



To New Troop 15 Scouts and Their Parents

One thing that sometimes concerns the parents of new Scouts is the cost of camping gear. With visions of hundred-dollar packs and sleeping bags, more expensive tents, shoes, accessories, etc., the prospective cost can be dizzying.

But we recommend that unless you really know what you want to buy and expect to make a major commitment to camping, you wait before plunging in with that big investment.

The alternative is to rent the gear for a few times to get used to what's needed and decide what kind of commitment you want to make.

The Backpacker in the Vista between Lady and Gervais streets along the railroad tracks (799-7571) and Adventure Carolina at 1107 State Street in Cayce (796-4505) both have good rental gear and similar prices. You should call to reserve the gear several days in advance -- preferably at the beginning of the week you plan to camp. They can run out on busy weekends.

Here are some sample prices as of 1998. The Backpacker required a \$50 deposit and Adventure Carolina \$100. The prices quoted are for 2 to 3 days:

	2 person tent	Pack/Frame	Sleeping Bag
Backpacker	\$20	\$15	\$17 + \$2 pad
Adventure Carolina	\$20	\$20	\$14 + \$6 pad

Shoes



The one thing you should buy is a good pair of hiking shoes, if you don't own them already. These will set you back \$50 to \$100, but they are worth it.

Do not wear sneakers camping, especially hiking. Not even high-tops. They don't give your feet the support you need. It's easy to twist an ankle, even on a path that doesn't look that rough. It's also easy for an ember from a fire to burn through a sneaker.

Get a shoe that supports your ankle and above all, is comfortable. Your foot should not move too much inside, nor do you want it too tight, or you'll get blisters. You will be wearing heavier socks than normal, especially in late fall and winter, so leave a little room for them.

Socks: Spend the \$6 or \$7 a pair to get two pair of hiking socks (at most sporting goods stores). These have a fabric mixture to cushion your foot and wick moisture away.

Tents, Sleeping Bags and Packs



If you do buy gear, we don't recommend going with the bargain-basement stuff - it just won't hold up. But you don't have to go with the top-of-the-line, either. Sometimes The Backpacker and Adventure Carolina have a good deal on used gear.

This isn't the exhaustive rundown; there are too many options. Talk to Troop 15's experienced campers and leaders and to clerks at places like Jumbo Sports. But here are some hints:

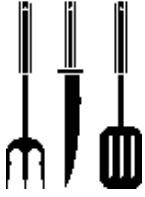
Tents: Target and Sears have reasonably priced tents. Check out the Service Merchandise catalog, too. More than a three-person tent usually is too much to carry when backpacking. Target's Greatland two-person dome tents hold up well for moderate use. Remember to get seam sealer to spread on the tent's seams to seal the needle holes. Look for tents with a large rain fly to direct water farther away from the sides. Cheaper tents usually have fiberglass poles; more expensive ones have aluminum. Fiberglass can crack and break if banged, but it lasts if you take care of it. And you can buy replacements. Also, cut two pieces of plastic -- one for under your tent and one for inside it -- to keep the moisture away. Every couple of years, give the tent a good Scotchgard treatment.

Packs: Jumbo Sports has the best selection, especially when it has a sale, but shop. Sometimes you'll find similar models at reasonable prices in the Service Merchandise catalog or at Sears. And Carolina Surplus Sales at 1621 Main St. downtown also has some. Don't get a day pack like for school. The pack should have an internal or external frame. Try packs on to make sure the one you want fits well and is well-balanced, allowing you to carry the load on your hips, not all on your shoulders.

Sleeping Bags: Shop around to get an idea of what you like and can afford. Get one rated at least to 20 degrees and lower if you plan on doing a lot of late fall, winter or early spring camping, or if you think you might be using it in areas north of here. It's possible to spend a small fortune on a high-tech bag, but you don't have to if you're not going to climb mountains. Look for a reasonably price bag that's light, has the correct temperature rating and can be compressed even smaller for backpacking. Get one with as waterproof a shell as possible, not canvas or cotton. Jumbo Sports, Sears and Wal-Mart have some decent selections, but stay away from the "slumber" or summer bags. If the sleeping bag does not come with a compression bag, go to Jumbo Sports or one of the camping stores and buy one. Best is a side-compression bag to push the sleeping bag in from the sides as well as around and make it smaller to tie on your backpack.

Important: Buy a good, light pad to put underneath the bag for your comfort and to keep the moisture away. Get the thin ones for \$12 to \$15; don't get a thick "egg crate" and don't get an air mattress. A camp pillow that also compresses is an excellent investment, too.

Accessories



There's an accessory for everything, but starting out, you don't need much. Do not rush out and buy a knife. You won't be able to use it or bring it with you until you get your Totin' Chip. Get a good compass with a movable dial for using with maps, a decent canteen and a personal mess kit. Augment that with a metal cup instead of the plastic one with most mess kits. Skin-so-Soft or another bug repellent is a good idea. If you are going to summer camp, you also need mosquito netting. Bring extra plastic bags to pack wet clothes, toiletries, etc. Ziplock-type are the best. A net bag to hold dirty clothes but let them air out also is good.

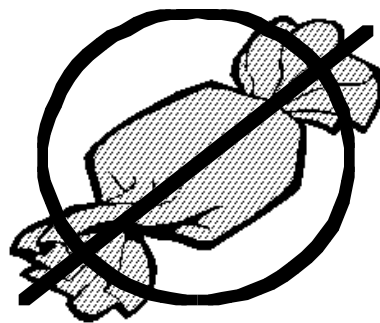
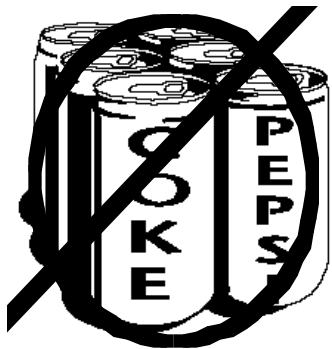
Clothes



This isn't so much what to buy as a reminder: When you camp always take extra clothes. It's easy to get wet -- even in cold weather just the perspiration from hiking can soak your clothes to the point where you can get hypothermia. Also, remember layering: Two layers of lighter clothing can keep you warmer than one heavy one.

Buy those hiking socks we talked about, and if you are doing any cool or cold weather camping and hiking, some polypropylene underwear is useful, too. The polypropylene wicks moisture away from your body. But this stuff is expensive, so wait until you really are doing some serious hiking and camping with the troop in the winter.

Finally, we recommend that you do not bring soda, candy or similar food in your packs -- and especially don't eat them in your tent or sleeping bag -- unless you like to be bitten by fire ants!



We hope this helps. Happy camping!