Campsite Considerations

Location

A campsite facing the south or southeast will get more sunlight and generally will be drier than one on the north side of a hill or in the shade of mountains or cliffs. Cold, damp air tends to settle, causing the bottoms of valleys to be more cool and moist than locations a little higher. On the other hand, hilltops and sharp ridges can be very windy and should be avoided in lightning-prone areas.

Size and shape

A good campsite has plenty of space for your tents and enough room to conduct your activities. It should be usable as it is, so you won't need to do any digging or major rock removal to shape the area. The less rearranging you do, the easier it will be to follow Leave No Trace principles and leave the site exactly as you found it.

Protection

Consider the direction of the wind and the direction from which a storm will approach. Is your campsite in the open or is it protected by a hill or a stand of trees? Is there a solitary tree nearby that may attract lightning? Don't camp under dead trees or trees with dead branches that may come down in a storm or light wind. The best campsites are found near small, forested ridges and hills.

Insects and animals

All creatures have their favorite habitats. The best way to avoid mosquitoes and biting flies is to camp away from marshes, bogs, and pools of stagnant water. Breezes discourage insects, so you might look for an elevated, open campsite. Don't forget to check around for beehives, hornet nests, and ant mounds; their inhabitants usually won't bother you as long as you leave them alone, but give them plenty of room. The same goes for most animals.

Ground cover

Any vegetation covering a campsite will receive a lot of wear and tear. Tents will smother it, sleepers will pack it down, and walkers will bruise it with the soles of their shoes. Some ground cover is tough enough to absorb the abuse, but much of it is not. Whenever you can, make your camp on naturally bare earth, sand, graveled soil, or ground covered with pine needles or leaves.

Drainage

While a campsite should be relatively flat, it should slope enough to allow rainwater to run off. However, you don't want to be in the path of natural drainage. Check uphill from where you plan to set up your tent to make sure water won't run through the site. Never camp in a stream bed! Also, you want to avoid depressions in the ground, as even shallow ones can collect water in a storm.

Group Camping Gear (Pack, Den, Patrol, Troop)

Required Items

o First-aid kit
o Food
o Cooking utensils as needed by menu, or cook kit
o Stove and fuel, or firewood, charcoal, and cooking grate
o Matches, fire starters, charcoal chimney-style lighters
o Aluminum foil
o Biodegradable soap
o Sanitizing agent (liquid bleach)
o Plastic scouring pads, dish mop, wash tubs
o 100 feet of quarter-inch rope
o Water containers
o Trash bags
o Paper towels
o U.S. flag, pack flag
o Repair kit (rubber bands, safety pins, sewing gear)
o Toilet paper
o Shovel
o Cooler
o Activity gear (game materials, craft supplies, etc.)

Spare Items

o Tent stakes
o Fuel canisters
o Ground cloth or tarp
o Insect repellent
o Eating utensils
o Blanket

Optional Items

o Dutch oven
o Marshmallows, popcorn, etc.
o Cooking fly or tarp
o Musical instruments
o Lawn chairs, camp stools

Leave No Trace

In the early years of our nation, you could have camped almost anywhere. The population of the country was small. In fact, most of the land was wilderness. Towns, roads, and farms were few. There weren't yet many demands on the land. As the nation grew, its needs began to turn much of the land into farms and cities. Dams tamed rivers to provide electrical power. People cleared forests for lumber and to make room for crops.

The open country that remains today is home to a rich variety of animals and plants. It is the source of clean water for everyone to drink, and its vegetation freshens the air we breathe. When you want to camp and hike, you can visit parks, forests, and Scout camps across the nation. With that freedom comes a duty to care for the environment. That means enjoying the outdoors, learning from it, and then leaving it as you found it. Scouts do this by following the principles of Leave No Trace—guidelines for traveling and camping without leaving any signs you were there.

Scouting's Trail to Outdoor Ethics

For more than a century, the Boy Scouts of America has been a leader in teaching the conservation of natural resources. The 1910 edition of the Boy Scout Handbook included a Conservation merit badge. To earn that badge, Scouts had to learn the value of timberland, the causes of water pollution, what made a farm field suitable for growing crops, and which game animals could be found nearby. William T. Hornaday, director of the New York Zoological Park and a strong supporter of Scouting, made a plea in the Handbook's second edition (1914) for Scouts to help preserve wildlife habitat. The Gold Award of the Permanent Wild Life Protection Fund (later renamed the William T. Hornaday Award) was created to recognize Scouts who were making special efforts to care for the environment.

In the decades that followed, Handbooks continued to encourage Scouts to see themselves as protectors of nature. In 1948, the BSA introduced the Outdoor Code—a conservation pledge that Scouts could use during all of their outdoor adventures. Scouts continued to increase their skills and to make their way deeper into the backcountry. They were paddling, pedaling, and climbing farther than ever before. They were learning to feel at home in wilderness areas. As they understood more about the impact they could have, they increased their efforts to protect trails and campgrounds. Handbooks and merit badge pamphlets discussed minimum-impact camping, and the BSA encouraged the use of camp stoves in places where campfires might scar the land. Other groups were moving in the same direction as they encouraged people who liked going to the outdoors to help care for it, too.

In the early 1990s, a number of federal land-management agencies agreed that Leave No Trace would give everyone basic guidelines for using the outdoors responsibly and a common

language for discussing the best ways to minimize our recreational impacts. Today, the principles of Leave No Trace are used throughout America. Scouting is proud to be a partner in this ongoing effort.

Using Leave No Trace

Scouting's adventures cover a wide range of activities—from tenting at public campgrounds and BSA council camps to backpacking many miles through forests, deserts, and mountains. Think about outdoor ethics and Leave No Trace wherever you hike, camp, or do any other outdoor activity, and do your best to follow its principles. Make them a guide for how you conduct yourself in the outdoors.

LEAVE NO TRACE SEVEN PRINCIPLES*

*The member-driven Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics teaches people how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly. This copyrighted information has been reprinted in the Den Leader Guide with permission from the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics: www.LNT.org

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare

Good leadership happens when you have a vision of what a successful adventure will look like. Plan the steps to put yourself and your den into that picture. Being ready for the challenges that might arise is such an important part of Scouting that Be Prepared is the Scout motto! A lack of planning can lead to unintended damage to equipment and the land.

Planning and being prepared are important for protecting the outdoors, too. Plan ahead and you'll know what to expect wherever you are going. You can find out from land managers if there will be limits on the size of your group and what permission you might need to obtain. The land managers also might suggest other ways you can lessen your impact.

2. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

Durable surfaces are areas that will not be damaged by your footsteps, bicycles, or tents. A trail is a good example of a durable surface. The soil of the trail tread has become so compacted that little can grow there. By staying on existing trails, you are protecting the surrounding landscape and the plants and animals that live there. Scout camps and many public parks and forests already have durable campsites laid out. If there are no designated camping areas, make your camp on sand, gravel, rock, compacted soil, dry grasses, or snow. All of these are durable surfaces. Carelessness in choosing a campsite and hiking or pedaling where there is no trail can harm the land in several ways. Campers walking to and from cooking areas, water sources, and their tents can trample plant communities, pack down the soil, and form unwanted pathways. Hikers and cyclists using the edges of trails or going off a trail to get around a rutted or muddy stretch can widen pathways unnecessarily. Taking shortcuts, especially down hillsides, almost always leads to damage from erosion. Pitch your tents well away from streams

and lakes. This will allow animals to reach the water and will lessen your impact on shorelines. In addition, try to camp in the forest away from meadows and the trees at their edge. Deeper in the woods you will be sheltered from sun and wind, and your camp will blend into its surroundings. You are also less likely to beat down meadow grasses or to frighten away animals that use meadows as feeding grounds. Camping away from meadows is especially important in mountainous regions. Camping on top of fragile alpine meadow vegetation can cause it serious harm. Make your high-elevation camps in established campsites or on bare ground or nowfields.

3. Dispose of Waste Properly

Getting rid of human waste outdoors requires special care. In campgrounds that have restrooms or outhouses, be sure to use them. Where there are no such facilities, follow the guidance of local land managers. They are likely to direct you to dig a cathole. Digging a Cathole—Find a private spot at least 200 feet (75 steps) from water, campsites, and trails. Dig a hole 6 to 8 inches deep (4 to 6 inches in more arid areas) with your heel, a stick, or a trowel. Relieve yourself, and then refill the cathole with the soil. Organisms in the topsoil will safely break down the waste. Replace pine needles, leaves, or other ground cover. Push a stick into the ground to warn against digging in the same place. Always use a hand sanitizer afterward, or wash your hands with camp soap and plenty of water. Disposing of Dishwater—Strain food bits out of your dishwater and put them in your trash. Carry dishwater and rinse water away from your camp and at least 75 steps from any streams or lakes. Give the water a good fling to spread it over a wide area. For long stays at one site, dig a sump hole at the edge of camp and at least 75 steps from streams, lakes, or other open water. The sump should be about a foot across and 2 feet deep. Use a sieve to catch food particles as you pour dishwater into a sump. Empty the particles into a trash bag to carry home, or consult with a land manager on proper disposal. Fill the sump when you break camp. Replace any ground cover.

4. Leave What You Find

Among the joys of being outdoors is finding evidence of the natural world and of our past. Resist the temptation to collect antlers, petrified wood, unusual rocks, alpine flowers, and other natural souvenirs. Hikers coming after you will want to enjoy these items, too. Removing almost anything can change an environment in ways that might have a negative effect on wildlife and plant communities. Leave a place in as good a condition as you found it by removing everything that you bring into an area. Don’t leave structures or furniture at a campsite, and don’t dig trenches. “Pack it in, pack it out” is good advice when it comes to food wrappers, cans, paper, and whatever else you have carried to camp or along a trail.

5. Minimize Campfire Impacts

Many Scouts use stoves rather than campfires on all their camping trips. Without a wood fire at the center of a camp, they often find that they are more aware of their surroundings and of the night sky. Stoves are clean, quick to heat water and cook food, and easy to light in any weather. Best of all, they leave no marks on the land. Campfires have their place, too. A fire can warm you, dry your clothes, and provide a focal point for gathering with friends. Bright flames can lift your spirits on a rainy morning. At night, glowing embers can stir your imagination. Good Scouts know how to build a fire, especially in an emergency. They also know there are often reasons not to light one. Campfires can char the ground, blacken rocks, and sterilize soil. Vegetation might have a hard time growing where a fire has been. Fires consume branches, bark, and other organic material that would have provided shelter and food for animals and plants. Campfires must be closely watched to prevent them from spreading into surrounding grasses, brush, and trees. Find out ahead of time if the area where you want to camp permits the use of fires. If you build one, use an existing fire ring and use wood no thicker than your wrist. Dispose of ashes properly. Even where fires are allowed, a lightweight stove can make it easier for you to camp without leaving a trace.

6. Respect Wildlife

Among the great pleasures of outdoor adventure is sharing your surroundings with wildlife. When you are in the backcountry, you are visiting the creatures' homes. It is important to be a good guest. Travel quietly and give animals enough space so that you don't disturb them. Avoid nesting sites, feeding areas, and other places critical to wildlife. Chasing or picking up wild animals causes them stress and can affect their ability to survive. Many Scouts learn to track and stalk wildlife to study animals, photograph them, and learn about their habits. Do so with great care and respect. You are too close if an animal changes its activities because of your presence. Plan your trips so that you can protect your food from wildlife. This is especially important when you will share the woods with bears. Bears that find food in campsites might come back for more, and that can be dangerous for the animals and for campers. Keep your camp clean and hang your food from trees or store it in bearproof containers.

7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Scouts are not alone in wanting to go on outdoor adventures. You're likely to pass a few people on a hiking trail, or perhaps dozens. You could find yourself sharing a council camp with other BSA troops. In public parks and forests, your patrol might spend the night near campers who are not Scouts. Be considerate of everyone you meet along the way. They have come to the outdoors to enjoy nature, to hike, and to camp in the open air. Some want to get away from it all—including other people. Respect their privacy. If you can, select campsites away from those of other campers. Trees, bushes, and the shape of the terrain can screen your camp from trails and neighboring campsites. Tents with muted colors that blend into the background will reduce

the visual impact of your camp. Leave portable music players at home and hold down noise in your den and pack. Keeping noise to a minimum will make it easier to appreciate the outdoors, and you will be less likely to disturb wildlife and other backcountry travelers. Sometimes it might be appropriate to go with your adult leaders to introduce yourselves to nearby campers and let them know you are Scouts who follow the principles of Leave No Trace. Ask if there is anything you can do to help make the experience good for everyone.