

Backpacking

HIGH-ADVENTURE ACTIVITY: Trip or High-Adventure Approval Form Required
First-Aider 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, carrying all her gear in a backpack, while 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 Girl Scout of Northern California for site suggestions, such as Girl Scout camps.

Learn More:

- [AmericanTrails.org](https://www.americantrails.org)
- [Backpacker.com](https://www.backpacker.com)
- [AllTrails.com](https://www.alltrails.com)
- [LeaveNoTrace.org](https://www.leaveonotrace.org)

Making Activities Accessible

In order to make your activity accessible to girls of all abilities, it's important to communicate with all girl attendees and their caregivers to learn about and accommodate their varied support needs. 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 [Move United](https://www.moveunited.org). To find backpacking programs for youth of various abilities, contact [No Barriers USA](https://www.no-barriers.org) and [Wilderness Inquiry](https://www.wildernessinquiry.org).

Equity

In addition to physical and social-emotional disabilities, consider the history, culture, and past experiences of the girls in your troop that could affect a girl's ability to equally participate in an activity. Work with girls and families to understand how an activity is perceived. Ensure that all girls and their families feel comfortable that they have access to whatever is needed to fully participate, such as the proper equipment, prior experiences, and skills needed to enjoy the activity.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

COVID-19 Guidelines. Review the "Coronavirus Safety in Girl Scouts" section in the [Introduction to Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) under the "Standard Safety Guidelines" section and be certain to consult with [GSNorCal's specific COVID-19 guidance](#).

Emergency Action Plan (EAP). Review and document your Emergency Action Plan (EAP) ahead of time before taking girls out for this activity, and review it with the girls so they, too, are prepared. Think through scenarios of what can go wrong such as an accident, physical injury, sudden illness, or lost backpacker.

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. Also take into consideration, the season and weather conditions, the water quantity and quality, and the activities planned along the way to plan a comfortable and successful trip.

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. Make sure at least one adult member who is certified in first aid/CPR and the GSNorCal's online Troop First Aider course accompanies the troop on activities. 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 any part of the activity is located 30 minutes or more from emergency medical services, ensure the presence of a first aider 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. Consider bringing walkie-talkies for areas that may not have cell phone service. [\[SAFETYWISE: First Aid & First Aiders\]](#)

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.

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 or hydration pack
- 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; please note firewood burning restrictions applied in certain City/County/State jurisdictions)
- 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. Consider bringing walkie-talkies for areas that may not have cell phone service.

- Hat or bandana

Backpacking Interest Group (B.I.G.) for Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts in the Northern California Council

Love hiking and camping and want something more challenging? Try backpacking with other Girl Scouts! You'll learn new outdoor and team skills, meet girls with interests like yours, and enjoy the beauty of the out of doors. B.I.G. welcomes both independent scouts or members of a regular troop. For more information, visit their website at <http://www.girlscoutbackpacking.net/>.

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. Gather the following information to complete this form:
 - Confirmation that your chaperones are registered members of Girl Scouts of Northern California, have a current background check, completed the troop chaperone course and troop driver course (if transporting girls), and completed the [California State Mandated Reporter Training](#). Troop Leaders can find this information in their [Volunteer Toolkit](#).
 - Name of First Aider and a copy of their current CPR/First Aid certification card. Certification needs to be renewed every two years. If you are hiking or backpacking farther than 30 minutes from a medical facility, please have the information of the member, who is certified in Wilderness First Aid, accompanying your troop.
 - Confirm that the necessary online and in-person courses have been completed for this trip. You can find more information or register for these courses in your [MyGS Account - GSLearn](#) in the section called Trip & Outdoor Advisor.
 - The **Trip & Outdoor Advisor Course** is required for all overnight and [high-adventure activities](#).
 - The **Camp Out course** is required for all camping trips that involve advanced outdoor cooking or camping trip with girls to a campground or other non-GSNorCal outdoor facility for longer than 1 night without indoor plumbing and electricity. Girls should have already had practice sleeping and cooking outdoors.
 - The **Extended Trips course** is required for troops traveling three (3) nights or more.
 - The **Backpacking course** is required before you take girls on an overnight backpacking adventure.
- **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.

