

## **Holiday shopping list for Cascades-bound Scouts and Scouters**

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In just seven short months, Troop 970 Scouts will hit the trail for summer adventures in the Cascades and Len Hoxsen. If you are thinking about putting some high adventure gear under the tree this year, here are some ideas on what to look for.

### **RAIN GEAR**

Did we mention that it rains a lot in Washington State? (And anywhere else troop 970 seems to go!)

You can be certain that 100 percent waterproof rain gear it will be on the required equipment list for the trip. We consider proper rain gear to be essential survival equipment and if you don't have it, you won't be boarding the plane for Washington state.

Forget about ponchos, anything made of vinyl, and anything labeled "water resistant." We're talking two-piece 100 percent waterproof rain suits here, guys; a hooded rain jacket and full-length pullover rain pants.

Non-breathable rainsuits start at about \$60.00. Coated nylon is the most popular material. Breathable laminates (such as Gore-Tex) are more comfortable, but cost a lot more, starting at about \$150.00. (Costco in Sterling and Leesburg have nylon, waterproof rainsuits; elastic waist zip cuff pants and hooded front zip jacket together is \$30. This is a deal that can't be beat, they are good quality. Took a beating during mulch last spring and didn't leak. But smallest size is Adult medium. For this price alterations can be made.)

Whether you pick nylon or a breathable material, remember 1) that your rain jacket will probably be the only jacket will you carry on the trip, 2) that you'll be wearing your rainsuit over your regular hiking clothes, 3) you'll be wearing it while carrying your pack and need to be able to open the jacket to vent perspiration on the trail and 4) you will be rolling the rainsuit up and storing it in an outside pack pocket. Buy your raingear loose enough to fit comfortably over trail clothes. Find one you can vent while carrying a pack (pullover anorak-style rain gear isn't a good idea). And find one you can stuff into an outside pack pocket.

Nice features to look in rain pants include slash openings (to allow access to your pants pockets), a zippered fly, a drawstring or adjustable elastic waistband, and adjustable cuffs (either zippers or snaps) to help you pull them on quickly over your hiking boots.

### **BACKPACKS**

Day packs don't have anywhere near the capacity for an extended backpacking trip, and lashing bulky items to the outside of a too-small pack won't work.

Serious backpacking calls for a high-capacity pack. For the Cascades trip, we're talking internal capacity of 4,500 – 5,000 cubic inches. For LenHoksen, (where you don't need to jam a full week's worth of food into your pack) we're talking 3,000 -3,500 cubic inches capacity.

You may be thinking, hey, I can fit my sleeping bag, clothes, and personal gear into a pack half that size. What's the big deal?

Well, on a serious backpacking trip, you're carrying not only your personal gear, but bulky crew gear (part of a tent, cookware, a stove and fuel bottles, a water pump and bladder, or a bear bag and rope) and food. Lots and lots of food. All this stuff should be inside the pack, not dangling loose outside.

If you're not sure your current pack will hold that much stuff, find your pack, a couple pillows or bulky towels, and a tape measure. Stuff the pillows and towels into the main cargo compartment(s), filling them so that you just barely get the zippers or flaps closed. Measure the average width, height, and depth of the main cargo compartments and do the math:  $\text{capacity} = \text{width} \times \text{height} \times \text{depth}$ .

So what should you look for in a high-capacity backpack?

- Wide, padded shoulder and waist straps
- Lots of ways to adjust pack fit, including straps, belts, cargo compartment.
- External pockets for rain gear, water bottles, bug repellent, sunscreen and other stuff you need to get to quickly on the trail. Pockets should have storm flaps or covered zippers to keep out rain, which falls frequently in Washington state.
- The best packs accommodate an overpacked main compartment (and yes, you will be overpacked at the start of the trip) with both locking drawstrings and a large storm flap.
- Lots of attachment loops for lashing or clipping loose gear, especially under the main compartment.
- Some backpackers use hydration packs (water bladders) instead of water bottles. If you're one of them, look for a pack with a built-in pocket for your hydration pack.
- If the manufacturer offers a rain cover designed specifically for the pack, buy it. Rain covers are must-have accessories, (did we mention that it rains a lot in Washington state?) and the better it fits, the dryer it will keep your gear.

Packs with the features listed above start about \$100.00. With proper care, it should last a lifetime. If the family budget won't stand the strain, talk to one of the Assistant Scoutmasters about borrowing a pack for the trip. Linking your son up with a loaner pack shouldn't be a problem.

## **SLEEPING BAG**

Look for a hooded mummy-style bag with synthetic (not down) fill. The bag should be rated at 20 – 30 degrees. Well-made 20 degree bags start at about \$65.00. One accessory well worth the added \$15-\$25 investment is a compression sack, which can reduce a bag's bulkiness by as much as half.

## **SLEEPING PAD**

Look for a full-length closed-cell foam pad. You can pick up a simple roll-up style pad for about \$10.00. Fold-up Z-rest pads are quite popular, starting at about \$35.00. Inflatable foam pads give you a softer sleep, but they cost roughly twice as much (and can be punctured). Closed cell foam doesn't soak up water very easily but if you carry the pad outside your pack, buy a waterproof stuff sack ...because it rains frequently in Washington state.

## **HIKING BOOTS**

Lightweight boots of nylon/suede construction are probably not going to give you as much support and waterproofing as you will need on the Cascades trip. Ideally you should have a medium-weight boot with full leather uppers and rubber lug soles. The best models have built-in Gore-Tex liners and are 100 percent waterproof. Prices should start at about \$130.00.

If that's out of your price range, still try to find boots with 100 percent leather uppers. Leather treatments like SnoSeal can partially protect leather boots, but don't work on composite boots (nylon-suede construction). The only practical way to seal composite-construction boots is to use expensive Gore-Tex liners.

## **CLOTHING**

Please, **don't send your Scouts to the Cascades with jeans, cotton sweat shirts and t-shirts**. We are 100 percent certain that we will, at times, get 100 percent soaked. That's no big deal as long as we can get our guys dried off quickly. Guys wearing cotton are not going to dry quickly. At best, slow-drying cotton clothing will leave Scouts wet and uncomfortable. At worst, cotton can increase the risk of hypothermia.

T-shirts and shorts should be polyester or one of the other moisture-wicking synthetic blends. Pants should be a fast-drying synthetic blend. Leave cotton sweat shirts behind and bring polyester blend fleece instead.

High-quality moisture-wicking clothing don't need to cost a lot of money. The popular Underarmor line of moisture-wicking tops and bottoms works great, but sells for about

\$45 apiece. By way of comparison, Old Navy and other discount manufacturers now sell moisture-wicking athletic tops for \$16.00-18.00, fleece sweaters for under \$20.00 and nylon blend trail pants for under \$30.00. The Wal-Mart brand underarmour knock off shirts are around \$11. They work just as well as the higher-priced clothing on the trail.

Rugged Army camo fatigue pants (the genuine article, not the cheap cotton knockoffs) are a fast-drying synthetic blend available through army surplus outlets.

Remember, please, **no cotton.**

## **BOOKS**

For Scouters concerned about their map and compass skills:

Land Navigation Handbook: The Sierra Club Guide to Map, Compass and GPS (Sierra Club Outdoor Adventure Guides) – Amazon.com, REI, and other sources. Retail for about \$16.00.

US Army Map Reading and Land Navigation Handbook -- Amazon.com. About \$13.00.

Compass and Map Navigator – The Complete Guide to Staying Found – REI, Amazon.com, and other sources. Retail for about \$15.00

## **SOURCES FOR BACK PACKING EQUIPMENT**

Troop 970 Scouts and Scouters have shopped at each of the merchants listed below and feel comfortable citing them as sources of quality equipment.

### **Local Retail**

Eastern Mountain Sports:

The Market Common  
2800 Clarendon Blvd. Suite R550  
Arlington, VA 22201  
703-248-8310

Specializes in mountaineering and backpacking gear. House-brand sleeping bags are well made and competitively priced. Check out their website (see below) to get an idea of what type of gear they offer. Then visit the store to see it first-hand.

Dick's

(note: in Spring, 2005 Dick's purchased Galyans. Not clear whether the 10% Scout discount Galyan's had still applies.)

12501 Fairlakes Circle        and  
Fairfax, VA, 22033  
703-803-0300

45633 Dulles Eastern Plaza  
Sterling, VA 20166  
703-433-2190

Superstores have pros and cons.

**PROS:**

- Competitive prices on popular items.
- Convenience.
- Several different manufacturer's lines to compare

**CONS:**

- It's hard to find sales staff on duty knowledgeable about backpacking gear to point out important equipment features.
- Difficult to get help properly sizing footwear and backpacks.
- Much of their camping gear is designed for warm-weather family-style camping and may not hold up under more the rugged conditions of high-adventure backpacking.

**Hudson Trail Outfitters:**

Fair Oaks Mall 11743 Fair Oaks    and  
Fairfax VA 22033  
703-385-3907

9488 Arlington Boulevard  
Fairfax VA 22031  
703-591-2950

Good place to check out Alps Mountaineering equipment first-hand. Sales staff is generally knowledgeable about backpacking equipment.

**L.L. Bean**

Tysons Corner Center  
703-288-4466

L.L. Bean may bring mail order winter clothing and housewares to mind, but they do stock their own line of outdoor clothing and a fairly good selection of backpacking, canoeing, and kayaking gear at the Tysons store. Like anywhere else they have their good deals and their expensive ones but they are much closer than many of the other big name national retailers.

**REI**

Baileys Crossroads                      and  
3509 Carlin Springs Rd  
Baileys Crossroads, VA 22041  
(703) 379-9400

Fairfax  
11950 Grand Commons Ave  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
(571) 522-6568

Most REI gear is absolutely first-rate, but pricy. Check out their website (see below) to see whether the gear you are shopping for is part of their product line. Then visit the store to see it first hand. If you're not in a hurry, keep your eye on

their REI Outlet website for seasonal closeout and overstocked items at substantial savings. Or try one of the larger online discount stores (like Campmor) that carry REI product lines.

### **Web retail outlets specializing in backpacking gear**

Alps Mountaineering: <http://www.alpsmountaineering.com/>

A popular source of packs, sleeping bags for 970 Scouts. The manufacturer offers 40% discount on Scout orders. (contact Rich Glisman for a current Scout discount price list.) Hudson Trail Outfitters carries their gear in local retail stores. For a complete rundown on Alps gear, come to any 970 campout; ask Scouts and Scouters to look at the Alps gear they carry. Gear is well-constructed and sturdy, but not necessarily the lightest available.

Cabelas: <http://www.cabelas.com/>

Cabelas carries quality name brand gear and many house-branded items manufactured by nationally-known companies. Watch for seasonal closeout sales and sign up for their mail order catalog.

Campmor: <http://www.campmor.com>

Popular web/mail-order source for clothing, gear. Frequent deals on seasonal closeouts. Sign up for their mail order catalog.

Eastern Mountain Sports: <http://www.ems.com/>

Specializes in high-adventure outdoor sports: backpacking, climbing, kayaking, mountain biking. See above for retail listings.

Hudson Trail Outfitters: <http://www.hudsontrail.com>

Good selection of quality backpacking gear. Check out local retail stores (listed above) for close-up look at gear.

REI: <http://www.rei.com/>

Good selection of quality backpacking gear. Check out local retail stores (listed above) for close-up look at gear. If you like what you see and don't have to buy right away, REI's Outlet webpage carries seasonal closeouts and overstocked items at substantial savings. Don't forget that many large online retailers (including Campmor) carry REI product lines.

Sierra Trading Post: <http://SierraTradingPost.com>

A discount retail outlet featuring many nationally-known name brands. Do your research before you order. The site does not provide very detailed specs on gear or much background information on pros and cons of various designs. If you know exactly what you want, and find it in their online catalog, you will probably save money.