

Backpacking – Level 3

Planning

Backpacking:

We have covered the basics of the equipment and food. Now we need to cover the where to go.

State and National Parks:

State and National parks have many trails that can be used for backpacking. Many of these trails you will need to get back country permits to be able to use them. This would mean that you would have to e-mail or call the park to obtain a permit for back country camping or backpacking.

There are easy trails and there are more difficult trails. You will need to determine what shape you are in and plan your trip accordingly. For beginners, short trails with daily distances of 10 to 15 miles of low difficulties would be best. Trips of 3 to 5 days will test your ability to adapt to backpacking but are not long enough to take you too far into the wilderness where if needed you could get back out in a long days hike.

The time of year is critical to determining what to pack. Will it be cold where I am going? Will it be hot? Are there bugs out? Are the rivers and streams high or low? Will there be a lot of hikers on the trails?

These questions could all be answered by calling the rangers and asking them.

State and National Forests

The state and national forests all have trails through them. These trails are much less traveled than what you will find in the state and national parks. Once again your resource for planning is the rangers in charge of those areas.

State and National Trails

The state and National Trails are a wonderful source of backpacking resources. The Appalachian trail is the most widely known of all trails in the nation. There are many trails in every state that can be used for backpacking. In Wisconsin we have the Glacial Drumlin trail that takes you through some very scenic areas of Wisconsin. New Mexico, Utah and Colorado boast some of the best hiking and backpacking trails in the nation with some of the most picturesque and scenic views anywhere. Each trail brings with it some unique challenges and rewards.

The states have websites that you can use to find and map out the trails. They will also have weather, climate and other useful information on those sites. Calling local ranger stations is always a good thing as they know of the current situations and if there are any animal concerns in any of the areas you might want to backpack in.

Topographical Maps

Get maps of the areas you will be backpacking in. The more current the map, the better. Many websites have crude maps that can be down loaded for comparison to the topographical maps.

Camping Locations

Use the maps from the websites to plan out overnight camping locations and then plan your day hikes to them. You can hike up to 20 miles in a day over relatively flat terrain, but once you start adding in hills and mountains that can shrink to as little as 5 to 7 miles in a day. The compass and map are two tools that you should never leave home without.

Water Stops

Plan out your water stops. Water is vital, but heavy. You need to carry enough with you at all time to keep you hydrated. Planning water stops is more important than planning camping locations. Knowing the distance between water stops will also help determine how much water you need to carry to get to the next watering hole.

Some hikes require 2 to 3 liters of water a day where others require 8 to 9 liters.

Remember the rule of thumb, “If you are thirsty, you are dehydrated.”

Plans

Trip itinerary needs to be decided before you leave home. Your starting point, camp locations, watering stops and ending points all have to be identified. Also the date you are entering the trail and the day you will come off the trail. This itinerary needs to be given to friends or family and left in the vehicle at your starting point and at your ending point if they are different.

If you are carrying a cell phone or two way radio, the call phone number and radio frequency needs to be on the itinerary also.

Have the names of everyone in your party on the itinerary with family contact information. You want to have the contact information written down in case the cell phone with the information in it gets lost, wet or becomes unusable.

Other Backpackers

Other backpackers are a wealth of information on local trails and even some not so local trails. They would know the availability of water and camping locations, the difficulty of the trails and how busy the trails are. They could give you key pointers to help you plan your trip.

Backpacking Level 3 Requirements

- 1 – Where can you backpack?
- 2 – What do you not leave home without?
- 3 – What stops do you plan for?
- 4 – What distances are critical?
- 5 – Who do you need to call to get current information on trails?
- 6 – Why would you need two different types of maps?