

# BSA Troop 1018

## New Camper's Info & Tips

Getting started in camping can be somewhat intimidating for those who have not done it, or not done it recently. There is lots of equipment on the market and there are plenty of opinions as to what is and isn't necessary. I've prepared this guide as a jumping off point for new Scouts as to what to buy, and just as importantly, what not to buy when you're first starting out.

Important Notes up front:

- **Personal vs Troop gear** – The troop provides "common" equipment on a campout. This includes: cooking gear, stoves, first aid kit, dining fly, lanterns, saws & hatchets, water jugs, and miscellaneous tools. Scouts are not expected to pack this gear with their own equipment and there's no need to buy any of it up front. In Troop 1018, Scouts are generally expected to provide their own tents, however, we have a number of tents that new Scouts are welcome to borrow before making a decision on a tent purchase. Do not rush into a tent purchase – use a troop tent until you're certain of the type and style you'd like to invest in.

Things to buy, comments, etc (organized in the same order as the "car camping" checklist)

**Backpacks:** Not necessary unless we actually do backpack camping. Most of Troop 1018's camping is "car camping" (or, as it's sometimes called "plop camping") meaning that we camp close to where we park the cars. A duffel bag with handles is more than adequate for car camping.

### **Sleeping Gear:**

- Sleeping bags come in all shapes, sizes, and price ranges. For general use, a bag with synthetic fill (such as "Hollofil") that is rated at 20 degrees will suffice. Down filled is lighter and, therefore, generally preferable for backpacking (but down is more expensive and there are a number of considerations when buying a down filled sleeping bag -- all down filled sleeping bags are not created equal)

- Sleeping pads. Keep in mind that you need to insulate yourself from the ground – a pad serves that purpose, as well as keeping you comfortable. There are two basic types (please don't bother with blow up air mattresses) – foam pads, or self-inflating (such as Thermarest). Either will suffice. The self-inflating pads tend to be more comfortable (comfort, however, is very subjective), but are also more expensive.

- Pillow. Pillows are a matter of personal preference – There are inflatable pillows, backpacking pillows, or other small pillows. Some find that a rolled up jacket or sweater works just fine.

**Things to Wear:** What to wear is a function of the weather – how hot, how cold, how wet. But keep a few things in mind

- Rain gear – It will rain – be prepared. A good quality poncho is probably the best all-around rain gear. Do not buy a plastic rain suit – they don't breathe and are miserable to wear. There are a number of high quality rain suits that do breathe (made out of fabrics such as gore-tex). These are great but tend to be very expensive and most boys will outgrow them long before they've gotten their (or their parent's) money's worth from them. Stick with the poncho.

- Clothing – The key to comfortable camping is staying dry and warm. Cotton clothing is not the way to make that happen. Cotton (such as blue jeans) gets wet and stays wet, and when it's wet the wearer gets cold and stays cold. Cotton T shirts may be OK for camping when it's warm and dry, but be prepared for other weather. Synthetics will wick moisture away from the body whether it comes from sweat or rain, and helps maintain a reasonable comfort level. For cooler weather, layering is the key . . . layers of clothing that can be put on or taken off as needed.

**Footwear:** There's an old World War II vintage Bill Mauldin cartoon that shows Willie and Joe (two infantrymen) in a muddy foxhole. One turns to the other and in gratitude for saving his life offers him his last pair of dry socks. Willie and Joe knew footwear. Keeping your feet dry and comfortable are absolute musts when camping. For car camping, well-fitted sneakers should suffice, but bring an extra pair along as they do get wet (boys are attracted to water and can generally find some to step in – even in a desert. Also keep in mind that heavy dew can get shoes just as wet as a heavy rain). Use hiking socks that wick moisture away from the feet. For those that plan on a lot of hiking, boots are in order. Make sure they are high quality, fit well (when wearing thick hiking socks) and are broken in *before* going on a long hike.

**Toiletries:** Keep it simple. All the average Scout needs for a weekend campout is a toothbrush, toothpaste, camp soap, and a small towel. You can pack more, but it won't get used. Camping stores sell small camp towels which are lightweight, hold lots of moisture, and dry easily – nice, but certainly not a necessity.

**Cooking Gear:** As stated above, the troop will provide the cooking gear – the Scout will need his "eating gear", consisting of a bowl, a cup, and some utensils. A rinse bag is a nylon mesh bag that comes in handy for rinsing and drying dishes.

### **Other Gear:**

- Scout knife – very handy, but no need to buy a Swiss Army Knife with 50 gadgets – a knife with a couple blades is really all the new Scout needs. Brightly colored is better. They routinely get dropped and a camouflage design on a knife will do precisely what it was designed to do – remain camouflaged.

- Compass – Go for the basics – remember, the basic function of a compass is to point north – until you're ready to do *a lot* of orienteering, about \$10 should buy a basic, quality compass.

- Sunglasses – If you get them, make sure they have UV protection – cheap sunglasses without UV protection are worse than no sunglasses at all
- Emergency whistle – nice to have if there's any chance of wandering away from the group – nothing fancy
- Rope – A small amount of nylon cord comes in handy for repairs, clotheslines, tent guys, etc.
- Flashlight – small, inexpensive, and brightly colored – and always bring extra batteries. Don't buy the ultra small penlights – they don't last long; don't buy the huge monsters that take 10 D-cells – they're way too big and heavy; I've found the 2 or 4 "AA" cell yellow Eveready flashlights work just fine . . . and they're inexpensive.
- Personal first aid kit – The troop will bring a large first aid kit on any campout – a personal first aid kit with band aids and moleskin (for preventing blisters) is about all a new Scout will need.
- Canteen or water bottle – In actuality, the containers that bottled water comes in will be sufficient for a new Scout. But, if you really want to buy a water bottle, buy a wide mouth one. They're easier to clean, easier to fill, and easier for adding ice. There are containers that will hold a water bottle and attach to belts or backpacks. Very few people use traditional canteens any more.
- Personal chair – a small personal chair or stool can come in handy on campouts – but keep it small and lightweight. A fold-up three legged stool usually works fine and won't require a separate trip to haul it to and from the car.

Hopefully this will give you a start on what you need. As a Scout becomes more adept at camping, he'll have a better sense for what he needs. I'll close with three comments:

- 1) For things that a Scout will not outgrow and is not likely to readily lose (such as a tent), it generally pays to go with higher quality the first time.
- 2) Troop 1018's equipment room has quite a bit of gear available for checkout. Feel free to use it while gaining the experience to know what you *really* need.
- 3) Put your name on all personal gear with indelible marker or an engraving pen – despite our best efforts, things do get mixed up and this helps to sort things out.