

Tips from the Old Scout

Tip # 6: The Ten Essentials

Tips from the Old Scout is a series of informational articles that will appear on the Troop 201 website each month. They are intended to be an information source for both parents and scouts on a variety of important topics relating to camping, backpacking and hiking.

The subject is The Ten Essentials. Camping, backpacking and survival experts have argued over the years which items are “essential” and necessary to survival if lost in the woods. What is presented here is an updated version of the ten essentials, which gives the *why to bring it*, as well as the *what to bring*. Some of the gear may change from trip to trip, or season to season, but this comprehensive list will provide the information necessary to deal with any unexpected event.

The scouting motto is *Be Prepared*. Certainly, our troop prepares carefully for every outing in the woods. Camping and Wilderness Survival merit badges teach scouts detailed methods for living comfortably in the outdoors. But it is important that every scout understands what to do if he becomes separated from the troop, or finds himself lost in the wilderness. Scouts are taught to use the word S.T.O.P.:

S – Stay calm - stop and become aware of your surroundings

T – Think – try to determine where you are and where you may gone off your planned route

O – Observe – and take inventory of the emergency gear you have brought with you

P – Plan what to do next

Since the “buddy system” is a strict rule in scouting, it’s likely that *if* you are lost, both you and your buddy will have each other’s resources to help you out of the situation. If you are not certain of which way to travel back to camp, or to rejoin the group, it’s better to stay put: you will be found more easily.

The backpacking rule is “If you didn’t bring it – you don’t have it.” It’s important, therefore, to have the ten essentials with you at all times. Most of these items (with the exception of food, water and clothing) will fit in a small pouch that should always be accessible in your backpack (move to your daypack when side-hiking).

1. **Navigation** This includes both map and compass and the skills to use them.
2. **Sun Protection** This includes sunscreen and sunglasses. Let’s add insect protection in this category.
3. **Insulation** Bring extra clothing (layers). All hikers should carry extra socks, and a jacket or sweatshirt for when the sun goes down, even in summer. Wool or synthetics are best: cotton will not insulate if it is wet, and will take a long time to dry. Add rain gear to this category: a rain

jacket or poncho will also act as a windbreaker or outer layer. High adventure backpacking destinations (such as Philmont) also require rain pants.

4. **Flashlight** Or headlamp, with extra batteries
5. **First Aid Kit** Small kit with personal supplies, and a pair of latex gloves in case you need to assist another hiker.
6. **Fire Building Supplies** After proper training, scouts should carry water-proof matches, a lighter and other fire starters, as well as a candle, lint, frayed rope, etc. to use as tinder. The ability to safely build a fire in the wilderness can mean the difference between life and death in a survival situation.
7. **Repair Kit/Tools** Include in this category a whistle and mirror for signaling, 50 feet of ¼" paracord, and a knife (after proper training).
8. **Nutrition** Extra Food (never a problem for our scouts)
9. **Hydration** Extra water (scouts are instructed to bring two full 32 oz. Nalgene bottles on a weekend outing). You might also carry water purification tablets, or a water filtering device like a Lifestraw. The old scout carries a bandana and a metal cup, if filtering and boiling water is ever necessary.
10. **Emergency Shelter** A large plastic garbage bag or two, or a survival blanket can help keep you warm and dry, or help in building an emergency shelter.

Remember:

- Always carry the ten essentials in your backpack when camping or hiking, and in your daypack if on a side hike. ***Be Prepared!***
- Check your ten essentials before each outing (fresh batteries, etc.) and know how to use each item.
- Always stay with a buddy while on the trail and in camp