

Backpacking Food

by Joe Vockley

There is typically no troop fee or a very minimal troop fee for backpacking trips because we do not have to pay for camping spaces and each person provides their own food. On a typical weekend backpacking trip a scout is faced with carrying enough food for all three meals on Saturday, breakfast on Sunday and trail snacks. We usually stop for dinner on Friday and Lunch on Sunday. Backpacking food, purchased at a specialty store is expensive. Sometimes, you can not avoid purchasing backpacking food, other times you can. Usually, breakfasts and lunch are not special backpacking meals, but dinner on Saturday is. Almost every first time backpacker panics about the prospect of leaving their refrigerator at home and makes the mistake of over estimating the amount of food needed.

There are a few important things to remember when picking out food for a backpacking trip. It needs to be nutritious, filling and packed with calories. Weight must be kept to a minimum, so no cans, jars, glass bottles or any other packaging that adds weight. It should look the same when it comes out of the backpack as when it went in (blueberry muffins get a little worn around the edges and become less appetizing). Oh yes, and it should taste better than an old sock.

Especially for new scouts, freeze dried meals (which can be purchased at Hudson Trail Outfitters or a number of other places) provide an opportunity to try something new for dinner. They like it. Unfortunately, the quality of these backpacking meals often leaves something to be desired. Usually, meals with noodles or rice as a starch, especially those with lots of spice, tend to taste better than others. Many first time scouts like to try the spaghetti meals. Most don't buy them the second time. Whatever meal you buy, it is usually an insufficient quantity for someone who has just hiked a number of miles, carrying a backpack. Each meal will give information on the outside package about how many people it feeds. A meal that feeds two is usually enough for one.

If you have two scouts from one family (and if they can agree on a meal) it is a bit cheaper if you buy a meal for 4 and split it between two (on the trail). If you buy a meal for one (or even two), you must supplement it with additional food for dinner. Some suggestions include, dried fruit, beef jerky, trail mix, power bars, etc. Do not bring any food that is in a can or glass jar, contains a lot of water or requires cooking. **TYPICALLY, EVERY SCOUT WILL GET TWO CUPS OF HOT WATER FOR DINNER. THAT IS IT!** There are no facilities to cook additional food. During cold weather, there are other options that are not available during hot weather due to spoilage issues.

If you don't want to buy a backpacker meal, go to the grocery store. Look in the freeze dried section. You will find instant chili, mashed potatoes, lentils and numerous other things. Both Safeway and Weis have a variety of these foods. In addition, there are things like cup of noodles that can just have hot water added to them. If you go this route, always remember the rules about weight, availability of water and how filling it is. Drink at dinner is usually water. Some scouts will bring some powdered drink mix. This is ok but a scout should NEVER add drink mix to their water bottle....not for dinner and not on the trail. If you bring a powdered drink, you can either mix it in the foil outer package of the backpacking meal (if it has one) or you can bring a small cup of some sort.

Breakfast and lunch are no cook, no hot water meals. We do not set up a stove for these meals. We do not have a campfire in the morning. Breakfast foods include pop tarts, a bagel (eat it cold, pre-slice and spread with cream cheese), power bars, trail mix, dried fruit, cereal bars, granola bars and water. Lunch foods include beef jerky, dried fruit, peanut butter (or something else) on pita bread, power bars, trail mix and water. Always remember that there is no refrigeration on these trips.

In addition to these meals, everyone needs to bring munchies for on the trail. We usually stop every half hour and grab a handful of trail mix, dried fruit, beef jerky, power bar or granola bar (((is anyone getting the idea yet?))). Drink on the trail is water. Believe me, water is the absolute best thin you can drink...And lots of it. Every scout carries two liters of water. We refill the water bottles at every stream crossing. If you don't drink enough water, you get dehydrated, go into heat stroke and die. It tends to ruin the trip for the rest of us and presents a problem with what to do with the body.