

Backpacking Wisdom

These are small nuggets of wisdom collected over the years. I have gathered these ideas from other hikers, Scouts and Backpacker Magazine

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Please help by adding your ideas.

Maps

The Wide World of Maps is the best place in Phoenix to buy a topographic map.

1-800-279-2550 (M-F 8 am to 5 pm, Sat. 9 am to 5 pm)

Phoenix location

2626 W. Indian School Rd. Phoenix, AZ

Just west of the Black Canyon Freeway (I-17)

(602) 279-2323

Mesa location

1334 S. Country Club Dr. Mesa, AZ

SW Corner of Southern Ave. & Country Club Dr.

(480) 844-1134

<http://www.maps4u.com/>

For computer based maps I like National Geographic TOPO maps. I have the Arizona map set. This is a complete set of 7.5 minute maps for Arizona.

<http://www.topo.com>

I get magnetic declination values from the NOAA web site:

<http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/seg/potfld/geomag.shtml>

For a handheld GPS I like the Garmin "Etrex". This is a water proof unit. It is small and weights only a few ounces. The unit uses two AA batteries.

Arizona Water Flows

To check water flow for any Arizona creek or river. The Arizona District of the Water Resources Division of the USGS collects the this data.

http://az.water.usgs.gov/rt-cgi/gen_tbl_pg

Arizona Hiking Trails

The Arizona Republic newspaper has a nice listing of trails in Arizona.

<http://www.azcentral.com/travel/hiking/search.html>

Arizona Trail Association 602-252-4794

The Arizona Trail, the dream of Flagstaff teacher and hiking enthusiast Dale Shewalter, is a 750 mile non-motorized trail that traverses Arizona state from Mexico to Utah. The Arizona Trail is a primitive, long distance trail that highlights the State's topographic, biologic, historic, and cultural diversity. Jody Sixkiller captured the Trail's beauty and wonder in her song... The Arizona Trail. Great place to hike, many good weekend trips.

<http://aztrail.org/>

The Boy Scouts Grand Canyon Council publishes a booklet called "Council Trail Awards Program". This booklet has about 50 backpacking trails in it. You can get this booklet at the council office. When you are at the council office look at the patches that can be earned for each of these hikes. This is a great resource for less than \$5. The web site also lists the backpacking trails under "Great Outdoors".

Boy Scouts Grand Canyon Council
2969 North Greenfield Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016-7715
602-955-7747
<http://www.grandcanyonbsa.org>

Clothing

Polar fleece is the material of choice for warm middle wear. This is a miracle fabric as it will keep you warm when wet (like wool, but not itchy). Polar fleece is made from recycled plastic soda bottles.

Bring a polar fleece hat (ski hat) on all campouts. Your head acts like a radiator and you can lose up to 40% of your body heat from your head.

Food

If you eat Pop Tarts for breakfast, buy the Pop Tarts that have frosting on top. These taste better than the plain topped ones.

Look at the Philmont trail food menus for food ideas for backpacking trips.

<http://www.lns.cornell.edu/~seb/philmont.html>

Bring a zip lock plastic bag to put your garbage in. Each person keeps his or hers own garbage. There is not a community garbage bag when backpacking.

Water

For a Saturday/Sunday campout bring 4 quarts of water. Make sure your water bottles do not leak. Fill your bottles with water, turn upside down and squeeze the bottle. No water should come out.

One person in the crew should bring PolarPure on a campout. We use this to purify water if needed. For each quart of water to purify use two capfuls of PolarPure and let the quart of water stand one hour before drinking.

<http://www.polarequipment.com/>

A “Camelback” or other water system is a good way to stay hydrated. The drinking tube makes drinking water easy. I like the Platypus water system the best. The plastic used in the Platypus does not hold odors.

Backpacks

The most important part of a backpack is the hip belt. Most of the pack weight will ride on the hip belt. Thus the hip belt must be able to carry this weight. Look at the hip belts on a new pack and ask can it carry forty pounds.

Tents

Tents should be stuffed into its carrying bag. Tents should not be folded then put into its carrying bag. The folding will cause creases in the tent which will then wear and let rain in at the creases.

Stuff a tent, feet end first, into the stuff sack. The tent opening is the last part of a tent that is put into the stuff sack. In this way, trapped air can escape from the tent when stuffing it into its bag. Tents should weigh 5 pounds or less.

Sleeping Bag

Sleeping bags should be stuffed into its carrying bag. Sleeping bags should not be folded or rolled. This can cause the sleeping bag to have “thin” places in it.

Stuff a sleeping bag, feet end first, into the stuff sack. The sleeping bag opening is the last part of a sleeping bag that is put into the stuff sack. In this way, trapped air can escape from the sleeping bag when stuffing it into its bag.

Sleeping bags should be a 20°F or better mummy bag.

Put your sleeping bag in a “compactor” trash bag. The compactor trash bag goes inside your sleeping bag stuff sack. The sleeping bag then goes inside the trash bag with the stuff sack on the outside to protect the trash bag. Compactor trash bags are about 2 ft 4 in x 2 ft 11 in and 2.5 mil thick (71.1 cm x 88.9 cm x 63.5 μm). These trash bags are thicker than regular trash bags. This extra thickness keeps the bag from tearing or ripping. The sleeping bag should weigh 4 pounds or less.

When not in use the sleeping bag should be stored in a large cotton bag.

Hiking Boots

Hiking boots should fit loose. My hiking boots are 1/2 to one size bigger than my every day shoes. You need more room so your toes are not jammed into the boots. Also do not lace your boots tight, lace your boots so that you can fit your little finger under the lacing.

Buy a heel pad and place it in the heel of your hiking boots. This will help cushion your heel while hiking.

Socks

Always wear two pairs of socks with your hiking boots. The inner pair is a thin moisture wicking sock.

When I wash my socks, I first turn the socks inside out and wash. I then turn the socks right side out and wash again.

First Aid

For blisters use 2nd Skin blister pad. These are made by Spenco Medical Corp.

www.spenco.com

Cooking Stove

If you can buy a stove, purchase one with auto ignition. This way you do not need matches to light your stove.

You only need one stove per six or eight people.

Philmont

Below is a good web site about Philmont Scout Ranch.

<http://www.lns.cornell.edu/~seb/philmont.html>

<http://www.rogerknapp.com/knap/philmonttrek2000.htm>

<http://www.philmont.com/>

The Guidebook to Adventure

<http://members.primary.net/~jakebullet/other/philmont/gta/index.htm>

The 1999 trail menu

<http://philmont.bowline.org/trail/menu.html>

Philmont Tooth of Time Trading Post

To be added to the catalog mailing list please send your name and address to:

toothoftimetraders@hotmail.com

Where to buy backpacking equipment

REI

1405 West Southern, Tempe, AZ (Southern & Priest) 480-967-5494
Cactus & Paradise Valley Parkway (west of Paradise Valley Mall) 480-996-5400

Popular Outdoor Outfitters

16th St. and Indian School 602-264-3535
Phoenix, AZ
and other locations

The Wilderness

5130 N. 19th Ave. (great for repair work on camping equipment)
Phoenix, AZ 602-242-4945

Arizona Hiking Shack

11649 N. Cave Creek Rd (1/4 mile south of Cactus) 602-944-7723
Phoenix, AZ

Equipment

Most outfitting stores recommend leather hiking boots because of the support they provide when compared to high-tech synthetic boots. However, leather boots cost more and are harder to break in. Spending \$125 to \$200 on leather boots just does not make sense when a synthetic pair of boots costing \$40 to \$90 will work just as well. Outfitting stores will also say that synthetic boots will fall apart due to the ruggedness of trails. I never seen a synthetic boot fail.

Each crew member should wear two layers of socks. The inner layer should be synthetic (polypropylene or CoolMax) sock liner. The liner wicks the moisture away from the foot to the outer sock. When the foot is dry, there is a decreased chance of a getting a blister. Heavy wool socks as outer layers are great. However, some people do not like the feel of wool socks and they take a long time to dry out once they get wet. I use Thorlo socks. Like most backpacking equipment, it really comes down to a matter of personal choice. Whatever type you use, pack a pair of outer socks and a pair of sock liners for each day hiking. Make sure that you check the condition of your socks before you head out. Socks do wear out! If the socks' padding capability is worn down, get new ones.

Hikers also need to pack an in-camp shoe that can be worn once you get into camp and can get your boots off. A light set of moccasins or light running shoes makes an excellent in-camp shoe. These must be a closed toe shoe. Getting into in-camp shoes gives your feet a rest and gives you an opportunity to sun dry your boots. In-camp shoe should have a low impact sole that keeps it from further damaging the ground of your already over camped camp site. In-camp shoes should be easy to get on and off for those late night visits to the latrine. And finally, they should be comfortable enough for you to hike in to the next camp site, if you are having severe boot problems.

You will see many different styles of walking sticks on the trail. Some hikers prefer a single stick. However, over the last several years, many hikers have become ardent believers in using two walking sticks. The sticks are adjustable and can be lengthened or shortened according to the terrain. They provide much needed support and relieve some of the pounding that would normally be absorbed by your body. A medical study has shown that the use of two hiking sticks results in 250 tons of pressure being transferred from the back, knees and legs to the arms during an 8-hour hiking day.

Sleeping bags should weigh less than four pounds, and be rated to 20 degrees. A mummy bag is lighter and warmer than other design types. At higher elevations, the temperature gets into the thirties at night. Other than boots, the sleeping bag is the most important piece of equipment. Hikers need to know that the one and only place where they will always be warm and dry is in their sleeping bags, inside their tents. Care must be taken to assure that the bag is properly treated. Hikers must never get into their sleeping bags wet, because the moisture reduces the warming ability of the bag. During the night, the bag also absorbs moisture from the body. Every opportunity should be taken to air out the bag. Otherwise a 20 degree bag will become a 30 degree bag the next night and so on.

An inexpensive closed cell pad is a must for all hikers. Not only does it provide a comfortable sleep even on those not-so-level places; it also prevents heat loss downward and provides a barrier against moisture should your tents leak in a heavy rain. For adults, I recommend a Therm-A-Rest sleeping pad because of its ability to provide a good night's sleep. It also adds 5-10 degrees of warmth when compared to sleeping directly on the ground. While a Therm-A-Rest pad costs around \$50, it is well worth the investment. Therm-A-Rest pads come in two models; the full length and the 3/4 length. Although the full length model is a little heavier, it keeps the feet off the ground that could keep the sleeping bag dry should your tent floor get wet.

Rain gear is a must and it should be good quality. Use a rain suit and NOT a poncho. A light weight coated nylon rain suit works well and costs under \$60. Do not purchase the less expensive, but much heavier PVC rain suit. The beauty of a rain suit is that the jacket can also be used to keep warm, when layered with a polar fleece jacket.

Most hikers in Arizona wear hiking shorts and tee-shirt throughout their hike. I wear the same t-shirt and shorts both days of a weekend hike.

Cotton underwear? No way. Use nylon blend or synthetic (CoolMax) underwear. Cotton underwear is impossible to keep clean and dry.

Another way that you can bring non-human smells into the backcountry is through the use of fabric softeners on your trail clothes. Fabric softener fragrance will last on trail for several days until an individual's natural body odor takes over. You may have to wash your clothes several times without soap at home to ensure that there is no detectable odor. Remember, bears don't see well, but they have a tremendous sense of smell. The bottom line is if you are going hiking, it is best to sleep in clothes that have not been exposed to any smells

A set of long underwear tops and bottoms are a must for everyone. Long underwear can also be used as a means of increasing the warmth of your sleeping bag.

Polar fleece has taken over because of its light weight, ability to dry quickly, and softness. DO NOT rely on cotton sweat shirts to keep you warm!

Long pants are required at night to keep warm. Most hikers wear high nylon content pants that are extremely lightweight and dry out very quickly. Convertible pants with legs that zip off allow you to carry long pants and an extra pair of shorts with just one garment.

Hikers must have sun hats. Sun hats should have wide brims. They provide protection from the increased level of ultra violet rays found at higher elevations.

Finally, try to get your total pack weight as light as possible. Heavy packs just sap energy and strength, make you more prone to injury, and reduce your potential for having a good time on the trail.

Adults are still in the car camping mode when they go camping, bringing along that extra something "just in case". The idea is to hike, with the lightest possible pack, with the right amount of personal and crew gear for your hike and no more. Start eliminating ounces from your very first hike. Some ideas include:

- small rather than large (as in flashlight, knives, etc.)
- no toothpaste
- just-as-good-but-lighter (coated nylon rain gear instead of PVC)
- no canteens (use plastic water bottles)
- avoid gadgets (such as Leatherman)
- sharing (tents, cooking stove)
- smart purchasing (mummy bag versus a rectangular bag)
- clothing system based on layers
- take only what you need (a cup and spoon for eating gear instead of a cup, bowl, spoon and fork)
- eliminate dead weight (walkman radios, footballs)

From "A Sand County Almanac" by Aldo Leopold.

"Then came the gadgeteer, otherwise known as the sporting goods dealer. He has draped the American outdoorsman with an infinity of contraptions, all offered as aids to self-reliance, hardihood, woodcraft, or marksmanship, but too often functioning as substitutes for them. Gadgets fill the pockets, they dangle from neck and belt. The overflow fills the auto trunk and also the trailer. Each item of outdoor equipment grows lighter and often better, but the aggregate poundage becomes tonnage."

The goal is Zero Impact

Pack it in, pack it out

Leave only footprints, take only pictures, kill only time.