



Backpacking

Scouts BSA · Outdoors

Name

Started

Completed

Backpacking lets you carry everything you need and head deep into the backcountry. This badge builds your skills step by step, from packing light to planning your own multi-day trek. It's challenging, but the views and the sense of accomplishment are worth every mile.

Requirements

Every official requirement, in plain language. Check the official wording when you sign off (scouting.org/merit-badges/backpacking/). Tips and examples are ideas, not extra requirements.

- ☐ **1** Discuss how to prevent and treat health problems on a backpacking trip: blisters, dehydration, hypothermia, frostbite, heat reactions, insect stings, tick bites, and snakebite

Tip: Learn how to prevent and treat blisters, dehydration, and heat or cold problems. A first aid class makes this easier.

2 Essentials and pack weight

Tips for this section: Weigh your gear on a bathroom scale and look for items you can leave behind or share with your crew.

Example for this section: Cut weight with real swaps: repack food into zip bags, bring one pot your crew shares instead of one each, swap a heavy cotton hoodie for a light fleece, and split the tent so one person carries the body and another the poles and fly.

- ☐ **2a** List the 10 Scout Basic Essentials for any backpacking trek and explain why you need each one

- ☐ **2b** Describe 10 ways to cut the weight and bulk of your pack without risking your health or safety

3 Trek crews and safety

Tips for this section: Talk through what your crew would do if someone got hurt or lost. Leave a trip plan with someone at home.

Example for this section: An emergency plan could say: a crew of eight with two trained adults, a written route and return time left with someone at home, a designated bail-out trail at the halfway point, and a plan for who stays with an injured hiker and who goes for help.

- ☐ **3a** Explain how many backpackers make a good trek crew, including limits on crew size

- ☐ **3b** Describe how to organize a trek crew

- ☐ **3c** Tell how you would reduce risk on a backpacking trek

- ☐ **3d** Explain why a trek needs an emergency response plan

4 Leave No Trace and campsites

Tips for this section: Practice Leave No Trace on every outing. Choose durable campsites away from water and trails.

- ☐ **4a** Describe why following Leave No Trace's Seven Principles and the Outdoor Code matters on a trek, and give at least 5 ways your crew can reduce its impact

- ☐ **4b** Describe how to handle human and other waste on a trek, and why and how to keep yourself clean

- ☐ **4c** Tell what matters most when picking a campsite

5 Water

Tips for this section: Practice your water treatment method at home before the trip. Drink often, not just when you're thirsty.

- ☐ **5a** Show 2 ways to treat water and tell why treating water is essential

- ☐ **5b** Explain to your counselor why staying well hydrated on a trek is important

6 Navigation

Tips for this section: Practice with a map and compass in a park before going on trail. Keep track of where you are as you hike.

Example for this section: Before a trek, mark your route on a topographic map, note the steepest climbs where contour lines bunch together, and take bearings to two landmarks. On trail, check the map at every junction and say out loud where you are.

- ☐ **6a** Show that you can read a topographic map

- ☐ **6b** On a trek, find your position at 3 different places with a map and compass, or with a GPS receiver, locating yourself both on the map and on the ground

- ☐ **6c** Explain how to avoid getting lost and what to do if you do get lost

- ☐ **7** Tell how to get ready for and handle bad weather

Tip: Check the forecast before you go and pack rain gear and layers for the worst likely weather.

Example: Pack for the worst likely weather: a rain jacket and pack cover, a warm layer that works wet, and dry socks in a bag. Talk through what your crew does if thunder starts while you're on an open ridge.

8 Stoves and trail cooking

Tips for this section: Practice lighting and using your stove at home with an adult. Plan simple, light meals that cook fast.

Example for this section: A trail menu for a day: oatmeal with dried fruit, tortillas with peanut butter and jerky for lunch, and a one-pot pasta with dehydrated vegetables for dinner. Practice cooking it at home with an adult on the same stove you'll carry.

- ☐ **8a** Explain the pros and cons of different backpacking stoves that use at least 3 different fuels

- ☐ **8b** Show that you can run a backpacking stove and handle liquid fuel safely

- ☐ **8c** Cook 3 meals on a stove, using fuel light enough to carry in your pack

- ☐ **8d** Show you can keep your cook kit and eating gear clean and germ-free, and that you store food properly on a trek

9 Plan and hike a 2-mile trek

Tips for this section: Lay out everyone's gear on a tarp to inspect it together. Put heavy items close to your back.

- ☐ **9a** Write a plan, including a schedule, for a patrol or crew backpacking hike of 2 miles or more

- ☐ **9b** Inspect the patrol and its gear before the hike

- ☐ **9c** Show how to pack your own gear plus your part of the crew's shared gear and food

- ☐ **9d** Show you can put on your pack and adjust it to fit correctly

- ☐ **9e** Using your plan from 9a, carry your fully loaded pack on a hike of at least 2 miles

- ☐ **10** Take at least 3 backpacking treks, each at least 3 days and 15 miles with at least 2 campsites, carrying all you need and following Leave No Trace and the Outdoor Code

Tip: Start with shorter hikes to build up strength. Keep notes on each trek so you can share them with your counselor.

11 Plan and take a 5-day trek

Tips for this section: Plan your route, food, and gear with your crew. Write in your journal each night while it's fresh.

Example for this section: Keep a nightly journal on your five-day trek: miles hiked, weather, what went well, what you'd change, and one moment you want to remember. These notes make your counselor conversation easy.

- ☐ **11a** Plan in writing a trek of at least 5 days, 30 miles, and 3 campsites, covering the area and route, daily schedule, food and gear lists, safety and emergency plans, and budget

- ☐ **11b** Take the trek you planned in 11a (at least 5 full days, 30 miles, 3 campsites) following Leave No Trace and the Outdoor Code, and do at least 1 counselor-approved service project on the trek

- ☐ **11c** Keep a daily journal on the trek describing each day's activities, what worked well, and ideas to improve the next trek