

## **A New Scout Equipment Guide**

As your boy enters Boy Scouting he must make a commitment to pursuing the ideals described in the Scout Oath and the Scout Law. As he gets into camping, very often a sizable financial commitment must be made to purchase outdoor equipment. Many of us have purchased several “generations” of equipment; tents, bags, and boots (and lots more) that we used for one season (or less) and then upgraded. This “trial and error” method can be expensive, and the wrong equipment can ruin a camping experience. The purpose of this guide is to help new scouts and their parents in selecting from the many choices available in camping equipment, in hopes that your *first* choices will serve you well. Because of the large amount of equipment involved, *value* can be important. This guide tends to emphasize backpacking equipment. Equipment designed for backpacking will almost always work adequately for site camping, but equipment designed for site camping will rarely work well backpacking. In preparing this guide, I have drawn on resources such as Backpacker Magazine Annual Equipment Guide, Backpacker.com, GORP.com, REI.com, Campmor.com, my own experience and preferences, and, of course, the Boy Scout Handbook.

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### **Backpacks**

Overnight backpacks can basically be broken down into two types; external frame and internal frame.

External frame backpacks will usually be easier to pack and organize, be less expensive, and much more forgiving to the casual user. This is the type that I recommend for Scouts and most adults, considering the type of backpacking that we do. My favorites of these are the classic JanSport externals. They range in price from \$89-169, depending on size and features. The JanSport “Scout” (\$89) is the right backpack for most Scouts. Larger boys or adults may want to consider the “Rainier” or their top-of-the-line external “Olympic”. Camp Trails and Kelty also offer nice external frame packs at reasonable prices. Dana Designs has a high-end line of externals if you demand the very best.

Internal frame packs are excellent for “fast-packing” and climbing, and are quite comfortable - if they are packed correctly. These are what you want if you go on an ascent or a long, high-terrain change trip. A good internal will cost \$175-500. Dana Designs, Arcteryx, Gregory, The North Face and Lowe make very good internals in the middle to upper end. Kelty, JanSport, REI and others are offering pretty good internals at the lower end of the price range.

In Troop 797, we normally take two or three backpacking trips in a year. We will normally be out on the trail one or two nights. There is no need to buy a pack that

would be more suitable for a through-hike of the AT. Look for a pack with a hip belt and sternum strap (which can be purchased separately), and plenty of strap loops for attaching pads, tents, or sleeping bags.

### **Boots**

Boots can make a big difference in how much you enjoy a hike. That doesn't mean that you should spend \$175 for a pair of boots that a Scout will outgrow in a year. Backpacking and hiking boots need to be sturdy, water resistant, and stable. They should offer good ankle support. Really fine hiking boots from Vasque, Merrill, Raichle, and others can cost \$125-250. Good, serviceable, entirely adequate boots by Hi-Tec, Timberland or Nike, for example, can be had for \$50-75 and sometimes less. Look for all leather construction with few seams. Use Nikwax or mink oil to waterproof boots. Even inexpensive leather work boots from Wal-Mart or Kmart work well as long as you make sure they fit right.

### **Socks**

Socks really are more critical than boots. A Scout should have at least two pair of sock liners and hiking socks. Sock liners are made of silk or polypropylene. I recommend "poly". Wool outer socks are best. Winter or summer, layering socks like this keeps your feet dry and blister-resistant. A hiker will fare better with poor boots and good socks than with good boots and poor socks. *Scout socks are not good hiking socks.*

### **Hiking Staff**

A hiking staff is not just for looks. If you ever use a staff once, you'll never go backpacking without one. You can buy telescoping anti-shock poles or you can use a simple stick (or anything between). For Scouts, I recommend the stick. It will work just fine, and you won't be out \$75 when it gets left in the woods.

### **Clothing**

The correct clothing is critical to comfort and safety. Layering is the only way to dress for outdoor activity. Outdoor wear should consist of a wicking layer, insulation layer(s) and a shell. Winter or summer, the first layer should be polypropylene. The outer layer should be something wind and water-resistant. Parkas, jackets or pants made of breathable laminates, such as Gore-Tex, make ideal shell layers. Fleece or down make great insulation layers. *Remember to avoid cotton wherever possible.* Cotton holds water. This can very literally make the difference between life and death in bad circumstances. It will make a big difference in comfort even in the best circumstances. Silk, wool, polypropylene, and nylon are best. Great outdoor clothing can be purchased at REI, Galyan's, Fogdog.com and Campmor.com. I've also found some of my favorite outdoor wear, particularly fleece, at Old Navy. Wal-mart and K-mart often have acrylic flannel shirts that are good for cold weather camping and cost less than \$15.

## **Headwear**

Headwear is another area that is often neglected. The proper headwear can make a big difference. In winter, a wool or polypropylene fleece (again, cotton is very bad for winter use) stocking cap is absolutely essential. A hat (or cap) in the summer can prevent sunburn, improve visibility, and significantly add to comfort on the trail or in camp.

## **Camp Chairs**

A camp chair is really nice to have for “drive and drop” camping. I recommend buying the kind at Wal-Mart. It doesn't matter if the frame is made of cast iron or titanium – you won't be carrying it backpacking. (I have, however, recently discovered a small backpacking stool that weighs about a pound and is small enough to carry on a backpack. This may be worth considering for some backpackers.) Cascade Designs markets a sling that converts a Therm-a-rest sleeping pad into a chair. They are fairly expensive, but pretty light and comfortable.

## **Tents**

With tents, trial and error can be costly, and most people overbuy or under buy. *Bigger is not better!* Scouts are best served with a two-man tent of reasonable quality with a full rain fly. Here in Georgia, a three-season tent (with full rain fly) is adequate for year-round use. A good two man tent should weigh 8 pounds or less. A “freestanding” type tent is best for most uses. A tent should be simple to set up. Tents are available in discount stores for \$19 and up, but these tents provide very little shelter in rain, cold, and / or wind. Mountaineering tents can cost up to \$1000 or more, but are overkill for the kind of camping that we do as Scouts. My personal favorite Scout values are the Eureka Apex XT / Mountain Pass XT , REI's Half Dome, and the Kelty Vortex. They have two doors, two vestibules, easy to set up, free standing, readily available and not too expensive (\$100-175). A tent should be set up on a ground cloth ( a/k/a floor saver, footprint). Tents are rarely supplied with them, although many tentmakers market them as options. Custom sized nylon footprints are great, but usually cost \$25 or more. 6-10 mil poly sheeting works well too, and costs next to nothing at your local hardware store. The Apex XT / Mountain Pass XT, Half Dome and Vortex also happen to be sized just about right for using \$10 “space blankets” as floor savers. It's a nearly perfect combination.

## **Lanterns**

Almost everyone has a Coleman white gas lantern. If you have one it'll work fine for most “dump camps”, but I don't recommend that you go out and buy one if you don't already have one. Propane and battery lanterns have come a long way – and they are safer and far easier to use than liquid fueled lanterns.

## **Flashlights & Headlamps**

While a flashlight is an essential, you really don't need a very big one. Two small 2-AA battery flashlights, such as "Mini-Maglights", will serve a backpacker or site camper better than a large 2 or more D cell flashlight.

Headlamps are pretty handy and can replace a flashlight for almost any use.

There are many models available, the latest (and lightest) being the LED models, which weigh next to nothing and batteries last 150 hours!

## **Knives**

In Boy Scouts, we very strongly discourage the use of fixed-blade knives. A simple lock-blade knife is adequate. Swiss Army knives are also good choices, and many Scouts like "multi-tools", which tend to be a little heavy for backpacking, but sure can come in handy at times. In my experience, boys lose knives. Think about this before purchasing a \$50 knife.

## **Stoves**

There are basically two types of stoves: backpacking stoves and camp stoves.

**Camp Stoves:** These are usually two burner stoves used for site camping and fueled by white gas or propane. Many Scout troops, such as Troop 797, have camp stoves for patrol cooking, and you don't need to buy one.

**Backpacking Stoves:** Backpacking stoves are small one-burner stoves fueled by propane, butane-propane, or white gas. For Scouting, I recommend staying away from liquid fuel stoves. Butane-propane is easy to use, and is much, much safer than white gas. Primus, Gaz, and MSR make great, economically priced stoves starting at about \$20. Top-of-the-line models can cost as much as \$100 or more. The simple \$20-50 units are more than adequate for our purposes.

## **Gloves**

Needless to say, gloves are very important in cold weather. Choose a glove that insulates when wet. I prefer fleece gloves and waterproof shell mittens, but most Scouts will be better served with a variety of ski glove which can be purchased just about anywhere in season. I also carry a pair of cotton work gloves year-round. They can come in handy, and weigh almost nothing!

## **First Aid Kits**

Each Scout should assemble his own first aid kit as a requirement for advancement to the Second Class rank. The contents of this kit are described on page 289 of the current Boy Scout Handbook (11<sup>th</sup> edition). Remember, the requirement is for *the Scout* to assemble it!

## **Sleeping bags**

For cold-weather camping, a good sleeping bag is very, very important. Sleeping bags are usually either rectangular or "mummy" shaped. Most campers and

backpackers prefer mummy shaped bags because they offer more warmth with less bulk and weight. Bags are filled with either down or synthetic fillers such as Hollofil, Lite-Loft, or Polarguard. Ounce for ounce, down is the warmest and most compressible, but is relatively expensive and does not insulate well when wet. Most campers will find a synthetic fill bag rated to 15°F adequate for year-round camping in the southeast. Remember that the temperature rating assumes conditions (such as a 1" sleeping pad) that are not always present. A good sleeping bag can be purchased for \$50-100. It is not unusual to see high-end down bags priced as much as \$500.

### **Sleeping pads**

A sleeping pad is not an unnecessary luxury. In the winter, they can be critical. A sleeping pad insulates the body from the ground, which will rob the body of heat through conduction. "Therm-a-rest" self inflating pads are ideal, but will typically cost from \$40-80. There are many other suitable alternatives, such as inflatable air mattress and closed-cell foam pads, priced from \$5-25.

### **Cook Kits**

When site camping, Scouts will normally cook and eat in patrol groups. This necessitates that relatively large pots, pans, and utensils be used. Each patrol should already have all the necessary gear for cooking patrol style. Each Scout should bring his own eating utensils, a cup, and plate / bowl.

While backpacking, Scouts will usually cook for themselves or with one other "buddy". For this type cooking, a Scout should have a compact and lightweight cook kit consisting of a 1-1½ quart pot with lid, a plate / bowl, and eating utensils. Lightweight aluminum pots work fine. Titanium, also excellent, is also available at a higher cost. I recommend Lexan for plates, bowls, flatware, and cups. It is lightweight, nearly indestructible, easy to clean, and inexpensive.

### **Water filters and bottles**

We are fortunate in this part of the country to have streams almost anywhere we hike and camp.

When backpacking, I recommend that Scouts carry at least 2 quarts of water from the start. A Scout should, then, have two 1-quart water bottles. Any camping supply store will have adequate water bottles. Nalgene bottles made of Lexan are the standard for canteens and are indexed for measurements. Platypus collapsible bottles are great for carrying a backup water supply while backpacking. Empty 1 liter soft drink bottles also work fine.

Many Scouts like to use hydration systems. These work great, but the bladders must be kept clean (and Scouts often don't). They should never be used with flavored drinks or mixes.

Water from streams or lakes needs to be filtered or treated. Giardia and other protozoa, bacteria, and viruses live in the water and must be dealt with before

ingestion. Water can be treated by boiling, filtering, or with chemicals. Boiling is best, but is often inconvenient. Chemicals are inexpensive and easy to use, but require 30-60 minutes to work. Some chemicals can leave an unpleasant taste. Filters are instant and convenient, but can be heavy and sometimes complicated. Good filters will cost \$50-150. I recommend a chemical kit for most new Scouts. Look for one that leaves no taste, such as Polar Pure or Potable Aqua. Many older Scouts and adult leaders have filters and don't mind sharing.

### **Personal Items**

There are some personal items that all Scouts or Scouters should carry whenever hiking or camping. A comb, toothbrush and toothpaste, ½ roll of toilet paper in a Ziploc bag, a small plastic trowel for digging "cat holes", a small towel, sunscreen, lip balm, insect repellent are examples. These items are best kept together in a "ditty bag" so they can be found easily and will not be forgotten.

### **Compass**

Every Scout or Scouter should have a compass. A simple liquid filled compass with index (lubber) lines will work fine. Silva and Suunto offer excellent Scout compasses priced from around \$10.

### **Other Items**

Backpacking or camping, a scout should always pack water-resistant matches, 100 feet of parachute cord or ¼" braid, a small repair / sewing kit, a pot scrubber, a few trash bags and optionally sunglasses, camera, binoculars, etc.

### **Shopping for Gear**

Outdoor gear can be purchased locally in retail stores such as REI, Galyan's, Blue Ridge Mountain Sports, High Country, Sports Authority, and discount stores such as Wal-Mart, Kmart, or Target.

Anything you might need for outdoors can also be found online. Often online outfitters offer quality discontinued merchandise at (relative) bargain prices. Keep in mind that some items, such as boots, are best tried-on.

Check the following links:

[www.campmor.com](http://www.campmor.com)

[www.rei.com](http://www.rei.com)

[www.rei-outlet.com](http://www.rei-outlet.com)

[www.alltrec.com](http://www.alltrec.com)

[www.sierratradingpost.com](http://www.sierratradingpost.com)

[www.fogdog.com](http://www.fogdog.com)

[www.backcountrygear.com](http://www.backcountrygear.com)

[www.gear.com](http://www.gear.com)

[www.northernmountain.com](http://www.northernmountain.com)

[www.sierrasurplus.com](http://www.sierrasurplus.com)

[www.mountainhideout.com](http://www.mountainhideout.com)

[www.moosejaw.com](http://www.moosejaw.com)