

Turtle Tips #1 - Equipment

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.

The text of these Turtle Tips and associated lists will be posted on the District Web Site (<http://www.scouters.org/buckeye.htm>) 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.

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 it 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.