

# Backpacking Tips and Tricks

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This article is for those who are just getting into backpacking , just wanted to take a few minutes and share some of the tips and tricks about packing that I have figured out that have worked for me over the years. By no means are these to be meant as the only way to do it, one of the great things about backpacking is trying out a lot of different ideas, until you find what works best for you. So here are a few thoughts to consider :

1. Know your gear : Before heading out for a trip, make sure you know how to use all the gear first. Try setting the tent up in your backyard, use your stove and try cooking the foods you plan to eat while out there. Believe me it is no fun trying to learn how to setup a tent after dark, in the pouring rain !

2. Check your gear : When you are packing for the trip, check to make sure everything is in good shape, that the tent poles are really in the tent bag, pot lifter is with the cookset, fuel bottle has fuel in it, just a general making sure you have everything you need. A checklist of gear is a quick and easy way to do this, just check off each item as it is packed, then you will make sure nothing is left behind.

3 Trip Itinerary : Make sure someone you trust, knows where you are going, and when you will be back. Try to make sure you are back by the time you said you would be and let that person know you are back. Many Search and Rescue operations could have been avoided by people doing this, there have been a lot of them that the SAR personnel are out in the woods possibly risking their lives, looking for someone who is setting at home by their fire !!

4 Take it EASY : One of the reasons to get out there in the 1<sup>st</sup> place is to relax and enjoy yourself, so give yourself the time to actually do this.

5 Look UP !! : When it comes to finding a good place to pitch your tent, 1<sup>st</sup> thing you want to do after locating a likely spot, is to Look UP and make sure you are not going to be setting up under a dead tree, windstorms have a nasty habit of causing deadfalls to come out of trees, and you do not want to be under one when it does

6 Be knowledgeable of Basic First Aid and CPR : If something happens to someone in your group you should be able to treat them, but only do this if you are sure you know what you are doing, otherwise you could cause more harm than good

7 Do not rely upon a cell phone to call for help, there are many places that a cell phone will not work out there and you will not be able to call 911 for help

8 If you are going to an unfamiliar place, acquire a Topo map of the area and know how to use it and a compass to determine where you are and where you are going

9 Trekking poles : Up until I did the Appalachian Trail I had never used these, but now I am a believer in them, they make it a lot easier on the knees and back on the downhills and make balancing while trying to cross a stream a lot easier

10 Duct tape : I have a few wraps of duct tape around just about everything I have that I can wrap it around, water bottles, fuel bottles, food bottles, all of them have 5 or 6 wraps of it around them, you never know when you might need it and it can be used to fix almost anything

11 Hydrate : Make sure you drink a lot of fluids while you are out there, and make sure you filter or treat the water before use, it is no fun getting a bad case of the runs, halfway thru a trip !!

12 Sanitation : Even though you will not be getting a hot shower while packing, it is still easy to keep basically clean, use a bandanna to take a sponge bath with, just make sure you use biodegradable soap and use it away from the water source

13 LNT : this stands for Leave No Trace, if there are already firerings in the campsite, use them, instead of making another one, if there is not one, after making and using it, redistribute the rocks so that the area looks like it did when you got there. When you leave no one should be able to tell you have been there

14 Speaking of Fires : Keep them small, there is no need for a large bonfire out there, a small fire is more than adequate, make sure someone is attending to the fire while it is burning and make SURE the fire is completely out before leaving it, many forest fires have been started by fires that were not put out properly !!

15 Layer up : Instead of wearing one heavy jacket to stay warm, wear lighter layers instead, this way you can regulate the bodies heat and do not end up with sweaty clothes that will cause you to become chilled. Cotton is not a good idea, use synthetic clothes that are wicking instead, they will dry a lot faster than cotton and will wick the moisture away from your skin.

16. Wild animals : Look but do not disturb. Especially rattlesnakes, they tend to get a little angered if you disturb them !!

17. Your vehicle : Unfortunately these days a lot more vehicles left at trailhead are being broken into. The best way to hopefully avoid this happening to you, is to not leave anything of value in sight , inside the vehicle. I usually even leave the glove box open so someone looking into the vehicle can see there is nothing of value in it. It is probably a good idea to leave radar detectors at home, instead of trying to stash them in the vehicle

18 Extra set of keys !! : Make sure someone else in the group has a set of keys to the vehicle you came in, have had to walk quite a few miles a few times to get to a phone to call for help, when the only set of keys to a vehicle were lost !!

19 Pack as light as possible, the lighter the pack the more enjoyable it will be to carry it. Backpacking is about the level of comfort you want to have while out there. So there are 2 choices here, a heavier pack to have more things to make you more comfortable while in camp,

or foregoing some of the camp comforts to have a lighter pack to carry. For me it is a balance between the 2, and you will have to decide what works best for you.

20 Last but not least : ENJOY yourself !! Take a lot of breaks to enjoy the views, get to the planned campsite early enough to have plenty of time to get it set up easily. Stay flexible, if it is pouring the rain when you wake up in the morning, relax a little more and see if it decides to quit. It is not about the amount of miles you do, but the amount of enjoyment that you get out of those miles.