

How often have you wished to explore the woods, make supper over an open fire, pitch a tent, and sleep under the stars listening to the thousands of night sounds which the darkness seems literally to turn on? If you want to try some outdoor living, Scouting gives you a wonderful opportunity to find out what it is all about.

—Senior Girl Scout Handbook,
1963



Trailblazing

Join in a favorite Girl Scout adventure! Head for the backcountry, where you'll explore nature and challenge your body on a trailblazing trek. In this badge, you'll stay at least one night at a backwoods or primitive site, so get ready to learn some new outdoor skills while you share fresh-air fun and games with your Girl Scout sisters.

Steps

1. Start planning your adventure
2. Get your body and your teamwork skills ready
3. Create your menu
4. Gain some trailblazing know-how
5. Head out on the trail

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll know how to take a safe and fun overnight backpacking trip.



Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

STEP 1 Start planning your adventure

When you're packing in and packing out all your gear, pay special attention to preparation. Do one of the choices below to help you review the planning checklist on the next page.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

- Ask an older Girl Scout or Girl Scout volunteer for tips.** She should have tips on nearby campsites and recommendations for the kinds of gear you'll need to stay safe and have fun.
OR
- Check with a member of a local trekking club.** Ask the person to come speak to your group, tell you about trails in the area, and help you plan your adventure.
OR
- Do it yourself.** Pick up maps and information about places to trek from a library, bookstore, or recreation center. Look in hiking books or go online to research the supplies you'll need.

More to Explore

Find the right fabric. Compare the properties of cotton, wool, and synthetic fabrics for protection from wet, cold, and heat.

TIP: Pay special attention to shoes!

- What will the terrain be like?
- How heavy will your load be?
- How much support do your feet and ankles require?
- If you have new boots, be sure to break them in by wearing them in the house or around town before you go and make sure your feet are comfortable.

Important for an overnight camping trip are the ability to adapt yourself to new and strange conditions, the spirit of comradeship, and cooperation that is founded on unselfishness and self-reliance, perseverance, and perception that will enable you to shoulder your own share of the duties and responsibilities of the occasion.

—Girl Scout Handbook, 1933



STEP 2 Get your body and your teamwork skills ready

Hiking can be hard work, so make sure you're ready. Can you carry all your supplies over the distances and terrain you'll travel? Can you work together with your trailblazing companions? Get your group in mental and physical shape for the trip. (For at least one of the sessions, do your exercise with your pack fully loaded and in the shoes you plan to wear.)

Before you begin, fill out the quiz on the next page and discuss your answers with your group.

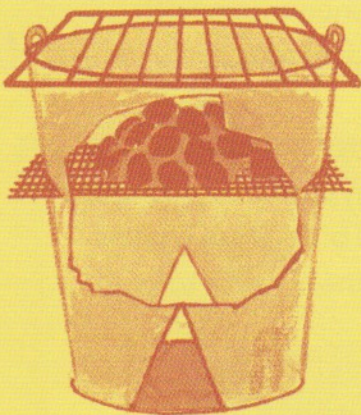
CHOICES - DO ONE:

- Participate in a physically challenging team-building course.** These might be offered through your Girl Scout council, Outward Bound, or another organization. To continue to practice the skills you gained on the course, meet at least twice before you go.
OR
- Build teamwork and endurance.** Do three hikes, bike trips, or jogs of at least 30 minutes each with the friends you'll be hiking with. Try to practice on your own as well.
OR
- Try a "boot camp" exercise course.** Find a course in your community, or ask a coach or trainer to help you make your own. Practice the routine at least three times all together before you go. Try to practice on your own as well!

TIP: Just as important as being able to go, go, go is knowing when to give your body a break! During this step, practice listening to your body when it wants to slow down and conserve energy.

Cooking over an outdoor fire is a fine art and has to be studied carefully. It should be called almost a post-graduate course in the camp studies.

—How Girls Can Help Their Country, 1913



STEP

3 Create your menu

You'll need meals that are not only energy-packed but lightweight. What's the difference between freeze-dried and dehydrated foods? Which foods pack best? Which need to be repackaged? What do you need to eat to keep you warm, energized, and satisfied? Find the answers and plan your menu based on what you discover. Use one of the choices below to help you.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Find three recipes for quick meals. Look for meals that can be cooked quickly in one pot using a cooking stove. Quick cooking means more time can be spent exploring. It also means using less cooking fuel. Ask your companions about their favorite foods and any allergy restrictions, and keep them in mind.

OR

Get into quick-energy snacks. You'll need fast fuel on your trek! Plan a menu to include energy bars and other non-cook lunch items. Then, try three different recipes for energy bars or quick snacks before you go, and make your favorite to take on your trek.

OR

Take the trash challenge. Since you'll be packing out what you packed in, plan your menu to create as little trash as possible. Bringing just enough food for each person and selecting foods with minimal packaging are two ways to reduce trash—find at least three more.

TIP: Under no circumstances should any food be kept in a tent— it might attract animals and insects.

QUIZ: What is Your M.Q. (Maturity Quotient)?

There are many characteristics of a person with the maturity to get along with others in a group setting. If an important one is not listed below, add your own ideas. Which of the following characteristics of a mature person do you possess?

First, check all that apply to you. Then, discuss with your group how these characteristics help people to work together.

- Being open-minded
- Being flexible
- Not picking on small things
- Sharing hard work
- Being able to admit when you are wrong
- Thinking before you speak
- Knowing you are not perfect
- Knowing other people are not always right
- Respecting the rights of others
- Being responsible
- Being self-motivated

CAREERS TO EXPLORE

- Park ranger
- Environmental engineer
- Environmental journalist
- Landscape architect
- Astronomer
- Geologist
- Sociologist
- Infectious-disease biologist
- Water-quality technician
- Camp counselor
- Outdoor educator
- Emergency-medical technician
- Surveyor
- Particle physicist
- Soil inspector
- Mathematician
- Product developer
- Fabric developer

Trailblazing Tips

- Make sure you leave your hike route, destination, and time you're expected to return with an adult back home.
- Choose your site well before dark, so you have a chance to get everything set up.
- Set up camp well away from the shore of a stream, lake, or other body of water.
- Check weather reports before you go to be prepared for possible conditions.
- Whenever possible, use an established campsite to concentrate your impact on the environment rather than disturb a new area or multiple areas. If you need to make a new site, try for minimal impact.
- Find out if primitive toilets will be provided, or if you'll be digging your own. If so, check to see what's allowed in your area and prepare accordingly. Don't forget your hand sanitizer!

STEP

4 Gain some trailblazing know-how

You might already have some great trail skills, and if you don't, one of your trailblazing companions might. Within your group, assess what would be most useful for each person to learn and divide these choices accordingly.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Learn how to purify water.** The farther away from civilization you head, the less likely you are to find a water tap! Research the common water pollutants in the area where you'll travel. Find out about methods of purifying water and practice at least one.

FOR MORE FUN: Learn how to construct a solar still in the ground to extract water.

OR

- Practice navigating with a map and compass or GPS unit.** Trace out a hiking route on a topographical map. Describe what you would see along the way by visualizing the terrain from the map symbols, and decide where you'll take rest breaks based on the topography. Remember, if you're taking technology on the trail, have a low-tech backup in case you move out of range of GPS satellites.

FOR MORE FUN: Try orienteering or geocaching on the trip.

OR

Pitch your tent three times in three different locations. Select a tent that will meet the needs of your group. Then practice assembling, taking down, and storing the tent in three locations with different conditions. You'll always want a well-drained, level tent site, but it's good to practice in various conditions—who knows where you might go trailblazing next!

More to Explore

Build a shelter. What shelter needs might you have in a survival situation? If it's environmentally sound and you have permission, construct a shelter using fallen branches, other found materials, or the natural features of a site. For example, construct a snow cave for winter survival or storm-lash a backpacking tent.



STEP

5 Head out on the trail

Enjoy being away from it all and out in the natural world, using your skills and adventuring with friends. Practice Leave No Trace principles, and take time to bond and reflect on your experience. Try one of these activities once you've settled in for the evening.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Play stuff-sack dramatics. From tents or packs, everyone finds the strangest thing they have. Then get into teams. Make as many stuff sacks as the number of teams, and mix up the objects evenly in the sacks. Then give each team 15 minutes to invent a play that uses every object as a prop. Remember, use the objects as things they're NOT—a banana is *not* a fruit, but a telephone, a stray sock, or a fancy glove.

OR

See the stars. Bring a guide to constellations with you, and identify as many as you can in the night sky. Talk about the stories behind the stars from Greek mythology. And what about a game of constellation charades using what you find out from stories?

OR

Tell a progressive story. One girl starts the story and tells it for a minute, then the story is picked up by the next girl until everyone has made up a part. You could even act out the story as you tell it, or tell your part in song!

TIP: If you have a digital camera, video camera, or smartphone, document your trip in video and photos. When you get home, make a digital album to share with the group.

There is a peculiar charm about the morning in the open woods that must be felt to be appreciated.

—How Girls Can Help Their Country, 1913



Cadette Trailblazing Skills from 1963

How many skills from these historic Girl Scout badges do you have? If any appeal to you, you might learn them before you head out.

Campcraft:

- Learn to handle and care for a tool you never used before. Make something of wood or tin.



Conservation:

- Know which plants and flowers in your state may never be picked. Be able to identify them.



Pioneer:

- Demonstrate skill in the use of tools, knots, lashing, compass, map. Conservation practices. Ability to forecast weather.
- Make plans on how to meet emergencies, such as forest fires, a sudden storm, a lost camper, wilderness first aid, evacuation.



Leave No Trace Principles

- Plan ahead and prepare
- Travel and camp on durable surfaces
- Dispose of waste properly
- Leave what you find
- Minimize campfire impacts
- Respect wildlife
- Be considerate of other visitors

PLANNING CHECKLIST

- Who's going.** Head out with a Girl Scout group and always with at least two adults.
- Where you'll go and how you'll get there.** Find out where you can trek and camp out safely in your area. How far will you go? Will you need any permits? (You can get advice from the council staff member assigned to your community.)
- What gear to pack—for eating, sleeping, and the hike itself.** It's crucial to consider the weight of all your supplies when packing for a backpacking adventure. What kind of pack will you use? How will you divide responsibility for carrying shared items like tents and cooking supplies?
- What activities you'll do.** What will you do in the evening? If the weather turns bad? Do you need to carry any special gear for your plans?
- How you'll budget and earn money for your trip.** You'll need to budget for things like personal gear, equipment, food, transportation, and permit fees.
- Review safety.** The most important part of any trip is safety. Think about these questions while you're planning.
 - What skills are required for all girls and adults on the trip?
 - Will training be needed to get the group and adults ready?
 - How many additional adults are needed?
 - What permissions are needed?
 - What information is needed for the trip safety plan? For example, you might ask a camping expert how to prevent encounters with wildlife on the trail, and how to avoid insect and tick bites.
 - Is a first aider needed? Is a lifeguard needed?
 - Check that your first aid kit contains treatments for burns, cuts, blisters, sunburn, heat exhaustion, heatstroke, hypothermia, shock, insect stings, contact with poisonous plants, and bites from snakes and insects. Do enough people know how to use these items to keep everyone safe?
 - What are some backup plans for emergencies?
 - What code of behavior is needed for girls and adults?