

BSA TROOP 201 GEAR GUIDE

Here are a few tips from Troop 201 to help you select the proper equipment for your son to use on campouts and backpack trips with the Troop. You can equip your son for a very reasonable price, and you don't have to buy all the equipment at once. Garage sales are good places to pick up some great deals but take care not to waste your money on outdated or worn out gear.

Another great place to shop is thrift stores. There is an abundance of clothing (and gear) in all sizes available at thrift stores and garage sales. The savings are always 75% +!

Since there are literally millions of Scouts and since they ALL camp, the major camping gear makers (especially Coleman) carry special lines of good, boy-sized equipment at affordable prices. Much of it even has the word "scouts" or "scout-sized" on it.

To get started and since you may not know what brands of equipment are good for your son to use, you may want to consider renting equipment. REI and Sports Chalet are very reasonable for weekend rental of a good backpack and they will custom fit the equipment for your son.

They may also allow the price of rental to go towards the purchase of a pack. Buy only the size that fits your Scout NOW. It is unsafe for them to wear an incorrectly sized backpack.

THE BARE ESSENTIALS

As you start shopping for equipment this is the order of importance in which you should buy it:

1. **SLEEPING BAG** – a good bag is a must. But you don't have to spend a great deal of money to get a decent one. I recommend a bag that is rated for 0 to 10 degrees weather and which weighs 4 pounds or less. Target, Big 5, Sports Authority, Sports Chalet and REI are good places to shop, although you may be hard-pressed to find a 4-pound bag at Target. Remember that your son is going to *backpack* with the Troop—the lighter and smaller the bag is, the better. If the bag does not come with a stuff sack, then buy one. Be sure that the stuff sack is water resistant and that it has a pull cord drawstring on it. This will keep the bag clean and dry as your son comes and goes from a camping trip. You should consider the size your son would be when he becomes an adult. Sleeping bags come in regular (up to 6 feet long) and long (up to 6 ½ feet) lengths. Since your son's bag will (hopefully) be with him into adulthood, it will have to fit him when he reaches his adult size. Lastly, remember that your son is going to have to lug that bag up and down hundreds of miles of hills, and it is going to have to keep him toasty in the cold altitudes of the High Sierra Mountains. Do not scrimp on the sleeping bag!
2. **SLEEPING PAD** – for placement underneath your son's sleeping bag. This is necessary not only for cushioning, but for warmth. Without a pad your son is sleeping on very cold ground. Pads supply extra comfort, but more importantly they act as moisture barriers against the cold ground. However, DO NOT send him with an air mattress; a pad does not have to be thick to work. Suitable pads can be found at Target. More high tech pads can be found at any sporting goods store. Pads should be small and very light weight (most are only a few ounces) and take up very little space. (Never send a bed pillow either. He can roll up his jacket and throw it into his sleeping bag's stuff sack.)

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3. **BOOTS** -- are the single most important piece of backpack equipment there is and are essential to any safe, comfortable camping trip. Once again, they range in price from cheap to outrageous. Watch for sales. Also, please, please don't buy boots too big thinking he will grow into them. It's okay to buy them large, but have him wear two pairs of socks when trying them on. The last thing that you want is to have your son's boots sliding around when he walks. This will cause serious blisters and various other aches and pains for your boy. In terms of boots, once you have purchased them, encourage your son to wear them often to break them in. Have him wear them to the mall, grocery shopping, etc. Do not send him to school wearing his boots.
4. **BACKPACK** – a good pack can make the difference for your son between a miserable experience and a great adventure in the wilderness. When selecting a pack:

DO –

Have your son try on the pack at the store and make the store personnel load it up to verify the fit.

Make sure the pack fits snugly around your son's hips. (This is where he will carry the total weight of the pack and it is essential that the waste strap fit well.)

Make sure the shoulder straps are not draped around his shoulders. They should actually extend straight back. Otherwise this means he is carrying the weight of the pack on his shoulders instead of his hips.

Keep in mind he is growing and look for a pack that fits now, but can grow.

Make sure the pack is not too big and roomy. This leads to the temptation to overload it. It needs to fit a sleeping bag, pad, clothing, outdoor essentials, water and some patrol gear.

Remember that the total weight of the fully loaded pack should not exceed 30-35 pounds (or 1/3 your son's body weight). 25-30 pounds would be best for some of our smaller kids.

Watch for sales. Decent packs range from \$50 to \$200. Stay in the economical range since your boy will outgrow this pack in a few years. Be sure it is a quality pack.

DO NOT -

Get confused between a backpacking pack and a daypack. Ask for help from the store people. I am sorry to report you CANNOT get a backpack at Target.

Borrow a pack from an adult and expect it to be usable by your boy unless he is a teenager (aka a boy in an adult body). If you must borrow one, adjust it to fit. Be alert to the fact the waist strap MUST fit snugly.

Let your son overload his pack and don't YOU overload his pack. He really won't need those extra socks or that Army blanket. (The blanket is too heavy and guess again if you think he will change socks on a campout unless he steps into a creek and even then...)

Let your son wear the waist strap under his belly. Some of our guys have tummies already and are used to wearing their pants under their gut. They absolutely cannot wear their backpack like this, as it will put the weight of the pack on their shoulders. Make sure they know to put their packs on with the buckle over their belly buttons.

Good places to purchase packs include: REI, Sports Chalet, Big 5 and Sports Authority. There are also consignment sporting good stores around like Play It Again Sports on Ventura in Studio City. (The *Boy Scout Handbook* shows a picture of an external frame pack. These are the least expensive and easiest for the boys to use. Another page shows an internal frame pack. This type is best for mountaineering as it hugs the body but is difficult to pack because most brands have only one large compartment. Also, internal frame packs can get a little pricey.

5. **WATER BOTTLE/CAMEL PACK** – this should be a good quality water bottle that will fit easily into a backpack and will not leak. (The *Boy Scout Handbook* shows a good water bottle. The opening is the right size for a water purifier to snap onto it.) One of the best brands is Nalgene. Look for the quart size with the wide month. Pick up two. Otherwise, you should be able to fit a camelback water bag into any backpack. Buy at least a 2-liter size and a good brand.
6. **FLASHLIGHT (and extra batteries/bulb)** – the troop provides lanterns on car camping trips to light the camp at night, but those night trips to the outhouse make the use of a flashlight necessary. Also it is against BSA policy (and safety rules in general) to have lanterns (flames) inside tents. His flashlight will be the only way your boy will have light in his tent and be able to find his way to the outhouse (or the nearest bush) in the dark. Generally, look for lightweight, durable, waterproof lights. It is not necessary to buy a large light. Headlamps are a very good option.
7. **MESS KIT & EATING/COOKING UTENSILS** – you don't have to spend a lot of money. A decent, lightweight mess kit is under \$10. It should be composed of a decent size plastic bowl with non-breakable plastic utensils. Plastic utensils are best since they do not conduct the warmth out of the foods. Look also for a plastic mug.

THE “NICE TO HAVE” ESSENTIALS

Okay, those are the essentials that your boy will use on EVERY campout. This next list is the recommended equipment that he will find useful for backpack outings:

8. **STOVE** – the Troop will supply stoves. **DO NOT PURCHASE A STOVE.**
9. **TENT** – several of the boys in the Troop have tents. When the boys go camping, it is decided between the boys who will bring the tent for camping. Tents may be purchased at your local sporting goods store. Make sure you buy a same-size tarp to go under any kind of tent to serve as a ground cloth. A plastic tarp will protect the bottom of the tent from tearing on sharp rocks and will give an extra-added layer of insulation against the cold ground. If the tent has a nylon floor, it will keep the floor dry. *No large tents. Two-three man tents are best. Buy “short” tents vs. tall because of high winds. Also remember, boys are learning to be good scouts. Don't spend a lot of money on a tent you're willing to share with boys. Save that for your family tent.

CLOTHING SUGGESTIONS AND HINTS

Rule No. 1 in hiking and camping clothing is “avoid cotton.” This is because cotton holds moisture and dries very, very slowly. In cold weather, cotton gets damp (from sweat or moisture in the air) and since it will stay wet for a very long time, it can cause hypothermia. Here is a quick list of clothing made of cotton that you should **NOT** include on camping trips:

1. Jeans;
2. T-Shirts;
3. Sweats;

In the summer time, the above-listed clothing is okay. But for cold weather camping and especially backpacking, avoid cotton. Period.

In general, unless they are very well worn and comfy, jeans are not good for hiking due to chafing, and they are made of cotton.

Like all other camping gear, it is possible to spend a fortune on high-tech camp clothing. Check your closet or your boy’s closet (or his floor or under his bed) for the following:

1. Nylon mesh – the nylon dries very quickly and is very warm. The open mesh will allow sweat to evaporate.
2. Nylon warm-up suits – these are great since they are very warm, lightweight, comfortable, and will also dry very quickly.
3. Polyblend sweats – check the label for fabric content. Much of the sweat wear available is 50-60% poly with the rest being cotton.
4. Wool Pendleton-type shirts and pants – wool is nature’s “high-tech” fabric. It will stay warm even when it is very wet and it dries quickly.
5. Athletic socks – those Nike (or other name brand) socks your kid insisted on having to be cool are great. Unbeknownst to your son, they are made to keep sweat from being a problem. Wet, sweaty socks are the leading cause of blisters. You can now find lightweight wool and wool blend socks in everyday stores like Target. Wool is excellent for hiking. Heavy wool socks are excellent to sleep in.
6. Fleece wear – again, this stuff is warm, lightweight, NOT cotton and very likely to already be in your son’s wardrobe.
7. Remember layers are the secret to happiness in the outdoors.

Also, your best reference guide on clothing needs and camping gear needs is the *Boy Scout Handbook*.