

## Backpacking: Safety Activity Checkpoint

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: [Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required](#)



**Council Approval:** Required

**Activity Permitted For:** J C S A

**Not Permitted For:** Daisies and Brownies

### About Backpacking

A backpacker's primary mission is to explore on foot, while carrying all her gear in a backpack and being a good steward of the land. These checkpoints focus on preparing for backpacking in remote areas, but the recommendations can be used in urban areas too.

Backpacking is not permitted for Daisies and Brownies because of the equipment used in backpacking trips (see below) and the longer duration of the activity. Hiking is recommended for Daisies and Brownies to prepare them for the adventure of backpacking at the next grade level.

When choosing a destination, connect with your Girl Scout of Northern California for site suggestions, such as Girl Scout camps.

**Learn More:**

- [AmericanTrails.org](http://AmericanTrails.org)
- [Backpacker.com](http://Backpacker.com)
- [Trails.com](http://Trails.com)
- [LeaveNoTrace.org](http://LeaveNoTrace.org)

## **Include Girls with Disabilities**

Communicate with girls with disabilities and/or their caregivers to assess any needs and accommodations. Contact national parks to inquire about their accommodations for people with disabilities. To find resources to adapt various sports, including backpacking, to persons of all abilities visit [Disabled Sports USA](http://DisabledSportsUSA.com). To find backpacking programs for youth of various abilities contact No Barriers USA and Wilderness Inquiry.

## **Safety Activity Checkpoints**

**Encourage girls to share resources.** Have girls make a list of needed gear and supplies and determine which items can be shared. This way no girl is carrying a heavier backpack than necessary.

**Choose an appropriate backpacking route.** The route chosen needs to be within the ability of every person in the group, and the pace needs to accommodate the slowest backpacker. Determine the length of the trip by the backpackers' grade levels, level of experience and ability, physical condition, nature of the terrain, and weight of the load to be carried as well as the season and weather conditions, the water quantity and quality, and the activities planned along the way.

**Assess the safety of backpacking sites.** The route needs to be known to at least one of the adults or a report should be obtained in advance to assess potential hazards. Ensure that a land-management or similar agency is contacted during the trip-planning stage to help with available routes and campsites, recommended group size, information about water quantity and quality, and permits (if needed).

**Assess backpack quality and do a trial run.** Ensure that backpacks and all equipment (including food and water) weigh no more than 20 percent of each person's ideal (not actual) body weight. Guide girls in choosing backpacks, adjusting straps, and taking them on and off. Have the girls plan and conduct a series of conditioning hikes before the backpacking trip.

**Ensure that backpackers have a comprehensive understanding of the trip.** Group members need to be trained to be observant of the route, the surroundings, and the fatigue of individuals. Instruction should be given on the safety rules for backpacking, such as staying together in a group, recognizing poisonous plants and biting or stinging insects and ticks, respecting wild animals, and behaving effectively in emergencies. Ensure that girls know how to read maps, use a compass, navigate a route, and estimate distance.

**Prepare for emergencies.** Ensure the presence of a waterproof first-aid kit and a first-aider with a current certificate in first aid (including adult and child CPR or CPR/AED), who is prepared to handle cases caused by extremes of temperature, such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, frostbite, cold exposure, and hypothermia, as well as sprains, fractures, and altitude sickness. Ensure that emergency transportation is available, if possible; if any part of the activity is located 30 minutes

or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first-aid-er with wilderness first-aid certification. See Volunteer Essentials for information about first-aid standards and training. The designated adult should have a working cell phone for emergencies. [[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders](#)]

**Take safety precautions.** Create a risk management plan with the girls and leave a copy at home. Search-and-rescue procedures for missing persons should be written out in advance, reviewed, and practiced by girls and adults. Methods of communication with sources of emergency care, such as police, hospitals, and park and fire officials, should also be arranged in advance. Write, review, and practice evacuation and emergency plans that cover any situation with girls.

**Practice safe backpacking.** Hiking after dusk is not permitted. Off-trail hiking must be done with an experienced leader. The group must hike away from the edges of waterfalls, rock ledges, and slopes with loose rocks. Girls are never allowed to go on high-altitude climbs.

## Girl Scouts of Northern California's Approval Process for Backpacking

Backpacking is considered a high-adventure activity and must be pre-approved by the council.

- **Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form:** Submit the online [Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form](#) to council at least 4-6 weeks prior to your activity.
- **High-Adventure Approved Vendor List:** GSNorCal troops/groups must select a high-adventure vendor from the [High-Adventure Approved Vendor List](#), which consists of organizations that meet Girl Scouts safety and insurance requirements for the activity. For the safety of our members, before a troop uses a high-adventure site/vendor for a troop or service unit event, the council must approve the high-adventure site/vendor. This process is designed to ensure a safe experience and protect the council's and volunteer's legal interests.

## Safety Gear

Backpacking requires various equipment dependent on the length of trip, location, and weather.

- Lightweight, layered clothing and outerwear appropriate for weather conditions
- Water bottle or hydration pack (each girl should carry at least one quart)
- Non-perishable, high-energy, lightweight foods such as dehydrated meals, fruits, and nuts
- Whistle
- Ten-essentials emergency survival kit, including a flashlight, first-aid kit, extra clothing (including a waterproof jacket), snacks, tablets for purifying water, emergency shelter, matches in a waterproof container, a knife, a map, a compass or GPS, and a water bottle
- Backpack appropriate for size and experience of user
- Sturdy hiking/trail footwear with thick soles (soft-soled shoes to wear on campsite after removing hiking footwear), high-tech socks designed for hiking along with wicking-liner socks to keep moisture away from feet
- Map and compass or compass and GPS
- Sleeping bag, preferably a mummy or lightweight sleeping bag; closed-cell sleeping pad
- Potable water or water purification supplies to remove potential contaminations from natural water sources; use water filters designed to remove Giardia Lamblia—see the outdoor cooking safety activity checkpoints for purification tips
- Unbreakable, lightweight knife/fork/spoon combo, with a bowl and cup

- Portable cook stove and fuel, whenever possible (to reduce the use of firewood)
- Waste management supplies (toilet paper, garbage bag, plastic trowel to dig a cat hole, hand sanitizer)
- Food storage (check local regulations to find out if a bear-proof canister is required)
- A working cell phone for emergencies (in the hands of an adult) or a specific backup plan
- Hat or bandana