

# Lightweight Backpacking with Boy Scouts

Posted on July 17, 2012

<http://larsonweb.com/blog/?p=390>

Backpacking in Colorado's High Country

I have been a scoutmaster or assistant scoutmaster for 23 of the last 25 years. I have been involved with boy scout troops in New York, Colorado, and Utah. I've had inner-city scouts, suburban scouts, scouts from poor families, and scouts from wealthy families.

Throughout all of my scouting experiences, I have learned that a good outdoor program is one of the keys to success. Because of this, I take my scouts on at least one multi-day backpacking trip each summer. Backpacking teaches skills and develops experiences that you simply can't get at an organized council scout camp. Learning to have fun while moving safely through wilderness and carrying your house on your back is a great way to build lasting memories.

Lightweight camp shoes such as Crocs are good for river crossings

Here are some of the bits of learning that I have developed over the years of backpacking with scouts:

**Have reasonable expectations:** I don't plan to travel all that far with the boys each day. Typically, 5-10 miles is the maximum I will travel in a day. We're on the trail by 8:30 a.m., stop for lunch at 11:30 a.m., and we try to be done hiking by 3:00 p.m. This allows plenty of time at camp for fishing, exploring, skills training, resting, and goofing off.

Make sure there is plenty of time for fun

**Go Light:** Carrying a lightweight pack is key to having fun, particularly with younger boys. I try to keep the scouts' pack weight down to around 20 pounds or so whenever possible. A scout carrying 20 pounds will have twice as much fun as a scout carrying 40 pounds.

**Plan ahead and include the parents:** At least a month before the scheduled backpacking trip, meet with the scouts and parents to discuss the equipment that their scout will need. I typically have a meeting at my house, and I have a fully loaded scout pack that I unpack, while discussing each piece of equipment. The parents need to understand the gear issues early in the process, so they have time to procure the right equipment. I typically send out a gear list to the scouts and their parents, detailing what will be needed and including examples of equipment that can be purchased on line.

**Tents:** I have experimented on occasion with using lightweight tarps instead of tents. However, after a while, I gave that up and came back to using lightweight 4 man tents. The tents I use are the Black Diamond Guiding Light. They hold 4 scouts, and weigh about 88 ounces (5 pounds, 8 ounces.) That's 22 ounces per boy, which is pretty light. The Guiding Light is no longer sold, but there are other lightweight 4 man options, such as the [Big Agnes Fly Creek UL4](#) which is even lighter than the Guiding Light.

The big thing I don't like about tarps is the lack of bug protection. Summertime bugs can be pretty terrible, and a real tent provides scouts with a night-time shelter from evil blood sucking mosquitos. Pyramid tents can provide bug protection if they have netting around the perimeter, but they aren't free-standing, and rely on lots of tent pegs and very careful pitching to keep them secure. A lightweight, free-standing tent is more secure and less prone to user error.

A tent is a snug haven from bugs

**Water Purification:** For purifying water, I typically carry a bunch of [chlorine dioxide tablets](#), together with a [gravity filter](#). This combination is lighter and more efficient than the traditional pump filters.

**Cooking:** Rather than a traditional cartridge or white gas stove, I bring lightweight dual fuel (alcohol/wood-burning) Caldera Cone Ti-Tri stove by [Trail Designs](#). As discussed in my stove review, [HERE](#), I think that these are the best summer backpacking stoves available, as they allow you to utilize

both alcohol and wood for fuel and they weigh very little. Typically, dinners are freeze dried meals or ramen, so all that is required is boiling water, which the Ti-Tri Caldera Cone does very well. For grilling fish, I use a [titanium grill](#) that weighs about an ounce.

Below is a **GEAR LIST** that I provide to the scouts and parents well ahead of our trips. We have careful pack checks to ensure that scouts aren't bringing stuff that they don't need and that's not on the list.

Lunch items are all non-cook snacks

**Necessary Equipment:** Anything not on this list must be approved by the scout master (me.) Only the essentials should be carried. **DO NOT BRING** iPods, radios, gameboys, or other useless stuff. Also, because we will be out for several days, more than 10 miles from the trail head, all of this equipment is necessary. **If there are some items you don't currently have, please talk to me before you buy them. I can let you know where to obtain them at the lowest cost. I also have many items on this list which may be borrowed.** I have included some links to various products. You don't need to have these specific things, I've just included the links so you can see what these items look like. Again, I have a number of items that I will loan out for this trip.

## Pocket knife

**32 ounce (one liter) Sports drink bottle (Powerade, Gatorade, etc.)** A 32 ounce "Camelback" or similar bladder is also good. (If using a Camelback, just bring the bladder, not the pack for it.)

**Flashlight** A small LED headlamp is best. Do not bring a big, heavy flashlight. Do not bring extra batteries. If you conserve batteries, an extra set of batteries will not be necessary.

<http://www.sierratradingpost.com/cyclops-atom-led-headlamp~p~3247v/?filterString=search~head-lamp%2F&colorFamily=01>

[http://www.amazon.com/Dorcy-41-2089-Deluxe-Headlight-Batteries/dp/B001AT3TYO/ref=sr\\_1\\_13?s=sporing-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328475720&sr=1-13](http://www.amazon.com/Dorcy-41-2089-Deluxe-Headlight-Batteries/dp/B001AT3TYO/ref=sr_1_13?s=sporing-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328475720&sr=1-13)

[http://www.amazon.com/LED-Baseball-Cap-Clip-Flashlight/dp/B002GWJ2V8/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328475720&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/LED-Baseball-Cap-Clip-Flashlight/dp/B002GWJ2V8/ref=sr_1_2?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328475720&sr=1-2)

**Small bottle of Sunscreen (1 or 2 ounce)** If you have a large bottle of sunscreen, re-package it into a small container. Don't bring a bit 6 ounce bottle of sun screen, as a big bottle is just useless weight.

[http://www.amazon.com/Beyond-Coastal-Active-Sunscreen-4-Ounce/dp/B0013RQWFQ/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476723&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/Beyond-Coastal-Active-Sunscreen-4-Ounce/dp/B0013RQWFQ/ref=sr_1_2?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476723&sr=1-2)

<http://www.rei.com/product/660012/dermatone-spf-36-z-cote-sunscreen-1-oz>

<http://www.rei.com/product/750581/rei-multilevel-protection-sunblock-spf-30-2-fl-oz>

**Insect Repellent.** NOT a metal aerosol can. SMALL bottle. Best is Ultrathon brand.

[http://www.amazon.com/Repel-Insect-Repellent-Spray-402000/dp/B000LGN3Z2/ref=sr\\_1\\_7?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476237&sr=1-7](http://www.amazon.com/Repel-Insect-Repellent-Spray-402000/dp/B000LGN3Z2/ref=sr_1_7?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476237&sr=1-7)

[http://www.amazon.com/3M-Ultrathon-SRL-12HF-Insect-Repellent/dp/B002JVB44E/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476237&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/3M-Ultrathon-SRL-12HF-Insect-Repellent/dp/B002JVB44E/ref=sr_1_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476237&sr=1-1)

**Backpack** Must have either an internal or external frame, and a padded hip belt which will support the weight on the scout's hips, NOT his shoulders.

<http://www.rei.com/product/807783/deuter-fox-40-pack-juniors>

<http://www.rei.com/product/830583/rei-flash-50-pack-womens-special-buy>

<http://www.backcountry.com/the-north-face-terra-youth-55-backpack-3350cu-in>

[http://www.amazon.com/Osprey-Jib-35-Backpack-Cherry/dp/B0016XP0ZA/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1331224914&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Osprey-Jib-35-Backpack-Cherry/dp/B0016XP0ZA/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1331224914&sr=8-1)

**Sleeping bag (NOT a big heavy bag. Should weigh less than 3 pounds.)** If you're going to invest in a single item for this trip, I would recommend getting a good sleeping bag. A good down bag like the Kelty Cosmic in the links below will last a scout into his college years and beyond, and will be much lighter and more compact than a heavy synthetic bag.

[http://www.amazon.com/Kelty-Cosmic-Degree-Sleeping-Regular/dp/B004K1D9NK/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476466&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Kelty-Cosmic-Degree-Sleeping-Regular/dp/B004K1D9NK/ref=sr_1_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476466&sr=1-1)

[http://www.sportchalet.com/product/300270\\_3051594.do](http://www.sportchalet.com/product/300270_3051594.do)

Here are some less expensive synthetic sleeping bag options. Heavier and less warm than the Kelty Cosmic, but decent 2nd choices. (Again, I have some loaner sleeping bags.)

[http://www.amazon.com/Suisse-Sport-Adventurer-Ultra-Compactable-Sleeping/dp/B001TR7QZA/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1342383346&sr=1-1&keywords=lightweight+sleeping+bag](http://www.amazon.com/Suisse-Sport-Adventurer-Ultra-Compactable-Sleeping/dp/B001TR7QZA/ref=sr_1_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1342383346&sr=1-1&keywords=lightweight+sleeping+bag)

<http://www.sierratradingpost.com/vaude-43-f-snow-cloud-350-sleeping-bag-synthetic-mummy-for-women~p~4183m/?filterString=sleeping-bags~d~208%2F&colorFamily=01>

<http://www.sierratradingpost.com/alps-mountaineering-20-f-echo-lake-sleeping-bag-synthetic-mummy~p~3233m/?filterString=sleeping-bags~d~208%2F&colorFamily=01>

**Sleeping pad.** Lightweight and cheap is better than heavy and expensive! Don't bring a heavy inflatable pad. If your pad weighs more than 14 ounces, it's too heavy.

[http://www.amazon.com/G-I-FOAM-SLEEPING-PAD-TIES/dp/B004IM4Z66/ref=sr\\_1\\_8?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328477192&sr=1-8](http://www.amazon.com/G-I-FOAM-SLEEPING-PAD-TIES/dp/B004IM4Z66/ref=sr_1_8?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328477192&sr=1-8)

[http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00339NSJ0/ref=cm\\_cr\\_asin\\_lnk](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00339NSJ0/ref=cm_cr_asin_lnk)

**Plastic or aluminum bowl** Don't bring a big army mess kit. All you need is a single bowl. One of the best bowls is a light plastic bowl with a lid, made by Ziploc. You can get them at the grocery store or online:

[http://www.amazon.com/Ziploc-Container-Medium-Square-4-Count/dp/B003UEGNQS/ref=pd\\_sim\\_sbs\\_hpc\\_2](http://www.amazon.com/Ziploc-Container-Medium-Square-4-Count/dp/B003UEGNQS/ref=pd_sim_sbs_hpc_2)

A folding bowl like these will also work very well:

<http://www.amazon.com/Fozzils-Bowlz-Pack-Set-Green/dp/B007MJ9TGS>

**Spoon** (get a lexan-plastic spoon at REI or Walmart for \$2) A long handle makes it easier to eat out of the food pouch.

<http://www.rei.com/product/781529/rei-campware-long-spoon>

**Cup** (lightweight plastic cup, nothing fancy needed)

<http://www.rei.com/product/401090/open-country-plastic-measuring-cup>

<http://www.rei.com/product/830752/rei-campware-cup>

[http://www.amazon.com/Fozzils-Solo-Pack-Bowl-Dish/dp/B0024E00JQ/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1342384255&sr=1-1&keywords=fozzils+cup](http://www.amazon.com/Fozzils-Solo-Pack-Bowl-Dish/dp/B0024E00JQ/ref=sr_1_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1342384255&sr=1-1&keywords=fozzils+cup)

## Toothbrush

**Small tube of toothpaste** (get a trial size tube)

Small travel pack of **diaper wipes**. (better than toilet paper.)

1 ounce bottle of biodegradable liquid **Soap**

[http://www.amazon.com/Sea-Summit-Wilderness-Ounce-89ml/dp/B0029W13A8/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476900&sr=1-2](http://www.amazon.com/Sea-Summit-Wilderness-Ounce-89ml/dp/B0029W13A8/ref=sr_1_2?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476900&sr=1-2)

[http://www.backcountry.com/sea-to-summit-wilderness-wash?CMP\\_SKU=STS0074&MER=0406&CMP\\_ID=SH\\_FRO001&mv\\_pc=r126&003=7162907&010=STS0074-ONECOL-S13OZ&mr:trackingCode=DBB7AEC8-8E50-E011-9324-0019B9C043EB&mr:referralID=NA](http://www.backcountry.com/sea-to-summit-wilderness-wash?CMP_SKU=STS0074&MER=0406&CMP_ID=SH_FRO001&mv_pc=r126&003=7162907&010=STS0074-ONECOL-S13OZ&mr:trackingCode=DBB7AEC8-8E50-E011-9324-0019B9C043EB&mr:referralID=NA)

Small bottle of **Purell hand sanitizer** (get a half ounce bottle, not a big bottle)

Don't bother to bring deodorant, cologne, or other toiletry items. They aren't needed. We will all just stink.

First Aid kit with lighter and tinder (Your scout should already have one of these from scout meetings. Make sure it has the blister dressings in it, as blisters are the most common first aid need. If it doesn't have any blister stuff in it, the best blister dressings are the Johnson and Johnson band-aid blister dressings.)

[http://www.amazon.com/Band-Aid-Adhesive-Bandages-Multi-Day-Protection/dp/B005CPGN1S/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1342385753&sr=1-1&keywords=band+aid+blister](http://www.amazon.com/Band-Aid-Adhesive-Bandages-Multi-Day-Protection/dp/B005CPGN1S/ref=sr_1_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1342385753&sr=1-1&keywords=band+aid+blister)

**Clothing:** (The kids don't need more clothing than what is on this list. Avoid the temptation to pack more. It's not needed, and will take up space and weigh the scout down)

**Sunglasses**

**Baseball Hat** or other sun hat

**Bandanna** or “Buff”

**Warm hat**

**Warm jacket.** This can be a jacket, like a ski jacket or could also be a warm, fuzzy fleece sweater. NOT a cotton sweatshirt, jean jacket, etc.

**Rain jacket with hood and Rain pants** (One of the lightest and least expensive options for rain pants and rain jacket are “DriDucks” rain suits, which can be purchased for less than \$20 for the set.)

[http://www.amazon.com/Dri-Ducks-Hooded-Rainsuit-GREEN/dp/B0038Z2G8I/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476117&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Dri-Ducks-Hooded-Rainsuit-GREEN/dp/B0038Z2G8I/ref=sr_1_1?s=sporting-goods&ie=UTF8&qid=1328476117&sr=1-1)

**Shirt** (I prefer a button up with collar, as it keeps bugs and sun off your neck, but a sports t-shirt made from a sweat wicking fabric will also work.) The shirt should NOT be made from cotton.

**Swimming suit** (also to be used as shorts for hiking)

**2 pair underwear**

**2 pair WOOL hiking socks NO COTTON SOCKS!**

<http://www.sierratradingpost.com/bridgedale-trail-light-socks-for-men-and-women~p~11837/?filterString=mens-hiking-socks~d~362%2F&colorFamily=04>

<http://www.sierratradingpost.com/goodhew-light-hiker-socks-merino-wool-3and4-crew-for-men~p~4832u/?filterString=mens-hiking-socks~d~362%2F&colorFamily=01>

**Trail runners or other running shoes.** Waterproof trail runners are the ideal footwear. Big heavy hiking boots are not required. We aren't doing any mountaineering, so lightweight footwear is best.

**Synthetic or wool Long john top and bottoms** (these will be worn for sleeping; evenings; and for cold days. **NO COTTON.**)

<http://www.sierratradingpost.com/wickers-expedition-weight-comfortrel-bottoms-base-layer-for-kids~p~94335/?filterString=Wickers~b~117%2F&colorFamily=05>

<http://www.sierratradingpost.com/wickers-expedition-weight-comfortrel-top-long-underwear-long-sleeve-for-kids~p~94334/?filterString=Wickers~b~117%2F&colorFamily=12>

<http://www.sierratradingpost.com/wickers-long-underwear-shirt-midweight-moisture-wicking-long-sleeve-for-kids~p~12180/>

**Pants NOT COTTON. NO JEANS.** Polyester or nylon hiking pants or lightweight warm-up pants. Best ones have zip-off legs that double as shorts, but any comfortable, lightweight non-cotton pants will work.

**Snacks:** Some between-meal snacks are a good idea. Bring something that won't crush or melt or go rotten. Dried fruit, jerky, hard candy, are all good choices.

#### **Optional Items:**

**Camera**

**Lightweight liner gloves** (if you have them, they can be nice on cold evenings)

**Hiking poles** (If you have these, bring them. They really help, especially on the downhill sections)

**Light-weight camp shoes** (teva sandals, flip-flops, Crocs, aqua-socks etc. for creek crossings and hanging out in camp)

**Sheath knife** (for turning bigger sticks into smaller sticks)

**Microfiber pack towel** (small, hand-towel size.)

**Fishing gear** (go light.)

Packing light makes for good balance

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