is ready for High Adventure treks.
- Expect to pay \$50 – 120+
- Rain covers (\$15-20) are important because packs are not 100% waterproof. A large plastic trash bag can be used temporarily. (PS. Everything inside should be in 1-2 gallon Ziploc bags)

COLD WEATHER CLOTHING:

- During cold weather campouts, Scouts should NOT be wearing cotton clothes. When (not if) they get wet and cold, Scouts are miserable and they stop being interested in Boy Scouts and camping out. Please take some time to properly outfit your boy with at least two changes of synthetic or wool-blend clothing for fall and winter campouts.
- Check COSTCO or SAMS every now and then for deals.
- A properly "layered" Scout will have on the following (from outside-in, top-down): fleece or nylon knit cap, polyester or down fill jacket, fleece vest, polyester pull-over or wool shirt, polypro long underwear top, nylon or wool pants, polypro long underwear bottoms, wool/polypro wicking socks, waterproof boots.
- **No cotton, NO cotton, NO COTTON!**

Other Resources: (There is no shortage of texts or Scout materials on equipment. Take a few minutes to look through the Scout Handbook and Fieldbook.)

Additional websites:

"What to Bring on a Hike": http://www.wildearthadventures.com/what_to_bring.htm

Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education: <http://www.aore.org>

Backpacker Magazine: <http://www.backpacker.com>

Equipped to Survive: <http://www.equipped.org>

Guide to Safe Scouting: <http://www.scouting.org/HealthandSafety/GSS.aspx>

National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS): <http://www.nols.edu>

Outside Magazine: <http://www.outsideonline.com>

Wilderness Education Association: <http://www.weainfo.org>

Wilderness Survival: <http://www.wilderness-survival.net>

Wildwood Survival: <http://www.wildwoodsurvival.com>

Rules & Instructions for Keeping Warm in the Sack:

<http://macscouter.com/KeepWarm/keepwarm.asp>

NetWoods Virtual Campsite: <http://www.netwoods.com/d-equipment.html> (Equipment and Camping Gear (excellent reviews and extracts from scouting news groups, not to mention great camping recipes)

Local Outfitter Stores:

Academy (all over town)

Good Sports (I-10 and De Zavala)

Bass Pro (Rim Shopping Center I-10)

Whole Earth Provision Company (at the Quarry)

REI (I-10 near Huebner)

Dick's (Rim Shopping Center I-10; New Braunfels; Austin)

Gander Mountain (Hwy 151 at Loop 410)

Discount Mail-Order Stores:

Campmor <http://www.campmor.com>

Sierra Trading Post <http://www.sierratradingpost.com/>

Sportsman's Guide <http://www.sportsmansguide.com/net/Main.aspx>