



Teaching Leave No Trace

Plan Ahead and Prepare

- 8 Elements to Consider When Planning a Trip

Proper trip planning and preparation helps backcountry travelers accomplish trip goals safely while minimizing damage to the land and having fun.

Poor planning often results in miserable campers, damage to natural and cultural resources. Rangers often tell stories of campers they have encountered who, because of poor planning and unexpected conditions degrade backcountry resources and put themselves at risk.

Wilderness is a necessity...a fountain of life... thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people who are beginning to find out that going to the mountain is going home; that wilderness is a necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.

—John Muir

The Importance of Trip Planning

Here are a few incentives for trip planning. You may want to add to this list. Trip planning

- Helps ensure the safety of groups and individuals
- Reduces the likelihood of needed search or rescue assistance
- Prepares users of the out-of-doors to leave no trace and minimizes resource damage
- Contributes to a fun and enjoyable outdoor experience
- Increases self-confidence and opportunities for learning more about nature

When a group neglects the responsibility of proper trip planning, it leaves the door wide open for events to go awry. A group that is experienced and familiar with the geographical characteristics of an area will avoid risk by

- Steering clear of areas susceptible to flash floods or along ridge-tops vulnerable to lightning activity
- Carrying an adequate supply of drinking water or arranging for a way to purify water from natural sources when traveling along arid lands
- Checking with local land managers and studying maps and weather conditions to contribute to a low-risk experience

A well-prepared group might plan to cook meals on stoves or, if using a campfire, will find out in advance when and where that is allowed. Stoves are preferred over campfires because they leave no impact, can be used in different environments, and are convenient. Such a group would not discover upon arrival at its destination that a fire ban is in effect or that firewood is in scarce supply. In contrast, poorly prepared groups often build a fire anyway—breaking the law or spoiling the land—simply because they have not planned for alternatives. A scarce wood supply is a sign that an area is experiencing the cumulative effects of heavy recreation use.

A group that has developed good travel plans will be able to travel as fast as it expected. This group will not be caught off guard because of steep terrain or trails that are too rugged. However, the unprepared group will often resort to setting up camp late at night, sometimes in an unsafe location. Poor campsite selection usually leads to unnecessary resource damage. In addition, the group may never even reach its planned destination.

Other Considerations When Trip Planning

Take the following elements into consideration during trip planning. You may want to add to this list.

- Weather
- Terrain
- Regulations, restrictions, permits
- Private land boundaries
- Hiking speed of the group's least capable member
- Anticipated food consumption (Leftovers create waste, which leaves a trace!)
- Group size (Does it meet land management regulations, trip purpose, and Leave No Trace criteria?)
- All Leave No Trace principles

Meal Planning

Meals are another element to trip planning that can profoundly affect a group's impact on a backcountry area.

Benefits of Good Meal Planning

Meal planning helps

- Reduce trash.
- Reduce pack weight, resulting in faster hiking times and less fatigue.
- Reduce dependence upon campfires for cooking.

One-Pot Meals and Food Repackaging

Planning for one-pot meals and lightweight snacks requires a minimum of packaging and preparation time, lightens loads, and decreases garbage. One-pot meals require minimal cooking utensils and make it easy to prepare meals on a lightweight stove. Two backpack stoves can be used to cook all meals for groups of 12 people if you have a couple of large pots. (One large pot can be balanced on two stoves when quick heating is desired.) When using smaller pots, four backpack stoves may be needed.

Most food should be removed from its commercial packaging and placed in re-sealable plastic bags or sealable plastic containers before packing your backpacks. Re-sealable plastic bags secure pre-measured food and reduce bulk and garbage. Empty bags can be placed inside each other and packed out for reuse at home or used to carry out garbage left by others (good turn). This method minimizes the amount of garbage your group must pack out at the end of the trip and eliminates the undesirable behavior of stashing or burying unwanted trash.

8 Elements to Consider When Planning a Trip

1. Identify and record the goals (expectations) of your trip.
2. Identify the skills and abilities of the participants.
3. Select destinations that match the goals, skills, and abilities of participants.
4. Seek information about the area your group plans to visit from land managers, maps, and literature.
5. Check the normal weather patterns and temperature ranges for the area during the time of year your trek is planned. Get a projected weather forecast the night before departure. Adjust your plans if necessary, considering the knowledge, experience, and preparedness of the group.
6. Choose equipment and clothing for comfort, safety, and to follow Leave No Trace principles. Include these outdoor essentials:
 - Extra clothing
 - Extra trail food
 - Rain gear (shelter)
 - Pocketknife
 - Matches and fire starters
 - Stove
 - Water bottles
 - Maps and compass
 - First-aid kit
 - Watch
 - Sun and insect protection (broad-brimmed hat, sunglasses, sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher, insect repellent)
 - Camera with zoom lens for photographing wildlife at a distance
 - Small trowel for digging a cat-hole
 - Small strainer or 1-foot-square piece of fiberglass screen for removing food particles from dishwater
 - Gators for muddy trails or trails with loose stones
7. Axes and saws are not needed for collecting and preparing wood for a Leave No Trace fire. Downed, dead wood is gathered from the ground and broken by hand.
8. Plan trip activities to match the goals, skills, and abilities of the group.
9. Evaluate your trip upon return; note changes to make next time.