Backpacking

Skill Builders

The two starred Skill Builders activities are required.

1. Make a list of equipment and clothing needed for a backpacking trip. Add specialized items to this list for the following environments: desert, mountain, and beach. Learn ways to take care of yourself by the use of appropriate clothing, food, and water. To learn ways to reduce the size and weight of the items you carry, talk with an experienced backpacker or read a book about lightweight backpacking. Pages 193–194 in Outdoor Education in Girl Scouting will be helpful.

2. Get into shape from the ground up. Choose and break in hiking shoes or boots appropriate to terrain you will be hiking on. Learn proper foot care, including what socks to wear. Develop a plan for conditioning your legs and increasing cardiovascular strength to meet the demands of the terrain and altitude. Take a practice hike with your backpack loaded and make any needed adjustments. Learn to spot signs of fatigue and dehydration and what you can do to avoid them. See pages 34, 38, and 111 in Outdoor Education in Girl Scouting.

3. Learn the first aid treatment for burns, cuts, blisters, sunburn, heat exhaustion, heatstroke, hypothermia, shock, insect stings, ticks, contact with poisonous plants, and a bite by any poisonous animal common to the areas where you plan to travel. Assemble a lightweight first aid kit. Review how you can put a first aid plan into action. See pages 38–39 in Outdoor Education in Girl Scouting, and complete the activities in each section.

4. Learn to use a compass and read a topographical map. Read pages 103–111 in Outdoor Education in Girl Scouting or pages 123–124 in the Cadette Girl Scout Handbook. Then trace out a hiking route on a topographical map. Describe what you would see along the way by visualizing the terrain from the map symbols.

5. Put your minimal impact skills to the test by planning and carrying out a backpacking trip of at least two days. Follow Safeguard guidelines, obtaining permission for each trip and the area where you plan to camp. Submit a written plan that describes the route, emergency procedures, group safety rules, equipment, menus, and names of participants. Develop a plan for building teamwork and sharing leadership among the individuals going on each trip. Before taking the first trip:
   - Be able to explain why a group of four to ten people is most appropriate in a backpacking setting.
   - Know ways to avoid and prevent encounters with wildlife on the trail or when storing food overnight.
   - Know how to avoid insect and tick bites.

Upon your return, evaluate the trip. Make appropriate changes in procedures, teamwork strategies, and gear before your next outing.

Draw your own design for a piece of equipment or clothing that would be useful on a backpacking trip or improve on a current model. If possible, construct and use it on a trip.

Learn about the most common water pollutants in the area where you will be hiking. Find out about methods of purifying water on trips to the backcountry, including at least one "high tech" way. Practice purifying water by using one method.

Compare backpacking stoves operated by butane, propane, blended fuel (propylene and butane), and gasoline. Compare ease of use, weight of stoves, cooking times, suitability for different altitudes, and recommended storage temperature range. Arrange to try out at least two different kinds of stoves. Which stove(s) would be best for general use? Which would work best when backpacking at high altitude or in cold weather? See pages 48–49 in Outdoor Education in Girl Scouting.

Plan the food for at least one backpacking trip. Learn about lightweight foods as well as those that pack best and last without refrigeration. What’s the difference between freeze-dried and dehydrated foods? With your group, consider the cost and size per serving, the efficiency of the packaging, and which foods will provide the maximum energy. If needed, repackage food to eliminate excess weight.

On the Internet, search for information on backpacking, hiking, or outdoor adventures. Look for Web sites with backcountry weather reports, maps, or information on wilderness areas. If possible, use the Web to help plan a trip.

Service Projects

1. Teach younger girls skills such as campsite selection, safe use of a backpacking stove, equipment selection, proper backcountry hygiene, food selection and repackaging.

2. Join a trail maintenance or campsite cleanup effort.

3. Contact a search and rescue group. Train to become a member of a search and rescue team.

4. Work with an environmental organization to complete such tasks as replanting natural resources, collecting and planting native seeds, and protecting wilderness and park areas.

Career Exploration

1. Visit a store that sells camping and backpacking equipment. Learn about job opportunities in this retail business. Ask someone what kinds of skills and experience are necessary for different levels of jobs.

2. Shadow a wildlife biologist, geologist, botanist, or other natural resource professional for a day. Or interview at least two people who work in outdoor recreation. Find out what they do in their jobs, what challenges they enjoy and don’t enjoy. Ask them to trace their career paths for you.

3. Contact by phone or in writing two manufacturers of camping and backpacking equipment for information about careers in designing and manufacturing outdoor equipment.

4. Talk with two trip leaders or outfitters of various high adventure programs such as backpacking, white-water rafting, or horse packing. Ask questions about what they must do to plan trips, provide meals, and offer a safe but challenging program. What kinds of training, permits, and insurance are necessary to run an adventure-based business?

Investigate career opportunities related to backpacking such as working with recreational, outdoor, or environmental clubs and organizations.

Become familiar with these minimal impact camping principles:

Plan and prepare.

CAMP and travel on durable surfaces.

Pack it in; pack it out.

Properly dispose of what you can’t pack out.

Leave what you find.

Minimize the use and impact of fires.

Outdoor Education in Girl Scouting is an excellent resource and some camping experience will prove beneficial. Get out your pack and hit the trail softly!