

Turtle Tips #1 – Equipment 2013

Guide: I suggest that as a backpacking leader, you find and read a good backpacking book. I like Colin Fletcher's *The Complete Walker III*. However it is a bit dated and may be out of print. I will ask around for a newer guide and get back to you if I find one. Version IV is out and may still be in print

The text of these Turtle Tips and associated lists will be posted on the District Web Site (<http://www.SKCBSA.org/buckeye>) shortly after they are delivered.

Equipment List: Start out with an Equipment List. I have provided a sample but you can customize it to meet your needs. Once you have developed an Equipment List, your hikers need to understand that it is not a suggestion. All the items on the list must be included and no additional items should be taken. Each hiker should have a list ahead of time and check off items as they go into the pack. Note that the list includes everything that goes including the clothes that the hiker is wearing.

Before starting, do a pack inspection to make sure that everything is there and there is nothing extra. Missing items may jeopardize the hiker, the group, or completing the hike. Extra items take up load space and weight that will be needed for Group Equipment. Remove extra equipment and attempt to provide missing items. Depending on the importance of the missing items, the hiker may need to be left behind if the missing items cannot be replaced.

Make sure your adults understand that the Equipment List applies to them. It is common for adults to think that if boys can do the hike, it will be easy for them. This is often not the case.

Go Light: The key to enjoying backpacking is going as light as possible. For beginning and younger hikers, the total pack weight should be less than 20 to 25% of their body weight. Young hikers will not be able to carry their personal gear and their full share of the group gear. This means that adults and older hikers will have to carry more than their share. Experienced adults and older hikers can usually handle a third or more of their body weight. However, this will slow them down and make the hike less enjoyable.

I have always had 11 year olds on the week long wilderness 50-milers that I have lead. Older scouts and adults just have to pick up some of the load. For longer trips, you may need to cache some of your food to be picked up along the way. Ranger facilities, visitor centers, stores, etc make good places to leave food to be picked up later.

As a side benefit, as the troop gains backpacking skill, the logistics of weekend camping will become easier. There will be much less gear to transport and carry in to the campsite.

As a leader, do not carry more than you can handle. If you are at the end of your endurance, you will not have the extra energy that you need to lead and make the hike a success for all the hikers. Hand off some of the load to others. You don't need to carry the biggest pack to be the leader!

The Pack: The pack is one of the most important pieces of equipment in the list.

There are many types of packs available today. Most true backpacks with a frame will work or can be made to work. Traditional backpacks have an external frame with the pack bag fastened to the frame with pins. Internal frame packs have the bag built around the frame. The internal frame pack fits closer to the back. This is great for rugged hiking but is can be very hot on the back in warm weather.

The pack must have a full waist belt. It should be 4 to 6 inches wide and go completely around the waist (actually around the top of the hips). The pack should hang from it at the sides. Cheap packs will have a narrow (1 to 2 inch) belt that is fastened directly to the frame on each side. This is unsatisfactory. It will not transfer enough of the load to the hips. Also, it often pushes the pack frame into the back or buttocks of smaller hikers. Add-on waist belts can be purchased for about \$10 from local stores or CampMore. Do not let hikers attempt the Turtle without a full waist belt.

The pack should fit. The frame should not go higher than the head or extend down significantly below the hips. A \$25 K-Mart special with an add-on waist belt will work better than a \$150 JanSport that is too big.

There should be space to carry tents and group food bags at the top of the pack. This may be under the top flap or tied to a top shelf. There should also be a space at the bottom to carry a sleeping bag and pad. Adjustable straps are the best for fastening on the extra equipment. Sometime hikers will attempt to tie a

sleeping bag on with a rope or cord. This often results in the bag falling off in the first hundred yards of the hike. While this may be instructive in a shakedown, it causes lots of delays on a real hike.

I have found that three cords tied to the frame provides a reliable mount that young hikers can handle. Tie the first to each side of the frame just below the bag. Leave enough length to form a loop that will go almost half way around the bag. Tie the second cord to one side of the frame at the bottom. Tie a loop in the end of the cord leaving the total length about six inches. Tie the final cord to the frame at the other side of the bottom. Leave it about 18 inches long. To tie on the bag, lay it in place. Take the loose end of the last cord over the bag, through the top loop, and back down and through the loop on the end of the second cord. Pull tight and secure with a half hitch (or a half hitch on the bight). Tuck the extra cord under one of the loops to keep it from hanging down.

Make sure that everything goes in the pack or is securely tied on. Hikers should have nothing in the hands, on slings, hanging from the pack or on a belt. Extra stuff gets in the way, gets lost, and makes getting the pack on or off a problem.

Boots: Good hiking boots with a steel shank are necessary for larger hikers who are carrying heavy. Light shoes without a heavy sole and steel shank will usually result in bruised feet after a day of walking on gravel and rocks. They also protect the feet and ankles when the going gets rough. However, good hiking boots are probably an unreasonable investment for smaller hikers who will grow out of them quickly. The relatively lighter load on their feet seldom causes blisters or bruising even in canvas athletic shoes or inexpensive boots.

Make sure that the boots are broken in. Wear them around the house and yard to start the process. However, they won't be fully broken in until they have been hiked in. If new boots are in the picture, make sure that they are purchased before starting the shakedown hikes. This is particularly important for adults and hikers who will be carrying heavy. The extra load will cause blisters with new boots.

Clothing: You will notice that the amount of clothing is limited. You don't need (and can't carry) enough clothes for changing every day. The clothing on the list will be sufficient for a week long trip, particularly if you let them dry before you pack them away.

You will usually be hiking under the canopy in the summer. This means that you will sweat and the air and ground will be damp. You will find that clothes made of man made fibers or wool will get less damp and will dry quicker. Cotton will get wet and dry slowly. I find that cotton shorts result in massive rash after a few days. I recommend poly blend shorts and wool or poly blend socks.

Pull over pants allow you to put them on over your shorts in the morning when it is cool and remove them without taking off you boots when you are ready to start. They are also much lighter than a pair of jeans. The new pants with zip off legs seem like they would suffice for shorts and long pants but I haven't tried them.

I often change my socks several times during the day, as they get damp. The damp ones always go on the back of my pack securely tucked under some straps until they are dry.

A backpacker poncho (one with an extra long back side) works well and covers your pack. In addition, by using the 10' cords to tie the corners to trees, it makes a dandy shelter for cooking or eating a meal in camp or along the way. While it is not quite as dry as full GorTex rain gear, it is lighter, cheaper, more versatile, and protects your pack.

I find that a light wool sweater works best for a long sleeve shirt. It will slip over a tee shirt and keep you warm in the evening and early morning. In cool damp weather, I find the sweater and shorts are quite comfortable. It will also shed a light drizzle without moving to a poncho.

Cooking/Eating: A spoon and a Sierra Cup work well for most backpacking food. If you like coffee or tea with your meal, bring a small plastic cup.

Each hiker must have water bottles to store at least 2 quarts of water. This is enough to get you through at least half a day of hiking under most conditions. If you know that there is water is available along the way, filling only a quart is an option. Get in the habit of taking the bottles full from home. This prevents scrambling around at the trailhead or going off without enough water.

Organization: I recommend that everything that is in the main part of the pack be collected into nylon stuff sacks or ZipLock bags. This will keep things dry and easy to find. It also keeps your week old socks out of your Sierra cup. If your pack has side or back pockets, use them for things that you need to get while you are on the trail or that you need often or quickly. Examples are water bottle, snack food, poncho, first aid kit, soap,

etc. If you don't have pockets, keep these items in the top of the pack near an opening so they are easy to get to.

Group Equipment: A significant part of the total load is gear and supplies that are best shared with the entire group. I will discuss this equipment in a later session. This equipment will need to be distributed to the group with the bulk to the larger hikers. It can also be shifted during the hike from the slower hikers to the faster ones to balance things.

I find that a set of large stuff sacks (8" dia x 20" long) work well to pack group food and equipment for distribution among the hikers.