

# Backpacking – Level 1

**You must have passed Hiking Level 3, Mapping Level 3, and Compass Level 4 as a prerequisite to this topic.**

## Backpacking – The basics

### **Backpacking:**

I have an inclination to say JUST DO IT, but I cannot, because the backcountry can be a dangerous place, even for those who are experienced. With that said we need to go over the basics of Backpacking and get you familiar with everything that goes into backpacking. Backpacking is not just a hike, it is exploring the unknown and being one with nature. This is one way you can see what GOD has put on the earth up close and personal. The bonds you make with nature and the people you share this experience with will last you a life time.

### **What really is backpacking?**

Backpacking is a long walk in nature alone or with friends. The day is spent hiking and the night is spent sleeping. The long evenings you imagine (from car camping) don't happen to backpackers much. They take their long lounging time during the day when it is warm and the sun is shining. Even "supper" is eaten along the trail before more walking. Most good backpackers walk right up to the moment of darkness (often sometimes until an hour after dark—the trick is to see how long you can walk before turning on the light). When all day hikers arrive at camp what do they do? They find a place for their tent or tarp and set it up, roll out their sleeping bag crawl in it go to sleep all within about ten minutes. Most serious backpackers do their "campfire chats" in the pleasant afternoon breaks not in camp. If you want a long evening snuggled around a campfire chatting and telling stories go car camping. If you like long breaks, many-a-day gathered around a stream or an overlook chatting, laughing and telling stories throughout the day then backpacking is your thing.

### **Planning**

Be stunned by the beautiful vista, not an uncrossable river. An hour of guidebook research and a phone call to the rangers can make all your surprises happy ones.

- Choose a destination within driving distance, so you can reschedule if bad weather threatens.
- Stick to well-marked routes with easy terrain, established campsites, and plentiful water.
- Plan on hiking no more than 5 to 7 miles a day.
- Learn when the bugs are biting, if you need permits, and what weather to expect.
- Let someone at home know your plans, and stick to your route so you'll be easy to find if needed.

## **Gear**

Thanks to today's lightweight equipment, a backpack loaded with all your weekend supplies should weigh less than 20 pounds.

- Rent a tent. Many outfitters rent shelter, packs, and other gear. It cuts initial costs and lets you experiment before buying.
- Pamper your feet. Prevent blisters and other foot woes by getting lightweight boots that are slightly larger than your street shoes and matching them with wool hiking socks.
- Limit your clothes. Pack clothes for a 24-hour period, on trail and in camp, and wear the same stuff all weekend. Throw in extra socks to keep your feet happy.
- Cook like a pro. Get a lightweight canister stove and one or two standard fuel canisters for a long weekend.
- Sleep like a baby. Bed down on a sleeping pad that's 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches thick, and with dimensions that don't leave your limbs dangling off the sides. Likewise your bag should match your frame--try it in the store--and should be rated at least 10°F warmer than the temperatures you expect.
- Bring along a luxury item, a deck of cards, a good book, or a camera.

## **Food**

Fine dining is simply a matter of smart menu planning: Use quick-cooking ingredients from your pantry and do prep work at home.

- Plan a menu for the whole trip, and don't put off shopping until the last moment.
  - For example: (two people on a 3-day trip)
    - 2 breakfasts: 4 packs of instant oatmeal; cold cereal with powdered milk
    - 3 lunches: turkey sandwiches; PB and J; salami and cheese on a bagel
    - 2 dinners: angel hair pasta with pesto sauce and sliced red peppers; burritos made from dehydrated beans, tortillas, cheese, and salsa
    - Snacks: Trail mix, dried fruit, energy bars, chocolate, and cookies
- At home, repackage food and spices, leaving behind bulky, heavy containers.
- Experiment with freeze-dried. Dehydrated food is fast, easy, and better than you think.
- Drinks: Juices in the ready to serve packs and dehydrated Gatorade are two great options.

## **Fitness**

If you can hike for a few hours, you can backpack for a weekend. But a little training will make the second day feel as good as the first.

- Hike yourself into shape: The best way to train for any sport is to do it. Carry a full pack on your routine dayhikes--it's also a great way to test your gear.
- Master the mountains: There's a reason hikers flock to alpine country. It's beautiful up there. Strengthen your hill-climbing muscles (quads, hamstrings, and calves) with regular workouts on a stairclimber.

## **Skills**

Don't get caught with your pants down and no shovel. Learn how to dig a cathole and other essential skills, like pitching your tent and lighting your stove.

- Read the directions. Ignore the neighbors and give your gear a test run in the backyard: Pitch your tent, light your stove, use your water filter.

- Lose the bathroom anxiety. Going to the bathroom in the outdoors is as natural as walking, and many backcountry campsites have outhouses.
- Learn good manners. Think of camping like being a guest in someone else's house: Don't mess it up. Camp on bare ground or rock, don't do dishes in the creek, and leave plants and animals alone.
- Find yourself. You'll never get lost if you stay attuned to your surroundings from the beginning. Locate yourself on a map, then stay oriented as you hike.

### **Where and When To Go**

When planning a backpacking trip, the first details to determine are the location and dates. There are thousands of scenic backpacking trails all over North America. Backpackers often find destination ideas from websites, brochures, or through word of mouth from other backpackers. While summer is typically the most popular season, many backpackers also plan trips during the rest of the year. Keep in mind that hiking in wet or cold weather does require extra consideration in terms of equipment and physical conditioning.

### **Planning and Packing**

The type of gear that a backpacker takes with them depends on the length of the journey and the weather. Even when hiking in good weather, it is advisable to pack warm and waterproof clothing and protection as a precaution. It always helps to pack as light as possible. This allows backpackers to move more efficiently while expending less energy. Look for multi-use items to reduce weight. Before heading out to the trail, practice wearing the filled backpack and walking around with it. If it seems much too heavy, remove unnecessary items.

### **On the Trail**

Backpackers should research the trail thoroughly before embarking on their trip. Look up details like the weather, terrain difficulties, and potential natural hazards such as wild animals and poisonous plants. It is best to hike in groups or at least with one other person for safety reasons. Pay attention to issues like nutrition and hydration throughout the trip. Backpackers can easily do this by stopping regularly for a quick healthy snack and by drinking water throughout the day. You need to drink even if you are not thirsty. Stay safe from other hazards such as sunburn with a full brimmed cap, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Wear lightweight clothing to protect from the sun without overheating. Always hike at a comfortable pace. Going too fast might result in injury or it could simply be uncomfortable. To avoid getting lost, it is best not to veer off the trail. It helps to keep a map and compass handy to keep track of where you are. Even well-conditioned backpackers should make it a point to rest a little while during the day. This will allow them to stay in good shape for the rest of the trip.

### **How to Find the Right Sized Backpack**

If you grab a backpack off the shelf at a local store or order one online, you'd better be careful to get the right size. Most multi-day backpacks come in a Small, Medium or Large. This size has nothing to do with capacity but instead refers to your torso length. Obviously, taller people need a different sized pack than someone who is shorter. To find your proper torso length, you'll need

to measure the distance from the top of your iliac crest (hip bone) to the C7 vertebrae (The large bump in the back of your neck). For detailed instructions follow this link: [How to find your torso length](#).

### **Adjusting a Backpack**

If you don't properly adjust a backpack, you could end up carrying all of the weight on your shoulders instead of letting it rest on your hips, which will wear you out quicker. For the most efficient hiking experience:

- Slip the pack onto your shoulders
- Attach the waist strap and tighten so it takes some of the weight off your shoulders
- Attach the chest strap and tighten so the shoulder straps are slightly inside the shoulder joint.
- The manufacturer's instructions for the packs will go over this in more detail.

### **Cut Down Your Pack Weight**

Once you've found the right sized backpack and adjusted it for the proper fit, the next thing to consider is how to cut down the overall weight of your load. Lightweight backpacking is definitely easier than trying to bring along all the comforts of home.

- Consider these tricks to cut down the weight of your backpack:
  - Replace your older backpack, sleeping bag or tent with a newer lightweight version.
  - Only bring along the items you really need. Try and cut out items that aren't necessary.
  - Consider filtering water from a stream instead of hauling water into the backcountry.
  - Plan your layers carefully so all of the clothing you bring has multiple uses. Don't skip on the necessities.

If you follow the above tips, you should be able to carry your load comfortably and efficiently for a fun and enjoyable backpacking trip. Enjoying the outdoors should be fun and easy. I hope you've been motivated to get outside and try backpacking.

### **Backpacking**

Ok, now comes the more serious side of backpacking:

- what is all involved?
- What do I really need to pack in my backpack for a trip?

Since you asked I have included a list below of what you might need to pack for a trip. The things to consider are, where are you going? The temperature, the terrain, the weather forecast and with whom will you be going?

## **1. Navigation**

- Map (with protective case)
- Compass

## **2. Sun protection**

- Sunscreen
- Lip balm
- Sunglasses
- Wide-brim hat

## **3. Insulation**

- Jacket, vest, pants, gloves, hat

## **4. Illumination**

- Headlamp or flashlight (plus spare)
- Extra batteries

## **5. First-aid supplies**

- First-aid kit, blister kit
- Insect Repellant
- Duct Tape

## **6. Fire**

- Matches or lighter
- Waterproof container
- Fire starter (for emergency survival fire)

## **7. Repair kit and tools**

- Knife or multi-tool
- Kits for stove, mattress; duct tape strips

## **8. Nutrition**

- Extra day's supply of food

## **9. Hydration**

- Water bottles or hydration system
- Water filter or other treatment system

## **10. Emergency shelter**

- Tent, tarp, reflective blanket
- Sleeping Bag
- Sleeping matt or pad
- 50' nylon cord
- Garbage bag(s)

## **11. Clothing**

- Clothes for hiking (consider long sleeves for sun and bugs and long pants the lightweight easy drying kind)
- Clothes for in camp
- Trekking Poles (Walking Sticks)
- Boots or shoes suited to terrain
- Socks (synthetic or wool) plus spares
- Sandals (for fording, in camp)
- Bandana

## **12. Food**

- 3 meals per day total of 2500 – 3000 calories minimum
- Dehydrated meals or no cook meals are easiest when on the trail
- Plastic eating utensils

## **13. Personal**

- Toilet paper
- Toothbrush
- Deodorant
- Hand Sanitizer

## **14. Outlook**

- Positive Attitude
- “Can Do” Spirit
- Permits
- Wallet
- Trip itinerary left with a friend and under car seat

This looks like a lot of things to bring along, how am I going to carry all of this on my back and still be able to walk! These items really do not take up a lot of space if you choose correctly. Others of you are thinking that there is no way that I will survive one day with only these few items to keep me alive! The most important item on this list is your attitude. Without a good attitude the trip will not be enjoyable.

The reality is that even if you pack everything in your backpack that is listed above you will not use everything. But for the pessimists among us I have included an expanded list of what could be brought along, especially if you are going at a time of year other than summer or someplace where you may experience extremes in altitude or weather.

## **Beyond the Basics**

Some people need to be more prepared than others, but you need to remember that you will need to carry everything on your back that you bring along. So the following list is here if you are going backpacking in the winter months or going when the weather is not supposed to be nice.

## **Beyond the Basics**

- Daypack or summit pack
- Pack cover
- Tent-pole repair sleeve
- Footprint (if needed for tent)
- Stuff sack or compression sack
- Pillow or stuffable pillow case
- Whistle (plus signaling mirror)
- Multifunction watch with altimeter
- Ice axe
- Energy food (bars, gels, chews, trail mix)
- Energy beverages or drink mixes

- Stove
- Fuel
- Cookset (with pot grabber)
- Dishes or bowls
- Utensils
- Cups (measuring cups)
- Bear canister (or hang bags for food)
- Backup water treatment
- Collapsible sink or container
- Packable lantern

**Clothing options: Warm weather**

- Wicking T-shirt (synthetic or wool)
- Wicking underwear
- Quick-drying pants or shorts
- Sun-shielding hat

**Cool weather**

- Wicking long-sleeve T-shirt
- Wicking long underwear (good sleepwear)
- Hat, cap, skullcap, or headband
- Gloves or mittens
- Rainwear (jacket, pants)
- Fleece jacket or vest, and pants

**Footwear; assorted personal items**

- Gaiters
- Camera and memory cards
- Binoculars
- Permits
- Route description or guidebook
- Field guide(s); star identifier
- Notebook and pen or pencil
- Credit card; small amount of cash
- Earplugs and eye shade
- Sanitation trowel
- Headnet
- Bear spray
- Toothbrush and/or toiletry kit
- Biodegradable soap (and shower bag)
- Quick-dry towel
- Cell phone/satellite communicator/2-way radios
- Post-hike snacks, water, towel, clothing change

This gives you a clue as to what we will be getting into in the levels to come. The first thing you need to do is to get in shape. Your physical condition can be either an aid or a detriment to the group you are with. If you are out of shape, it is very easy to get hurt in the wild, even on a trail.

If you are not in shape there is no way you will be able to carry the bare essentials not to mention if you want to bring along some of the non-essential items.

### **Backpacking Level 1 Requirements**

- 1 – What is the most important thing to bring along on a backpacking trip?
- 2 – What are 7 of the 14 categories of Backpacking items?
- 3 – What should you always do before you start out on a backpacking trip?
- 4 – List 5 things you need to bring along for clothing.
- 5 – Why is fitness so important with backpacking?