

Turtle Tips #5 – A Day in the Life ... 2013

Overview: This Turtle Tip will describe a day in a backpacking trip. While the Turtle is a relatively controlled environment, it is a good chance to develop the skills necessary for a wilderness trip.

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.

Morning: It's still dark out but there is a hint of light in the east. Time to get up. It cooled down enough during the night to sleep well but it's going to be another scorcher like yesterday.

You call out to each of the scouts by name and wait for them to respond. "Time to get up. Breakfast will be ready as soon as you get your gear packed and your tent down." You dress, stuff your sleeping bag and roll your pad. Fasten them on your pack, step into your shoes and climb out. After a quick call of nature, you bring out your pack and start a stove with a pot of water.

You have a look around and encourage a couple of scouts to get moving. All the boys are now moving but slowly. Your tent mate is out and you start folding your tent. Now it's on your pack. Some of the boys are out of their tents and starting to take them down.

You get out the dried fruit that you started rehydrating last night and break out the bag of breakfast cereal and the bag of hot chocolate mix. The water is now boiling, turn the stove down to a simmer, and get a cup of coffee. Take a minute to see how your scouts are doing. Mike is sitting on his pack staring into space. "Mike, put your shoes on and get your tent down."

It is now a half hour after you started moving. It is light enough to see and most of the tents are down. Some of the boys are starting to eat. Encourage the slow scouts and get your own breakfast.

As breakfast draws to a close, send a crew to fill water bottles. "We will have a long ridge trail this morning so everyone is to start with two full quarts of water." Clean and repack the cook gear. Send everyone off to finish their morning hygiene. "Packs on in 5 minutes." As always there are last minute bathroom trips, foot surgery, and pack packing. After 10 or 15 minutes everyone is ready to move. Take a last look around to make sure the campsite is clear and that nothing is left behind.

Your pack is now on and it is now light enough to see easily. The pack straps and boots hurt for a while but that goes away and you enjoy the feeling of moving out in the quiet of the morning with an experienced crew. You feel good! This is what it is all about!

When hiking in the summer in Ohio, you will probably want to start as soon as it is light. This will let you get your 10 miles or so in by early afternoon before the day gets too hot. If you are hiking in the mountains or in a cooler season, you may want to start a bit later. If it is a rainy morning, you may want to wait it out with a long breakfast and avoid breaking camp in the rain.

On the Trail: After an hour and a half or two hours, you start looking for a sunny spot to take a break and have a second breakfast. Some downed logs will make a nice place to sit. Pop tarts and breakfast bars will top off the breakfast you started in camp. Soak up the sun and enjoy the start of another day.

Try to limit your rest stops to one every two hours or so. You can stop with your pack on to get water or a snack from time to time. If the packs come off, it will take most of a half hour to get the group moving again. You will probably need to stop more often with inexperienced crews but still try to delay them. Make sure that every scout has a water bottle and snacks in a pocket that can be reached while walking (or at least accessible by a companion while walking).

I try not to stop at the bottom of a hill (unless I need water), or part way up a long climb. Also, after I have made it to the top, I like to walk for a while to cool off before stopping.

Keep track of where you are and where you would like to be at the end of the day. Note the time when you pass a landmark. You will quickly get a handle on how fast you are moving which will let you estimate your position. Try to get your scouts to keep track of where they are. Every hiker should have a map and keep it handy. (I keep mine in a plastic bag behind my head stuffed under my tent.)

Keep track of your crew. Count heads. If someone is missing, find him. Now!

Lunch: As it starts to get to midday, you will want to look for a place for lunch. If you can get down to a creek or river, you will often find it a bit cooler and there may even be a breeze. If your scouts are moving well, you may want a quick lunch of bread, meat, and cheese or a large helping of trail snacks. If your scouts are getting tired or if you have a long way to go, I find that a lunch of soup will pep up everyone. Your scouts may want to spread out their sleeping pads and take a real break while lunch is cooking.

On the Trail Again: Hopefully, you don't have too far to hike in the afternoon. However, if you find that you need to make up some time, the early start will help. As it gets hotter, make sure your scouts are drinking. You can do a standing stop to get out water and snacks. This is the time to watch how your scouts are doing. Don't forget that adults can get into trouble as well. One of the advantages of being in the back is that is where the hikers in trouble will end up. Watch how they move their feet. If they drag their feet (more than normal), trip often, or generally flop their feet around, try to find out what is wrong. It is often a lack of food or water. Call a standing stop to get some trail snacks and water. Keep an eye on them. If necessary, call for an extra rest stop. Try to get quick energy foods (sugars) into them. Shift weight to others if you can. If a number of hikers are getting into trouble, consider stopping early if that is an option. Study the map. If the trail ahead is level, even tired scouts can make good time. However, if there are climbs or rough trail, a tired crew will move very slowly.

End of the Trail: Finally, it is time to stop. After a short break, get tents up and gear out to dry. Don't put this off. The tents need to dry and afternoon showers can come up quickly. String up a poncho for a cook shelter if there is any chance of rain before morning. Keeping equipment dry is a continual fight. An early stop provides a chance for drying. String up some lines in the sun and put out clothes and bags. Always remind the boys to take down their gear before nightfall (they won't remember).

After a flurry of activity getting tents up, it is time to rest. Spread out your sleeping pad and take a break. If there is a creek or river near, the boys can get clean and cool off. Discourage eating into tomorrow's trail snacks.

After resting for an hour or two, sometimes it is good to walk a little. This is a good time to fill water bottles, treat any injuries, repair gear, etc.

Supper: As the evening draws near, it is time for supper. Pick the supper to match the day. If everyone is beat, some dried applesauce to start may get everyone moving.

Take time to make and enjoy supper. There is no rush. Make a great meal. Take your time enjoying it. If you were able to scrounge some apples or berries, think of making a desert of them.

When supper is done and cleaned up, get ready for breakfast. Find the food bag with breakfast. Put some fruit in a pot to rehydrate. If you have critters, put a big rock on it, tie it up in a tree, or put it in your tent depending on what is likely to want to eat it (or you).

Make sure that clothes, boots, and gear are gathered up and put into tents. Scouts tend to forget to bring things in. You need to check. Hiking in wet boots tomorrow isn't likely to make a scout more careful in the future and it will sure slow the group if he gets blisters. Food bags and trash bags need to be put away. Even small critters will make a mess of them.

Night: After supper, I like to wash off if there is a source of water. I find I can sleep better if I don't stick to the sleeping bag. Give the boys a chance to clean up but don't force it. They don't seem to be as sensitive to that sort of thing as do adults.

Then it is time for bed. It may still be light. However, the tent will be free of bugs and you have nothing better to do than rest. The boys need a full 8 or 9 hours of rest (and you could probably use it also).

Make sure that feet are clean and dry before going to bed. Remove socks. In most cases, remove band aids on the feet to let blisters dry out. Don't try to remove moleskin that is in good shape (removing will probably cause more damage). Clean up any cuts or scratches. Put lotion on any rash (it is easy to get a nasty rash from clothes that get sweaty and never quite dry out in the humidity under the canopy).

Finally, lay back, listen to the whippoorwills, and think of the day you had and the one that will come tomorrow. Good night.