



## Backpacking

**Activity Permitted for:** J C S A

**Not Recommended for:** Daisies and Brownies

**Council Approval:** Required as per Council Policy P1; [Activity/Trip Permission \(2129\)](#)

**Vendor Approval:** Not Required

**Required Training:** At least one adult must be trained in backpacking: GS 302A Backpacking Planning & GS 302B Backpacking Overnight in addition to prerequisite training. See below for additional required training prerequisites.

### About Backpacking

A backpacker's primary mission is to explore on foot, while carrying all their gear in a backpack and being a good steward of the land. These checkpoints focus on preparing for backpacking in remote areas, but the recommendations can be used in urban areas too.

Backpacking is not recommended for Daisies and Brownies because of the equipment used in backpacking trips (see below) and the longer duration of the activity. Hiking is recommended for Daisies and Brownies to prepare them for the adventure of backpacking at the next grade level.

When choosing a destination, connect with your Girl Scout council for site suggestions, such as Girl Scout camps.

### Learn More

- [AmericanTrails.org](https://www.americantrails.org)
- [Backpacker.com](https://www.backpacker.com)
- [LeaveNoTrace.org](https://www.leaveonotrace.org)

### Include Girl Scout Members with Disabilities

Talk to Girl Scout members with disabilities and their caregivers. Ask about needs and accommodations. Contact the location and/or local, state, or national parks to inquire about their accommodations for people with disabilities. To find resources to adapt various sports, including backpacking, to persons of all abilities visit [Move United](#). To find backpacking programs for youth of various abilities contact [No Barriers USA](#) and [Wilderness Inquiry](#).

**Equity.** In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the Girl Scout members in your troop that could affect their ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with members and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that

all Girl Scout members and their families feel comfortable and have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as proper equipment, prior experiences, and the skills needed to enjoy the activity.

**Infectious Disease Guidelines.** Girl Scouts use a commonsense approach to health and safety. Before participating in Girl Scouting activities, members are to undergo health checks at home for any symptoms such as fever of 100.4 (or need for fever-reducing medications) chills, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, stomach aches, nausea, or vomiting. Members with any of these symptoms or in need of fever-reducing medication **MUST** stay home until fully recovered.

**Emergency Action Plan (EAP).** Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) before taking girls out for any activity and review it with the girls so they too are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury to a girl, missing girl, sudden illness, or sudden weather or water emergencies. Share your backpacking route and itinerary with your emergency contact and council. **Stay aware of fire ban laws. Fire bans stay in effect February 15 through April 30 each year.**

### Backpacking Checkpoints

**Training Prerequisites.** Troop/Group Program leaders must complete GSUSA's online leadership courses and GSVSC's 281 GS 201 Trips & Overnights course in gsLearn, as well as GS 301A Outdoor Education Planning in gsLearn, and GS 301B Outdoor Education Overnight in an outdoor setting. *Volunteers must have completed prerequisite courses and have experience in leading local trips and camping overnight with troops or groups before progressing to backpacking activities.*

**Required Training.** For troops or groups to participate in this activity, at least one adult volunteer must be trained in backpacking as required by your council: GS 302A Backpacking Planning & GS 302B Backpacking Overnight.

**Encourage girls to share resources.** Have your troop make a list of needed gear and supplies and determine which items can be shared. This way no girl is carrying a heavier backpack than necessary.

**Choose an appropriate backpacking route.** The route chosen needs to be within the abilities of every person in the group and the pace needs to accommodate the slowest backpacker. Determine the length of the trip by the backpackers' grade levels, level of experience and ability, physical condition, nature of the terrain, and weight of the load to be carried as well as the season and weather conditions, the water quantity and quality, and the activities planned along the way.

**Assess the safety of backpacking sites.** The route **MUST** be known to at least one of the adults or a report should be obtained in advance to assess potential hazards. Ensure that a land-management or similar agency is contacted during the trip-planning stage to help with available routes and campsites, recommended group size, information about water quantity and quality, and permits (if needed).

**Assess backpack quality and do a trial run.** Ensure that backpacks and all equipment (including food and water) weigh no more than 20 percent of each person's ideal (not actual) body weight. Guide girls in choosing backpacks, adjusting straps, and taking them on and off. Have the girls plan and conduct a series of conditioning hikes before the backpacking trip.

**Ensure backpackers have a comprehensive understanding of the trip.** Group members need to be trained to be observant of the route, the surroundings, and the fatigue of individuals. Instruction should be given on the safety rules for backpacking, such as staying together in a group, recognizing poisonous plants, biting, or stinging insects and ticks, respecting wild animals, and behaving effectively in

emergencies. Ensure that girls know how to read maps, use a compass, navigate a route, and estimate distance.

**Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first aid kit and a first aider with a current certificate in first aid (including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED), who is prepared for extremes of temperature, such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, frostbite, cold exposure, and hypothermia, as well as sprains, fractures, and altitude sickness. Ensure that emergency transportation is available, if possible; if any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first aider with Wilderness First Aid certification. The designated adult should have a working cell phone for emergencies.

**Take safety precautions.** Create a risk management plan with the girls and leave a copy at home. Search and rescue procedures for missing persons should be written out in advance, reviewed, and practiced by girls and adults. Methods of communication with sources of emergency care, such as police, hospitals, and park and fire officials, should also be arranged in advance. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans that cover any situation with girls.

**Practice safe backpacking.** Hiking after dusk is not permitted. Off-trail hiking must be done with an experienced leader. The group must hike away from the edges of waterfalls, rock ledges, and slopes with loose rocks. Girls are never allowed to go on high-altitude climbs.

**Safety Gear.** Backpacking requires various equipment dependent on the length of the trip, location, and weather.

- Lightweight, layered clothing and outerwear appropriate for weather conditions.
- Water bottle or hydration pack (each girl should carry at least one quart).
- Non-perishable, high-energy, lightweight foods such as dehydrated meals, fruits, and nuts.
- Whistle.
- “Ten Essentials” emergency survival kit, including a flashlight, first aid kit, extra clothing (including a waterproof jacket), snacks, tablets for purifying water, emergency shelter, matches in a waterproof container, knife, map, compass or GPS, and a water bottle.
- Backpack appropriate for size and experience of user.
- Sturdy hiking/trail footwear with thick soles (optional: soft-soled shoes to wear at campsite after removing hiking footwear), high-tech socks designed for hiking with wicking liner to keep moisture away from feet.
- Map and compass or compass and GPS.
- Sleeping bag, preferably a mummy or lightweight sleeping bag; closed cell sleeping pad.
- Potable water or water purification supplies to remove potential contaminants from natural water sources; use water filters designed to remove Giardia Lamblia. See [Outdoor Cooking Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for purification tips,
- Unbreakable, lightweight knife/fork/spoon combo, with a bowl and cup.
- Portable cook stove and fuel, whenever possible (to reduce the use of firewood).
- Waste management supplies (toilet paper, garbage bag, plastic trowel to dig a cat hole, hand sanitizer).
- Food storage (check local regulations to find out if a bear-proof canister is required).
- A working cell phone for emergencies (in the hands of an adult) or a specific backup plan.
- Hat or bandana.