

## Camping / Backpacking Equipment

Here are a few tips to help you select the proper equipment for your son to use on campouts and backpack trips with the troop. You can equip your son for a very reasonable price, and you don't have to buy all the equipment at once.

Since there are literally millions of Scouts and since they ALL camp, many of the major camping gear makers carry special lines of good, boy-sized equipment. Prices will vary wildly. Prices are generally driven higher by the quality of the gear and how much it weighs. Equipment that weighs less will cost more. Shop around! And ask the adults in the troop for input on the gear you are considering.

Some potential sources of equipment are:

1. Garage sales - Good places to pick up some great deals but take care not to waste your money on defective, outdated or worn out gear.
2. Ebay – [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) – Great place to find used equipment. You'll find deals if you be patient and keep looking. But be aware you cannot "try it on for size".
3. Dicks Sporting Goods – Carries multiple brands.
4. Play It Again Sports – Potential source of used equipment.
5. Coleman – [www.coleman.com](http://www.coleman.com) – Good gear at reasonable prices.
6. REI – [www.rei.com](http://www.rei.com) – REI has REI branded equipment and also carries equipment from many of the other manufacturers listed here. So it's a good place to shop/compare. One plug for REI is the lifetime warranty on REI branded equipment. Scouts tend to be hard on gear....
7. Kelty – [www.kelty.com](http://www.kelty.com) – Great quality gear at reasonable prices.
8. Eureka – [www.eurekatent.com](http://www.eurekatent.com) – Great gear at good prices.
9. Big Agnes – [www.bigagnes.com](http://www.bigagnes.com) - Great high quality equipment with premium prices. Recommend making sure your son stays in scouting before spending this type of money.
10. Many others such as Mountain Hardware, Mountainsmith, Marmot, North Face, etc.

One of the best reference guides on clothing needs and camping gear needs is the Boy Scout Handbook. Not only does it show the equipment but it also describes its use and proper care.

## THE ESSENTIALS

As you start shopping for equipment this is the order of importance in which you should buy it:

**BACKPACK** – (Boy Scout Handbook pages 297 – 299) A good pack can make the difference for your son between a miserable experience and a great adventure in the wilderness. When selecting a pack:

### **DO -**

Have your son try on the pack at the store and make the store personnel load it up to verify the fit.

Make sure the pack fits snugly around your son's hips. (This is where he will carry the total weight of the pack and it is essential that the waist strap fit well.)

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.

Keep in mind he is growing and look for a pack that will shrink then grow.

Make sure the pack is not too big and roomy. This leads to the temptation to overload it.

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 our smaller kids.

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.

### **DO NOT -**

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.

**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 MUST fit snugly.**

Let you son overload his pack and don't YOU overload his pack. He really won't need those extra socks or that Army blanket. (The blanket is too heavy and guess again if you think he will change socks on a campout unless he steps into a creek and even then....) Rule of thumb is to have the filled pack weigh about 1/3 of the body weight of the Scout (25lbs minimum)

Pack belts are meant to be worn on the upper part of the hip bones. Don't let the Scout fit the pack so that the weight of the pack is on his shoulders, it should be on his hips.

There are both internal and external frame backpacks. Like the name suggests, the frame that supports the back is either on the inside or outside of the pack. External frame packs are often less expensive, have more compartments and may require that some bulkier items are tied to the outside of the pack. Internal frame packs hug the body more closely and have more storage space inside the pack. Either type will suffice this is generally a preference. But internal frame packs are more common these days and as such, this is what most people carry.

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 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 have cheaply made seams and pockets that frequently blow out. Unfortunately if the pack seems a little expensive, it is probably about right.

**SLEEPING BAG** - (Boy Scout Handbook page 305) A good bag is a must. But you don't 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 which weighs 4 pounds or less. Remember that if your son is going to backpack with the troop the lighter and smaller the bag is the better. If the bag does not come with a stuff sack, then buy one. This will keep the bag clean and dry as you son comes and goes from a camping trip. (Bag prices range from \$50 to hundreds of dollars. I own a 20°, 3.5lb bag – scout sized – made by Slumberjack for \$89. Coleman makes a 0°, 5lb bag that sells at Target for \$60. Stay away from the bulky \$20 bags; they are the WORST thing for backpacking and provide no warmth whatsoever.)

This is 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 that we would recommend splurge on. Some of us are using a set of rather expensive bags purchased almost twenty years ago and we still use them to this day. Each bag was about \$150 dollars. However we have never had the need nor wanted to buy new bags. Spend a little extra now and you won't have to spend anything down the road.

After you buy the bag you are not done. If we did not take care of our bags they would not have lasted so long. Wash your bag according to the instructions every four or five trips, we recommend letting them air dry because some synthetic martial does not take well to heat. Also allow your bag to air out after a trip. Do not store it in the stuff sac. Unroll it under a bed.

**SLEEPING PAD** – (Boy Scout Handbook page 305) The sleeping pad goes underneath your son's sleeping bag. This is necessary not only for cushioning, but for warmth. Without a pad you son is 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 Target even for under \$20. More high tech pads can be found at any sporting goods store. Pads should be small and very light weight (most are only a few ounces) and take up very little space. (Never send a bed pillow either. He can roll up his jacket.)

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 both air insulation as well as foam insulation and padding. If you are going to sleep outside however, you need a tarp as well otherwise the mattress could get punctured.

Storage is the same as a sleeping bag, a Thermarest should be stored unrolled under a bed - inflated with the valve open. Also do not become rushed when setting up a Thermarest and inflate 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 gets moisture into the pad which can cause it to mildew.

**BOOTS** - (Boy Scout Handbook pages 275 - 276) are the single most important piece of backpacking equipment. Don't rush out and buy expensive boots if your son is in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, he can make do with tennis shoes for now. Once again, they range in price from cheap to outrageous. Watch for sales but realize boots are on sale for a reason. Ask the sales people if they have had complaints about the boot. Also please, please don't buy the boots too big thinking he will grow into them. It's okay to buy them a little large, have him 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 your son's boots sliding around when he walks. This will cause serious blisters and various other aches and pains for your boy.

**CANTEEN/WATER BOTTLE** - (Boy Scout Handbook page 265, 301) This should be a good quality water bottle that will fit easily into a backpack and will not leak and with an opening that is the right size for a water purifier to snap onto it. Water is what the Scouts forget the most. ALWAYS ASK YOUR SON IF THERE WILL BE WATER WHERE HE IS GOING. If the answer is no, he needs to bring 1 gallon per day of the trip.

We highly recommend Nalgene bottles - they are pretty indestructible. We have Eagle Scouts who have had the same three since they entered Scouts. They are also cheap. In fact REI no longer carries any other brand of water bottle. These need to be cared for as well. 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 them someplace inside.

**FLASHLIGHT (and extra batteries/bulb)** (Boy Scout Handbook page 265) Flashlights are a camping necessity. It is against BSA policy (and safety rules in general) to have lanterns (flames) inside tents. His flashlight will be the only way your boy will have light in his tent and/or be able to 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 or headlamp, look into one from Princeton Tech or Petzel. Consider an LED flashlight. 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. Our Scouts appreciate darkness on campouts and generally go without a flashlight if possible and become agitated with large nuclear flashlights that could light and entire city.

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

**MESS KIT/EATING KIT/COOKING KIT** - (Boy Scout Handbook page 324) You don't have to spend a lot of money. Go to Dick's, Bargain Barn and find the cheapest mess kit that has copper bottomed pots. These will last for a long time. Many of us still use the original ones we purchased for \$10 or \$15. Do not buy the Boy Scout brand. The kind that looks like a flying saucer - we have seen several Scouts melt these - not fully but to the point that they are unusable. The copper kits 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 and 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 for the food they are going to eat. Many an experienced backpacker will only bring a lightweight small pot and a spoon. Another good-to-have 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** - (Boy Scout Handbook pages 414 - 415) Patrols will be cooking together. It teaches the Scouts to work as a team. Each patrol will have a two burner propane stove in their patrol equipment to cook upon.

**TENT** - (Boy Scout Handbook pages 302 - 303) For all regular campouts the Scouts will sleep with a buddy in a tent. The troop does not have tents of our own, so the Scouts normally provide them. During patrol meetings the Scouts will figure out who has tents and who does not. For backpacking some tents are very heavy (about 10 pounds) and way too big even when split between two boys. If your boy is interested in going on all troop backpacks, you may want to look into a small tent that weighs four pounds or under. And don't be confused when the tent box says "two person." This really means "one person and his stuff." The dome tent pictured in the handbook comes in all sizes from one-man to family sized.

Watch out for cheap tents because the mesh is sometimes second-rate and will let mosquitoes and ticks through. Again, this is another area where we would 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 on a backpack we recommend anything by Sierra Designs, Kelty, Northface, or Eureka. They cost anywhere between \$100-\$300 depending on the size, but all of them are good. For backpacking buy something durable but light weight. 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 looking at REI. Even if you do not buy a tent there, they allow you to set 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. I have seen mesh on tents similar to that on bike shorts - and other tents have mesh like that on a screen door. Neither of these is correct. 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 rainfall 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 it does no good.

Taking good care of a tent 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. That is why we usually recommend tents have a vestibule - an area where the rain fly sticks far out from the tent and allows outside storage.

It is important to set tents up after every campout and wash them off. Let them air out for a few hours and 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 sack.

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 that are available. Like all other camping gear, tents range in price. The most expensive tents are the all-season tents. As yet we have no plan to backpack in the Arctic, so 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** - (Boy Scout Handbook pages 304, 305) Make sure you also buy a tarp to go under the tent to serve as a ground cloth. Buy a tarp that is a little smaller than the tent or as close as you can get. A 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** – (Boy Scout Handbook page 361) All Scouts will need a compass similar to the one pictured in the handbook. The proper one to get is one similar to the Silva Starter Compass. More elaborate compasses tend to confuse the beginner Scout.

**HAT** – (Boy Scout Handbook page 274) A hat with a brim is recommended. It will not only protect your son's face and neck from the sun but rain as well. In cold weather, a stocking cap is a must for evening and sleeping wear. You lose a lot of body heat at night from your scalp.

**GARBAGE BAGS** – We practice Leave No Trace (Boy Scout Handbook pages 244 - 257) 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 to throw trash. An extra large black trash can bag can be used as emergency rain gear as well.

**KNIFE** – (Boy Scout Handbook pages 402 – 403, 409) 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 Totin' Chip 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. If they need to fillet a fish, they should pack that knife in with their cooking utensils.

**RAIN GEAR** - (Boy Scout Handbook page 274) A Scout is prepared. It may be dry in the valley, but raining in the mountains. An inexpensive, but sturdy light-weight poncho will keep your son dry. They are available at Target for a couple of dollars. As with most camping gear, rain gear comes in cheap plastic and expensive Gore-Tex versions. However, don't go too cheap. Don't waste your money on 'emergency' ponchos, they might be able to be used once, but then are useless.

**TOILETRIES** – A comb, deodorant (yes, your sons are growing up!), shampoo, soap, toilet paper, toothbrush, toothpaste should be considered as essentials for every campout. A small plastic garden trowel is what we use to make a latrine these days; Scouts should never go on a campout without one. Make up a kit inside a small cloth bag (you can get camping bags at Dick's, Bargain Barn) or large zip lock bag and keep it on hand for the campouts.

**FIRST-AID KIT** – (Boy Scout Handbook pages 127 - 129) 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 bandaids, 4x4 dressings, roller gauze, adhesive tape, and 2 triangle bandages).

## CLOTHING SUGGESTIONS AND HINTS

(Boy Scout Handbook pages 270 - 276)

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) and since it will stay wet for a very long time, it 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 okay. But for cold weather camping and especially backpacking, try to avoid cotton.

In general, unless they are very well-worn and comfy, jeans are not good for hiking due to chafing.

Like all other camping gear, it is possible to spend a fortune on high-tech camp clothing. However, if you are like many of us, you will have to make do with what you have available. Check your closet or your boy's closet (or his floor or under his bed) for the following:

1. Nylon mesh - The nylon dries very 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 very quickly.
3. Polyblend sweats - check the label for fabric content. Much of the sweatwear available is 50-60% poly 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 kid 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 stuff is warm, lightweight, NOT cotton and very likely to already be in your son's wardrobe.

## QUESTIONS?

As you shop, do not hesitate to ask store personnel for suggestions or tips, tell them you are buying for a Scout, many of them are Scouts. Or feel free to ask the Scoutmaster or one of the Assistant Scoutmasters about suggested gear for boys.