

BACKPACKING



Long before backpacking became a popular sport, the Boy Scouts of America was promoting this exhilarating activity. For many years, Philmont Scout Ranch in northern New Mexico has provided hundreds of miles of trails for thousands of Scouts across the country. In addition, BSA high-adventure bases and local councils throughout the country can provide Scouts with a stimulating backpacking experience.

Backpacking can be a single-day activity of several miles or a weeklong trip of 50 miles or longer. But no matter what length, participation requires hikers who are in top physical condition and prepared to meet the challenge. New Scouts can learn the basics of hiking and low-impact camping so that many thousands of people can enjoy the same trail for decades to come.

SCOUTING OUTCOMES

This month's patrol and troop activities should give your Scouts

- Improved physical fitness

- A sense of communion with nature and God
- A greater appreciation for the outdoors and a determination to follow the Outdoor Code
- Enhanced self-confidence in their ability to be comfortable on the trail and in camp

ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

By month's end, all Scouts should have met the majority of their basic hiking and camping requirements through First Class. Depending on the outing activities, they may also complete all or part of the following rank requirements:

Tenderfoot

- Outdoor—cooking, hiking, camping
- Citizenship—flag ceremonies
- Patrol/troop participation—patrol identification
- Personal development—Scout Oath and Law



Second Class

- Outdoor—cooking, camping, hiking, nature
- Citizenship—flag ceremonies
- Patrol/troop participation—patrol identification
- Personal development—Scout Oath and Law

First Class

- Outdoor—cooking, camping, nature, hiking
- Citizenship—flag ceremonies
- Patrol/troop participation—patrol identification
- Personal development—Scout Oath and Law

Merit Badges. Older Scouts can concentrate on the Backpacking and Hiking merit badges this month; they should be able to complete many of the requirements. Depending on activities during the month, they might also cover requirements in Camping, Cooking, Orienteering, Pioneering, Wilderness Survival, and other nature-related merit badges.

PARENT/GUARDIAN PARTICIPATION

The patrol leaders' council can involve parents in the program feature this month by

- Asking qualified parents to assist with instruction in camping and hiking skills
- Inviting parents on the backpacking outing
- Asking parents to provide transportation to the starting point for the hike, if necessary, and pick up at the end

PATROL LEADERS' COUNCIL

The patrol leaders' council should meet during the early part of the previous month to plan troop activities for this program feature. If you don't complete all items on the following agenda, continue planning at patrol leaders' council meetings after each troop meeting.

- Decide on the route and destination for the hike. If permission will be needed, assign someone to secure it.

- Decide whether it will be a day outing or a longer trek.
- Review skills needed for the hike.
- If the troop will be camping overnight, plan special activities. If special gear will be needed, assign someone to obtain it; seek the troop committee's help, if necessary.
- Plan details of troop meetings for the month. Assign patrol demonstrations, covering skills that will be needed for the hiking activities.

FEATURE EVENT

Backpacking Outing

Backpacking offers a multitude of program adventures for your troop. A hike or trek allows Scouts to interact with nature, test their physical abilities, presents photo opportunities for any camera bugs, and helps new Scouts meet their hiking and camping requirements through First Class.

You may want to organize the hike in stages, based on the skill levels and physical capabilities of the Scouts. One part could be relatively easy so that inexperienced Scouts can get a taste of backpacking. The second stage would give the more experienced young men a more challenging trail. Finally, the third stage would be a challenge for the older Scouts—almost a wilderness survival outing.

An unfamiliar route and destination would be best for the Scouts. Give them a topographic map and compass to find their way, or follow an established trail.

Conduct various activities along the route. Depending upon the needs of the group, you may want to consider one or more of the following highlights:

NATURE NOOK. Select a spot along the trail. Have each Scout select a 3-square-foot area and study wildlife within those boundaries. Note the plant life, animals, insects, etc.

ENVIRONMENT PROJECT. Check with local conservation authorities for an appropriate Good Turn. Here are some possibilities.

- Plant tree seedlings or shrubs to provide food and cover for wildlife.
- Build a check dam, deflector, or cover device to provide shelter for fish and to reduce streambank erosion.
- Build and set out nesting boxes for birds and small mammals like squirrels and raccoons.
- Plant hedges or windbreaks to provide winter cover for wildlife.
- Protect a streambank by planting grass or trees.
- Control erosion on hiking trails by constructing water bars or spreading a layer of an organic material such as sawdust, wood chips, pine needles, or leaves on the trail surface.

HOW TALL, HOW FAR? Locate a tall tree, mountain peak, cliff wall, etc., and have Scouts estimate its height and how far away it is.