

Everyday Wisdom

by Karen Berger (1997)

Dried cow dung can be used a fuel for a fire. **Keep your total pack weight under 25% of your body weight.** Take what you need, but no more: keep it light. Make a checklist & use it. Share gear with the group to avoid duplicating (ie: stove, cord, trowel, first-aid...). Stuff sacks will stay organized. Ten essentials: map, compass, spare clothes, fire-starter, matches, sunglasses & sunscreen, extra food, knife, first-aid kit, flashlight.

Use old foam pad to sit on & insulate bottles. Keep map in clear plastic bag. Have some items accessible without taking off your pack (snacks, water, map, camera...). Put small items in zip-lock bags. Make sure the fuel can you buy fits your stove & they cannot go on planes. Put liquids in small bottles in a zip-lock bag. Baking soda can be used for toothpaste, deodorant, and foot powder. Check with hiking clubs or local businesses before leaving car at trailhead.

Put backpack in a duffle bag or box when flying. Talk with local rangers to get good info & leave your itinerary. Most backpackers burn 4000-6000 calories per day on the trail. Use vitamins on long trails. Add dry gravy mix & foil packs of meat to mashed potatoes. Always try food & gear out at home. Dry salami & hard cheese can last 3 days without refrigeration. Pre-packaged butter can be a treat. Spice kit can include: salt, pepper, garlic, onion flakes, bouillon cubes, sun-dried tomatoes, gravy mix, dried milk.

Use powdered electrolyte drinks (or at least salt & sugar), cider, hot chocolate. Wrap rubber band around zip-lock bags with powders in them. Only 10% of backpackers that start the Appalachian Trail each year finish. It's harder than walking. **Take a 10-minute break each hour.** Drink & snack often. Wear gaiters in tick & rattlesnake country. Potholing will wear you out. Try to go around these areas if possible. Crampons & ice pick can save your life if you know how to use them. Never wear crampons glissading (sliding down snow).

Look for a wide, shallow spot to cross a river (not white water) & use hiking poles. Keep sleeping bag & spare clothes in dry sacks. Snow lingers longer on the north slopes. Avoid camping at the passes (too windy) & next to meadows (mosquitoes, but a breeze can keep them at bay). Camp, poop & wash 200' from water. Baby wipes are great. Layout ground cloth, then feel the ground for sharp objects that will puncture your air mattress. Don't sleep under a tree with dead branches.

Tie a cord around the corner of the tarp with a pebble in it when the corner rips out. Hang up food, toothpaste, lotions, etc at night in a tree 10' off the ground 100' away from tent. Pitch tent so you can see & make noise when you hear animals. Never sleep with food in your tent. Mice like wool to make nests (keep them in your bag). Read a book out loud together or play cards. Wear clothes to bed or a bag liner so your bag lasts longer. Don't cook in your tent!

Keep fuel can warm in cold weather. Signs of weather: red sky in the mornings, shepherds take warning; red sky at night, shepherds delight. Always keep a spare set of dry clothes. Dry gear out as soon as you can (especially when you get home). You start losing body heat when you stop hiking; add layers (hat or hood is best). Put up a tarp & hide out during the heat of the day in a desert. Hiking northbound is better than staring into the sun.

Air out your feet or soak them in a creek at breaks. Have a hypothermia victim warm up by getting into a sleeping bag (alone), put a warm water bottle under their armpits or give them some warm water. Clip toe nails before a trip. Cotton socks cause blisters. As soon as you feel a hot spot on your feet, stop & find out why. Moleskin or Spenco's second skin work great for blisters. Get your quads & ankles ready for a hike. Wear spandex underwear to prevent chafing. Always have water at hand when starting a fire.

DEET is the best bug repellent, but it can destroy nylon. In tick country, check every few hours & especially after going through tall grasses (DEET repels them as well). Poison oak & ivy leaves are in groups of three. Look for snakes in shade when it's hot & on sunny rocks when cool. Back away from a rattle. Do not use the old snake bite kits. Go for help or walk the victim out. Treat all water sources. Heat stroke victims need to get to a hospital. Climb slowly if you feel dizzy. If they are irrational, get them to a lower elevation.

Three blasts on a whistle indicate trouble. Most hikers need 1 gallon of water per day (2 in the desert). Melting snow takes a lot of fuel (add 1" water & cover to speed it up). Hot springs are not safe to drink, but they can melt snow. Turn water bottles upside down, keep it in your sleeping bag or bury it in the snow (insulator) if it freezes at night. Repair kit: needles & thread, wire, duct tape, safety pins, small pliers, cord, glue, spare stove parts, air mat repair kit, tent pole splints.

Do not place wet boots next to a fire to dry (they will shrink). Urethane glue will stop an air leak. Wool should be washed in mild soap & air dried (store with mothballs). Seam-seal tents. Don't store down compressed. Hold the ends of cut nylon cord over a match to keep from unraveling.

Links: Backpacker's magazine = www.hpbasecamp.com