

Scout Hiking and Camping Gear Guide for Lightfighters

Fresh on the heels of our successful West Point trip, the Troop has decided to attend the Spring Camporee as "Lightfighters." The Lightfighter designation means that we travel with all of our gear on our backs. As such and moving forward with Troop camping and hiking activities, appropriate gear is essential.

General Information:

- Lightweight is usually best.
- Good gear doesn't always mean expensive gear. WalMart, Target, Home Depot, Marden's all are good places to shop for general equipment.
- When your boy's pack is packed, it should NOT weigh more than 20 – 25 pounds. Older boys and adults will be able to carry more depending on size and fitness.
- Always send along 3-4 large black plastic garbage bags. They serve as pack covers, emergency rain coats, and are good for garbage.

Backpacks:

- Backpacks are different from Daypacks. Daypacks are similar to school packs. Backpacks are larger and designed for overnight hikes.
- There are two types of backpacks for overnight trips – External Frame and Internal Frame
- External frame packs have a metal or polymer frame that is exposed. The straps and pack are attached to this frame. The frame provides a good, solid foundation for the gear your son will be carrying. Sleeping bags, tents, and wet sneakers can be hung from the frame while hiking leaving room inside for food and gear. External frame packs are usually adjustable for hiker size.
- Internal frame packs have a metal or polymer frame that is stitched into the pack itself. Usually the pack is similar to a tapered duffel bag with shoulder and hip straps. Internal frame packs are slimmer and fit closer to the body making them ideal for scrambling over rocks and busting through thick brush. Everything goes inside an internal frame pack so you will need a larger capacity "bag" for an equal time on the trail. Internal frame packs are not adjustable to hiker size to any great extent.
- MY SUGGESTION FOR SCOUTS: I strongly suggest an External frame pack for your boy. The adjustability of these packs allows them to grow with your son. They are tough. They also usually have lots of pockets so keeping things organized is easier. I recommend shopping for a pack at www.Campmor.com Make sure the "Torso Length" specification for the pack fits your boy. Torso Length = distance up the center of the back from the top of the hips to the base of the neck.

Sleeping Bags:

- The sleeping bag is probably the heaviest thing your boy will carry. It's also one of the most important.
- Again, good does not mean expensive.
- The sleeping bag you purchase should be: Nylon, Mummy style, Synthetic filling.
- Temperature ratings are kinda silly... Add 10 degrees to the published rating. So, if a bag is rated to 20 degrees figure it will keep your kid warm on a 30 degree night. I suggest that you look for a bag that is rated for 20 – 30 degrees. If we go on a winter trip you can purchase a fleece liner for pretty cheap that will add lots of warmth to the bag.
- Slumberjack, Coleman, Kelty, North Face, Eureka all make good bags for backpacking.
- Here's a good bag for new Scouts who have younger siblings that can use it later http://www.campmor.com/outdoor/gear/Product_80620 it is shorter which means lighter.
- Here's a good bag that will be suitable up to that awful consequence called "adulthood"... http://www.campmor.com/outdoor/gear/Product_45324
- You will need a stuff sack for the sleeping bag. Most mummy style bags come with one. It will keep the sleeping bag clean, dry, and contained.

Sleeping Pad and Pillow:

- Two types – self-inflating and foam.
- Don't buy a self inflating pad for your son. He will manage to permanently deflate it within seconds of you giving it to him.
- Do buy a "closed cell" foam pad. Wal Mart. They're blue. Inexpensive. You can use a pair of scissors to cut it to boy length.
- A "yoga" pad might work as well. Just make sure it's thick enough to be comfy.
- Pillows – remember the stuff sack you bought for your son's sleeping bag? With the simple addition of some crumpled up clothing inside, it becomes a pillow. Don't spend your money on a special camping pillow. It's not necessary.

Boots & Socks:

- Please note that I said “boots”, not “sneakers”!
- Boots are really important because of the support they give your son’s arches, ankles, and feet. None of us want to carry your son out of the woods – we will if necessary – but we really would prefer not to have to!
- Shop at Target, Payless, WalMart for inexpensive hiking boots. Sometimes KTP has really good boots on their clearance rack.
- Laces are critical – NO VELCRO!!! Bring an extra pair of laces.
- No cotton socks. Wool is great but itchy. Look for socks that are polypropylene or some sort of synthetic fiber. For a day hike, your son will need two pairs of socks. For a week-long trip he will need 3. Why 3? Because he can rinse his socks out at the end of the day in a creek and then hang them from his brand-new external frame backpack frame the next day to dry.

Clothing:

- It is very important that your son have something to protect him from rain. A rain jacket and pants are okay. A poncho is fine also but you’ll probably want to send along some rain-pants as well. Do not buy the plastic, \$5 rain coat or poncho. They tear immediately. Shop at the usual places and you can find some decent coated nylon rain gear.
- It would be best if your son’s pants/shorts were NOT cotton. During the summer a pair of nylon swim trunks actually works really well. They dry quickly and the boy doesn’t mind wearing them. For cooler weather, shop for a pair of synthetic blend pants.
- Shirts – cotton t-shirts and boys just go together... However, your son will need something that is not cotton for warmth. Go to Goodwill and check out the “outerwear” section.
- Layering is the key. Your son will be plenty warm with his t-shirt + fleece vest + fleece jacket + rain coat on. He won’t need a big heavy jacket.

Miscellaneous:

- Water bottles – get the quart size Nalgene bottles. They are a little more expensive but you can see inside them (at some point you will find 3 month old Gatorade in one...), they’re easy to clean, and they pack well. Your son will need two to start.
- Utensils – look for the new, cool “Sporks” in the stores. I’ve seen them at Cabela’s, KTP, and Wal Mart. It’s a combination spoon/fork. Lightweight and cool.
- Plates/Bowls – I carry an old Tupperware bowl... period. It holds everything I need and it doesn’t transfer heat to my fingers as quickly as a metal plate or bowl. Simple is best here.
- Cup – a nice insulated mug is always nice. Hot chocolate and soup are staples of every trip. Get something unbreakable and then your son can hang it from his pack with a carabineer for easy access.
- Small first aid kit in a quart size ziplock baggie – band aids, moleskin for blisters, tape, etc. Good list is in the Scout Handbook
- Toilet paper in a ziplock baggie
- Stuff sacks – get lots and your boy can pack his gear in them before putting it in his pack. After a while he’ll start to have a system – socks in the blue bag, clothes in the red bag, etc... Keeps things organized and dry.
- Rope – buy some parachute cord at KTP or WalMart. 50 feet should be fine.

Spending \$100 to outfit your boy properly today will save you from having to buy replacement gear later and it will last him through his Scouting career.

Please contact Scoutmaster Paul Serrano with questions, comments and/or suggestions.